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INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FROM A SWEDISH PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

I want to make a contribution to understanding the relation between interreligious dialogue and Religious Education based on my own experience of teaching non-confessional Religious Education in Swedish schools, training teachers in Swedish universities for such Religious Education and sharing in Sweden dialogues, rejoicing and disappointment with friends of religious background other than my own, i.e. Bosnian Muslims. I show how our way of teaching, at least in Sweden, often diminishes the readiness for and interest in true dialogue among our students. One reason is that information about religions and religious traditions tends to "make" religions static and non-relational, not showing that lived religion is a life process during which you change and are expected to mature. Another reason is based on the effects of hegemonic discourses within which students interpret our teaching. I discuss which of them are present in Swedish classrooms nowadays, how they determine the identity-discourse of second generation immigrants, and what we can do to help students to understand how these discourses work and to widen them.

Keywords: Interreligious dialogue, religious education, lived religion, reciprocity and interaction between different forms of knowledge, hegemonic discourses in classrooms, identity-discourse of second generation immigrants, Carl Anders Säfström, Karin Kittelmann Flensner, Christina Osbeck

My line of thought

As this conference is part of the celebration of the jubilee celebrating 25 years of the Islamic Pedagogical Faculty in Zenica, a higher education institution of the Islamic Community in B&H and

a member of the University of Zenica, I want to make a contribution on the relation between interreligious dialogue and Religious Education based on my own experiences of teaching non-confessional Religious Education in Swedish schools, training teachers in Swedish universities for such Religious Education and sharing in Sweden dialogues, rejoicing and disappointments with friends with other religious backgrounds than my own, i.e. Bosnian Muslims. I hope I will be able to do this in such a way to encourage you to engage in a dialogue so that we can learn from comparing our experiences and theories.

Preparing my contribution to this conference I wrote a slightly different version. When I saw the conference program I realized that I had to try to concentrate it and be able to take short cuts. If you get interested in this version, I will be happy to give you the opportunity to see also the earlier version.

My line of argument now is this:

1. Does our teaching really inspire an understanding of religion in which dialogue is an important and meaningful ingredient *or* does it rather veil actual dialogues and the interest of most religious traditions for dialogue and personal growth?
2. Which are the more general educational logics causing this?
3. The Swedish RE-approach - religions as *views of life* facing *life questions* – tries to handle such problems, but it does not solve them.
4. Which are the more specific *discourses* in which our students live and communicate with others, interpret our teaching and try to understand religion and life?
5. What do these problems look like from the perspective of the identity discourse of children to immigrants from ”foreign” religious backgrounds, e.g. Bosnian Muslims?
6. How to help *all* students see, reflect on and widen their discourses on religion in order to grow as responsible human beings and hopefully also to take interest in and personally take part in true dialogues?

Does our teaching really inspire an understanding of religion in which dialogue is an important and meaningful ingredient, or does it rather veil actual dialogues and the interest of most religious traditions for personal growth and dialogue?

If our teachings of religions concentrate on institutions, texts, dogmas and ethical rules more than on "lived religion" (cf. Kittelmann Flensner, 2015, p. 258), they implicate that religions and religious traditions are more or less static and timelessly separated from each other, and that individuals have to comply with group opinions if they want to be accepted in these groups.

A "religious" person then will be visualized as a person loyal to this kind of "identity", ***not*** as a person with a life history and a person trying to mature, cultivating life and thoughts listening to and being influenced by others who do not live and think in the same way, that is living in dialogue.

Most members of religious communities will consider this static view as a false view of their own community and tradition, and I think they should also consider it as an at least questionable view of other religious communities.

It should also be easy to challenge this static view by exploring authoritative material from different religious traditions both about open discussions on high levels (councils) more than power as the way to find truth and about the way to personal maturity. How much attention is paid to such material in RE? Direct study of historical changes and influences between different traditions will show that the static view is historically impossible ("fake history").

This static and institution-centered view is also, at least in Sweden, challenged in authoritative texts about Religious Education. Starting the modernization of the Swedish school system the 1946 School Commission specified two main objectives, namely that every child should get the best possibilities to develop his/ her personality and mature towards a rich life, and that every child should get the education needed in order to be able to take an active part as a responsible citizen in the development of the Swedish society. In this project Religious Education was perceived as a main tool both for personal development in general and for the development and cultivation of a personal view of life, for the promoting of understanding and mutual respect, of

enriching exchange of ideas within the society, and of international understanding (Almén, 2000, p. 65f).

How can it then be, that the effect of our teaching still so often in so many students is such a static understanding of religions and "religion"?

Which are the more general educational logics causing this?

To some extent this is an effect of a certain fundamental and sometimes destructive logic of education related to what Hans Rosling talks of as "the generalization instinct" (Rosling, 2018a, 2018b). We all need to group persons and phenomena into categories and generalize from similarities neglecting differences in order to be able to understand and react. But generalizations can also lead to false conclusions, and generalizing can also be interpreted as using labels in order to try to be able to predict and to control.

Talking about "religions" can be seen as using a certain set of labels in order to be able to "know" how other people think and behave. The problem is when we think that we can "know" how certain persons think and behave without meeting and asking them, and that we even think we "know" how they think and behave better than they do themselves. Because of this possible (mis-) use of knowledge I as a teacher made an unofficial contract with my students:

> *If you want me to teach you, you have to promise not to use what I say against fellow students: You are not a good Evangelical Christian/Sunni Muslim etc, because you do not think as Edgar says Evangelical Christians/Sunni Muslims etc think.*

Probably you do not want to be dealt with in that way yourself, and trying to avoid this you may refuse to label yourself as included in such a described "religion".

I think this problematic logic of education is closely related to the complicated relation between different aspects of knowledge, which in Swedish curricula are defined like this:

> Knowledge is not an unambiguous concept. Knowledge is expressed in different forms – as facts, comprehension, skill and versatility /*fakta, förståelse, färdighet och förtrogenhet*/ – which

presuppose each other and interact. (Lgr11, p 10, Lpo94, p. 8, translation EA)

This year the Swedish National Agency for Education, *Skolverket*, has been accused of stressing comprehension in such a way that knowledge of facts is neglected, and it has decided to revise the curricula and stress both the necessity for knowledge of facts and the reciprocity and interaction of the different forms of knowledge (Peter Fredriksson in Dagens Nyheter 2018-06-19).

Another way to analyze this complexity of education is to talk of the interplay between acquiring knowledge and personal education (or in German *Wissen/Kentnisse* and *Bildung*).

The Swedish RE-approach - religions as views of life facing life questions – tries to handle such problems, but it does not solve them.

In order to make Religious Education as a school subject relevant to all students when not all students have a personal relation to a religion, we in Sweden since the 1960s have tried to face "life questions", thought of as asked by all and handled in different ways by all. "Religions" are then described as certain ways of handling such questions, or, perhaps better, as different "languages" or symbolic worlds used by individuals trying to handle such questions. Besides "religions" there are, in this perspective, other languages or symbolic worlds used for that purpose, what we call *livsåskådningar* (views of life, *Lebensanschauungen*).

In this line of thought you do not have to choose one such world, but you have to find more or less preliminary ways to handle the situations in life where these life questions become intrusive and urgent, and then you are invited to use (parts of) the symbolic world you have found most useful (are brought up in, or have chosen, and yourself worked on) and try to listen to and learn from how other humans try to interpret and handle these situations. The purpose then is to invite all students to be active and responsible individuals taking human life seriously and to describe listening, sharing, and learning about "others" in dialogue as the arena in which such human responsibility can come to maturity (Almén, 2000).

But of course this is not what has happened to all students in all classrooms. Also before the immigration to Sweden in the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s of people from countries dominated by Catholic churches, Orthodox churches, Oriental churches, Far East Buddhism, Iranian Islam and different traditions of Sunni Islam, many active members of the Church of Sweden or of the traditional "free" churches (more or less loyal to the important 400 years old Protestant pietistic tradition) thought that this way of teaching veiled the distinction between faith and unfaith and hence gave a false picture of their faith. But still the shared experiences of the change of the Swedish society into a "secular", "welfare" society borne by democratic "popular movements" made some degree of success possible. But as the Swedish society changes and the pluralism grows, we have to realize that once shared experiences are not shared experiences forever. When I look back I suspect that we have attained some success with "life questions", but much less success with "*livsåskådningar*".

When we tried not only to help students to test and develop their personal (and hence individual and changing) views of life but also to help them to do so by relating to a set of *livsåskådningar* described as symbolic worlds (and hence collective and like religions more or less static and timelessly separated from each other), we faced the same problems as when our teachings of religions concentrated on institutions, texts, dogmas and ethical rules more than on "lived religion". The concept *livsåskådning* was created in order to focus on the individual process and responsibility (cf. Hedenius and Jeffner), but now it did not work that way. And very few students recognized any of these *livsåskådningar* as important for themselves (or for anyone they knew). And when also the churches started to talk about their "answers" to the life questions, these questions were no longer shared challenges.

Hence, very often our teaching did not encourage the students to dialogue with religions and *livsåskådningar*.

When the Swedish society changed even more (being characterized by more secularization, more individualization, weaker popular movements, less voluntary efforts for others and so on) and with the immigration of people who were unfamiliar with some parts of the symbolic world of common Swedish experiences

in which the *livsåskådnings*-approach was formulated, the problems have grown even bigger.

In many ways it seems to have moved the focus of Religious Education from the shared struggling with shared questions to an attempt to inform students not interested in understanding themselves as "religious" about what those "others" who are "religious" do and think.

The way we taught "foreign" denominations and "foreign" religions focused more on trying to understand "other" countries and "other" cultures than on trying to listen to and learn from human beings in traditions and texts – even less than to listen to and learn from human beings you know and share life with.

My concern here is to try to trace the mechanisms working in this process and to search for possibilities of Religious Education to change some conditions, challenge some assumptions, offer some alternatives and hence improve the possibilities for dialogue.

Which are the discourses in which our students live and communicate with others, interpret our teaching and try to understand religion and life?

However, of course, the educational outcome is decided not only by the intentions and methods of the teachers in relation to these more general educational logics. In the last 10-15 years some RE-scholars in Sweden have focused more on the discourses within which the students frame their questions and discuss with their fellow students, and hence within which they understand themselves, and on how these discourses extensively determine the outcome of the teaching.

Of course teachers have always realized that they should teach different groups of students in different ways, but this new discourse-approach opens new perspectives. By analysing the effects of hegemonic and competing discourses within specific classrooms on how groups of students interpret and react on Religious Education you can discern not only effects of individual and social backgrounds but also how students try to grow up, be accepted without losing all personal integrity, understand themselves and being understood by others with help of the often conflicting and continually changing discourses accepted in the

different groups they live in, as earlier in the family and in the classroom, but now to a growing extent also in other contexts and in social media. If the students are interested at all in RE, they must interpret it in relation to all the other negotiating and competing discourses they live in. What happens then, and under which circumstances can RE also help the students to act as responsible humans in this situation?

Which are the hegemonic and competing discourses in my classrooms? How do they influence the way in which the students interpret my RE-teaching? Which discourses are the most powerful? Which discourses do the students find the most difficult to handle?

I will emphasize some findings on how some discourses common today in Swedish classrooms can influence the effects of a certain way of teaching Religious Education.

Karin Kittelmann Flensner

In her dissertation from 2015 *Karin Kittelmann Flensner* analyses discourses used by students and teachers in RE upper-secondary (*gymnasiet*) lessons. What she finds substantiates much of what I already have discussed as consequences from the chosen approach and a problematic educational logic and from the new group of students, but it also gives importance to new aspects and a new student perspective of mechanisms in work.

Kittelmann Flensner in these lessons discerns two different educational discourses, one more academic rational, dominantly used in theoretical programs preparing for higher education, and the other being more private discourse concentrating on personal opinions and values. Both discourses create educational problems, also in relation to the interest in dialogue. The analytical perspective tends, as I have already indicated, to concentrate on institutions, texts, dogmas and ethical rules more than on “lived religion”, and hence less focus is on the individual re-testing and cultivation of the *livsåskådning* in which dialogues can be important. In the more personal discourse personal opinions and values become more important, but the focus is more on declaring and registering and on tolerance, less on analyzing in order to find difficulties and complications, and hence less on attempts to

improve your own position and on listening to others in true dialogues (e g Kittelmann Flensner, 2015, p. 256f).

Kittelmann Flensner in the lessons also discerns three different and competing discourses on religion, religions and worldviews, a secularist one, a spiritual one and a Swedishness discourse. The secularist one was hegemonic, very much so, not only dominant but laying down conditions for the other ones.

> A secularist discourse was hegemonic during the lessons and implied that religion was something out-dated and belonging to history before science had provided humankind with reliable answers. A non-religious, atheistic position was articulated as a neutral and unbiased position in relation to the subject matter and was associated with being a rational, critically thinking person. Individualism and making individual rational choices were articulated as superior values in relation to different aspects of religion (Kittelmann Flensner, 2015, p. 256)

The spiritual discourse could at some points challenge the secularist discourse, but when it did so it was nevertheless "perfectly compatible with the individualism of the secularist discourse":

> Spirituality /…/ was associated with private religiosity and personal choices, to finding an authentic self and aspects of something divine inside oneself /…/ a spiritual dimension – a continuation of life after death or the possible existence of some kind of supra-empirical energy or being – was articulated as possible components of a personal worldview.
>
> /… But /
>
> Being "religious", or being part of a religious tradition that is considered one of the world religions, was linked to articulations of oppression and submitting to irrational rules. (Kittelmann Flensner, 2015, p. 256)

The third discourse also challenged the hegemonic one to some extent:

> In the Swedishness discourse, Swedishness was linked to the Christian history of Sweden and Christian traditions and values. This discourse was activated when defining a "we" in relation to "the Other", not when talking about personal beliefs. (Kittelmann Flensner, 2015, p. 256)

The result of these three co-existing discourses "was an ongoing discursive struggle over concepts such as religion and Christianity":

> In the secularist discourse, religion and Christianity had connotations of oppression and submission. Admittingly, religion in the spiritual discourse was constructed as opposite to spirituality, which had connotations of a milder, personal and more individualistic form of religiosity. But religion, as constructed by the spiritual discourse, was also associated with the quest for meaning and in this sense something genuinely human. Christianity too was given different meanings – in the secularist discourse Christianity was seen as one among the world religions and consequently had the same negative connotations as any religion. However, in the Swedishness discourse, Christianity was associated with Swedishness, Swedish tradition and history. In this context, Christianity was articulated as an example of a religion associated with individualistic secularist values. (Kittelmann Flensner, 2015, p. 258)

Kittelmann Flensner's study fundamentally questions the Swedish RE-practice. The outcome of all efforts tends to become quite the opposite of the expressed objectives:

> Based on the observations I conducted and analysed, it is my argument that in the Swedish RE-practice, talking about religion and about individuals, who consider themselves and/or are considered by others, as part of a religious tradition, in the way it was done, impedes /*hindra, hejda*/ an understanding of people of various religious worldviews and of social phenomena related to religion. Through an unreflective approach to these discourses, RE can, in a worst-case scenario, contribute to creating, reproducing and maintaining stigmatizing beliefs about people with different backgrounds and thus contribute to segregation and intolerance. Dealing with this stereotyping of "others", I maintain, is one major challenge for RE (cf. ter Avest et al., 2009). If the secularist discourse and othering of those with religious beliefs becomes dominant in the RE classroom, this has consequences both for individual students and society, and is also problematic from a didaktik of RE perspective, as the

objectives formulated in the syllabus are not reached. (Kittelmann Flensner, 2015, p. 267)

As I understand the argument, its center is the quest for a reflective approach to these discourses. At least in Swedish classrooms these discourses are powerful, even if teachers and students can be uneasy about them. The task, both for teachers and for students, must be to reflect even harder on the used discourses and their effects, and hence question them and try to widen them. Even if the discourses can make teachers and students despair on the outcome of dialogues with the subject matter (and with "individuals, who consider themselves and/or are considered by others, as part of a religious tradition"), all of us have to try once more ourselves and to help others to try once more.

In the terms of my argument: The outcome of such Religious education is ***not*** a growing interest in true dialogue and in listening to anything "religious".

Christina Osbeck

Christina Osbeck's dissertation from 2006 started within the National Agency of Education project aiming at understanding and supporting work against victimizations (*kränkningar*). Osbeck interviewed teenagers in the upper part of the compulsory school (*högstadiet*) and found that they (contrary to the formulated core values of the Swedish school system) very often not only tolerated victimizations but found victimizations by teachers and students important parts of the process where they helped each other to adjust to what was expected by (respected) humans. She came to concentrate on the relational processes in which students try to understand "life", how it works, how you can manage to be accepted by others, get some status etc., and in which discourses they try to understand this and act accordingly.

Osbeck found three competing discourses, diverging on how the relationships that the young people are part of are described, if the individual, the group or humanity as a whole is described as most important, what is defended and gives value and meaning in the community, and if the ethical mode of arguing is consequential or intrinsic (Osbeck, 2006, pp 392ff):

Discourse	*Relationship*	*Who are stressed*	*Valued*	*Values*
Life as adjustment for the benefit of individual competition	Adjustment	The individual	Individual competetiveness, achievements, status	Conseque nces
Life as adjustment for the benefit of collective competition	Adjustment	A (sub-)group	Group competitiveness, interests, loyalty Fellowship	Conseque nces Intrinsic value
Life as responsibility for the benefit of human society and universal community	Responsibility	All humanity	Responsibility, unicity, universal community	Intrinsic values

The point in this pedagogical perspective is that it concentrates not on what the teachers say and do but on how the students react, that is it places "the learning subjects – the youths – and their learning processes in the centre" (Osbeck, 2006, p. 401).

> It is important to stress that life understanding and the perspective of the reality change in the process. Understanding life is not a static phenomenon. The discourse on responsibility, unicity and community questions the idea that people should adjust to hegemonic notions, or to persons who hold such notions. (Osbeck, 2006, p. 396)

The empirical fact was that the first discourse was hegemonic in the group interviews, even if the students sometimes shifted between the discourses and also the third discourse "was revealed in accounts of their experiences, in which examples were given both of how the situation in school can be good too, and in descriptions of a desirable state of affairs" (Osbeck, 2006, p. 396). But the students were not very trained in discerning these discourses and choosing discourse for a certain situation in a responsible way.

This hegemony of the first discourse was, of course, problematic for the National Agency of Education which wanted to

oppose vindications in accordance with the expressed core values of Swedish education from the third discourse. One reason could be that the /re/construction of values in school is interrelated with the processes in the rest of society. But, even worse, the discursive practices in school tend to reify the students by trying to promote individual competitiveness with discipline and adjustment - that is by working in the first discourse itself in ways open to or even contextually legitimizing vindications (Osbeck, 2006, p. 382).

> In this situation Religious Education runs the risk of supporting a discourse of adjustment and competitiveness through introducing text books which, in an objective and descriptive spirit, point at a history brimmed with abuse of power.
>
> How may an education be shaped where the young people´s belief in the power and existence of good is reinforced, an education which makes the pupils willing to contribute to its realization, without at the same time risking that such an education makes them naïve and uncritical of the problems which exist? (Osbeck, 2006, p. 402)

As I understand the consequences of this perspective for Religious Education, it should help the students to work with their "life understanding" in such a way that they could engage in true dialogue with material opening new perspectives and offer new speech genres, to give

> insight into so many more practices and speech genres than the individual may acquire through personal experiences (Grimmitt, 1987, p. 163f). An extended repertoire of speech genres facilitates a meta-knowledge of speech genres /…/ When Religion provides alternative discourses in combination with other speech genres and other notions, the subject might be said to contribute to transcendence (Osbeck, 2006, p. 392).

What do these problems look like from the perspective of the identity discourse of children to immigrants from "foreign" religious backgrounds, e.g. Bosnian Muslims?

Some years ago I was asked by Andrew Wingate to write a chapter for a planned book reflecting on the experiences from inter-religious dialogue in Great Britain and Sweden. My chapter should deal with "Changes in society during the last decade reshaping

Swedish interfaith dialogues" (Almén, 2016). I started to describe the changes I had seen, but I chose to write also about my disappointment: The recent changes had aroused the interest in the kind of dialogue I am interested in less both in the immigrant-dominated congregations and in the parishes of the Church of Sweden. I view dialogue as personal conversations, i.e. a way to trustful communion, where you meet as genuine listeners trying to use what the other person is telling you of his or her tradition to deepen the understanding not only of the faith of others but also of one's own faith. There seemed to be less interest in such dialogue and more interest in inter-religious negotiations, using contacts to better the conditions in society of one´s own group or to strengthen one´s own position in internal power struggles by being recognized as a representative of a congregation in official talks (cf Osbeck's first two discourses as against the third discourse). There are good reasons to take part also in such conversations, but doing this is in my opinion not so much inter-religious dialogue as an important part of ordinary political and inter-human responsibility.

Diverging and often conflicting interpretations within Bosnian Muslim congregations …

The background is to a large extent my reflections on experiences in and in relation to Bosnian Muslim persons and congregations in Linköping and Norrköping. To me what has been happening the last years within these congregations seems possible to understand as a conflict of generations and of Bosnian traditions and conflicts moving into Swedish contexts and interpreted in search of new identities. And these interpretations occur in and are influenced not only by Bosnian traditional discourses but also, especially by those grown up and educated in Sweden, by those Swedish RE-discourses just described. Sometimes these discourses may also be combined with internet-inspired "radical" discourses.

As I understand it, the Bosnian refugee generation coming to Sweden in the 1990s tried to be accepted and in some way integrated into the Swedish context. They met in Muslim congregations to be able to pray and talk about life in the way and in the language they knew from "home", and they wanted their children to be able share this view of life and this way of talking

about life, that is they wanted them to learn the Bosnian language and to get basic Islamic education. That generation dominated the Muslim congregations I saw twenty and ten years ago, and some of them shared my vision of dialogue in their efforts to come to terms with their new situation. This generation still exists, but as they have become more involved in the Swedish society and more used to the Swedish language, they have less time for the congregation and less need for the Bosnian language.

The next generation, however, is educated in Swedish schools and often even born there. They prefer to talk and interpret life in the Swedish language and with Swedish interpretative keys, often in one way or another combined with Muslim faith. Many of them concentrate their efforts on good Swedish education, a good job here and a good living integrated into the Swedish society. They can be loyal to and also actively interested in the life of the congregation, but they have limited time to spend there, and they are less familiar with the Bosnian language. But others in this generation for one reason or another do not want to concentrate on this integration and often even try to oppose the Swedish way of life in their interpretation and formation of their own lives. These people can use what they interpret as a Muslim identity as a legitimation for this choice. They can use more time for the congregation, and they have greater interest in using the congregation as an arena where you can get respect and status. They seem in the last years to have got more power in the Bosnian congregations, not always because they are a majority, but they have become a majority in important votings at late nights, when those people having their work or school or university lessons waiting early next morning have had to leave the meeting.

Such differences between the perspectives of the two generations and within the second generation should have been expected. We (both Bosnians and Swedes) should have prepared ourselves and others in order to be able better to understand and to handle these differing life-situations and perspectives of and within the generations. And we should all have reflected more on which interpretative tools we have at our disposal and how we use (and misuse) them in these processes and on how the second generation to a certain degree is formed and restricted by the set of tools it has been offered in the Swedish education, not only by teachers but

also by how fellow students and official and social media formulate problems and alternatives.

… formed also by Swedish RE discourses …

Let me first try to show how the Swedish RE-discourses may have influenced the self-interpretations of second generation Bosnian immigrants and surprised and challenged not only their parents but also their imams (and their RE-teachers).

Those in the second generation who have strived for some form of integration have experienced and tried to come to terms with the secularist discourse with its stress on individualism and its insensibility for "lived" religion in organized or congregational forms. They have also often met constructions of Islam within this discourse:

> Christianity and Islam were partly constructed in relation to each other where Christianity became modern while Islam retained a past time. Islam was about submitting to religious (irrational) rules, which was not consistent with individualism /…/ Islam was thus in the classrooms often represented by extreme groups , not moderate liberal groups (cf. Otterbeck, 2005) /…/
> (In the Swedishness discourse) Christianity, unlike Islam, was described as something that does not pervade one´s entire life, but is a separate part of life. In the classroom it was articulated that "they" must adapt to "us", and in this sense Islam was constructed as something different from what is Swedish. (Kittelmann Flensner, 2015, pp 261f)

In this situation one option is to try to find a way to be "Muslim" in a way similar to the way "Christians" are described. If it is experienced as too demanding even to try to stand up as Muslim in any sense, you may look for some personal/individual way of being loyal to what you find essential in Islam without declaring yourself a Muslim and try to get it accepted among your "important others". In both cases the students get little help from the RE-textbooks, which have very little to say about Muslim perspectives on *livsfrågor.* If they can get any help from Bosnians, I do not know.

Those in the second generation who try to express a Muslim identity as against the non-Muslim Swedish context often also do it

in opposition against "established" Bosnian Islam which they consider "lazy" and unauthentic. Often they seem to prefer to listen to Bosnian imams who in a similar protest have chosen to be educated not in Sarajevo but in Saudi-Arabia, and often they are inspired by more "radical" interpretations of Islam found on the Internet.

But ironically also this effort to establish a demarcation against the Swedish context can be formed or strengthened by the Swedish discourses. The secularist discourse (following the radical church criticism of the 19th and 20th century) in an ambiguous way includes the heritage from the important pietistic revolt against the "lazy" 17th century church establishment and shows an almost unlimited respect for the seriously faithful as against the "lazily" or only nominally faithful. This has become an important part of Swedish understanding of religious liberty. To me it is obvious that it is much easier in Sweden to get respect for your way of living and of arguing if you argue that they are effects of your religious identity than if you argue that they are effects of your ethnic or cultural background (your cultural identity). But the other side of this is that such a radical religious identity is pretentious and in a way claims immunity against critique. This effect is an important element enforcing the trend that fewer and fewer people want to understand themselves as "religious" or "pious". Also those active in the Church of Sweden can hesitate to use such words, since asking as a devoted Christian for tolerance and respect becomes a way of establishing a distance to the surrounding society of the majority and very like "hiding" behind your religious identity, as if every religious position were impossible to criticize. The secularist discourse is enforced by Christian respect for the risk of pharisaical claim of superior piety. If you as a second generation Bosnian Muslim in continuation of a 200 years old *wahabitic* protest against "lazy" Islam, you could in Sweden get some respect as a seriously religious person, but you will then also be accused of hiding behind and misusing that identity, especially if you do not come to terms with the demands of the secularist discourse for individual sincerity and "modernity". Expressed in the terminology of Osbeck, you are then polemic against in Sweden mostly hegemonic individual discourse, but you have (as the pietistic tradition) not worked very hard on the fact that also the group-/subgroup-/minority-discourse

has a very problematic relatedness to the universalistic discourse in which also, as far as I understand, very central parts of both Christian and Muslim traditions are formulated.

Indirectly the identity-discourse of the second generation also becomes an issue for the first generation. For them, as I understand it, the mosque was earlier a place where you met discourses you knew from Bosnia and a place where you could use them in your efforts to come to terms with what you encountered in Sweden, and this was very much the reason why you wanted your children to become familiar with these discourses. Now the next generation (including your children) is changing also the discourses of the mosque. Your own way of interpreting and expressing your faith is challenged both from within yourself and from outside. Where to find confidence in these changes? And how could the congregation remain being overarching generations.

… and from what has not been provided in the RE

It seems to me obvious that also Swedish RE influences these diverging and often conflicting interpretations within religious communities. I think it is important also to ask if it provides tools for responsible interpreting and handling of such conflicts and identity discourses. Within my line of thought it is important also because, in my opinion, true dialogue is more often about handling conflicts and discourses than about statements and beliefs.

In Swedish RE textbooks very little is said about how different traditions within the same "religion" have interplayed with differing national traditions, different political ideologies and different social backgrounds. Very little is also said about the implications of the differences between being part of a religious majority and being part of one of many religious minorities. The result is that those thinking of themselves as orthodox Christians or (e. g. Bosnian) Muslims do not recognize their own faiths in our textbooks – or, much worse, they interpret their faith (and all faiths) as independent of such things. To create such an understanding of religious faith is, to me, the opposite of a responsible RE.

It could be avoided, if RE had discussed how "religious identities" can be used and misused in handling life questions in

general, and how "religion" can be used and misused in handling the question of how to form and defend your own identity when you are expected to be integrated into a new cultural context – a really urgent life question to all living in changing societies and especially to immigrants and, perhaps even more, to the children of the immigrants. As far as I know, very little is said about this, too. It is not to provide the tools needed for handling the urgent life questions. And it is to conceal something very important in most religious traditions, that is to make misleading descriptions of them.

How to help all students to see, reflect on and widen their discourses on religion in order to grow as responsible human beings and hopefully also to take interest in and personally take part in true dialogues?

Which are the implications for Religious Education from these observations?

The more general implications are these:

- Both students and teachers are imbedded in discourses which make communication possible but also create divergent interpretations and can make it difficult to express and understand thoughts from other discourses. It is important to help each other to see how important discourses work and to reflect on how they may influence or even distort our interpretations. And it is important to try to explore new interpretative possibilities, to widen one´s discourses with new speech genres (Osbeck) by intense listening to new texts and to persons who do not think in the same way as I do, that is from true dialogues.
- This help is, I think, possible only in a way of teaching that is listening, responsive and responsible at its center, where students (and teachers) are fundamentally respected and behaving ethically in relation to one another. Perhaps this is a dream, but sometimes you have to dream.

More specific implications from the different parts of this lecture:

- At least we in Sweden have to give more attention to the effects on the understanding of religion and religions of what I described as a destructive educational logic in combination with the secularist discourse (and perhaps with our *livfråge*-approach) in order to avoid own mistakes and to help also the students to try to widen their understanding of religion, religions and *livåskådningar*.
- At least we in Sweden need help from people at home in other religious traditions, especially Islam, and especially with information on "lived" religion and on different aspects and perspectives on *livsfrågor* in Muslim traditions in order to be able to tackle and widen the image of Islam within the secularist discourse and to help also students with a Muslim background to work on inherited images and on images met in educational contexts and in dialogues with friends.
- In relation to the secularist, spiritual and Swedishness discourses in Swedish classrooms we have to listen to varieties of these and to eventually alternative discourses at work in specific group of students, deepen the understanding of how they work and engage also the students in reflection on how they may be influenced and restricted by them and on new alternatives and possibilities.
- In relation to the individual, group and universalistic discourses we are invited to try to understand how all of us seem to use them complementarily, even if they in many ways contradict one another. Especially we are invited to reflect on the hegemony of the individual competitive adjustment perspective in the school practice and its relation to intrinsic values used as objectives for the school system and on how such conflicts are handled (and could be handled) by the RE-subject and its textbooks. Today in Sweden most students would benefit from being helped to deeper reflection on the differences between being part of the majority and being part of a minority and the problems

(and possibilities) also of the group- and subgroup-discourses.

– My personal experiences also convince me that not only students with immigration background but all Swedish students could deepen their understanding of themselves and of others by a closer attention to the identity-discourse of second generation immigrants. The second generation immigrants are themselves a very important part of the Swedish population, which in a sense have been left with their integration difficulties without much educational help, in spite of the fact that the future of Sweden to a large extent depends on how they succeed. But reflecting on this discourse may help most of us to see the effects and power of the hegemonic secularist perspective and our *livsfråge*-approach in new light and help us to a deeper understanding of religion, religions, *livsåskådningar* – and of ourselves.

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Izlaganje s naučnog skuipa

Izlaganje s naučnog skupa

MEĐURELIGIJSKI DIJALOG I RELIGIJSKO OBRAZOVANJE IZ ŠVEDSKE PERSPEKTIVE

Prof. dr. sc. Edgar Almen

Sažetak

Želim da dam svoj doprinos u vezi sa odnosom između međureligijskog dijaloga i religijskog obrazovanja temeljen na vlastitim iskustvima u podučavanju nekonfesionalnog religijskog obrazovanja u švedskim školama, u obučavanju nastavnog osoblja na švedskim univerzitetima za tu vrstu religijskog obrazovanja te sudjelovanju u švedskim dijalozima, kao i trenucima sreće ili razočaranja koje sam podijelio sa prijateljima iz vjerskih miljea drugačijih od moga, među njima i Bošnjacima muslimanima. Ukazujem na to da naš način podučavanja, bar u Švedskoj, često umanjuje spremnost i interes za istinski dijalog naših studenata. Jedan od razloga za to jeste da informacije o religijama i religijskim tradicijama imaju tendenciju da religije *čine* statičnim i nerelacijskim, prikrivajući da je religija koja se živi proces koji traje cijeli život; vi se u njemu mijenjate, i od vas se očekuje da pri tome sazrijevate. Drugi razlog su efekti vodećih diskursa u kojim studenti tumače naša predavanja. Vodim diskusiju o tome koji su to danas diskursi u švedskim učionicama, kako ustanoviti diskurs identiteta druge generacije useljenika, i šta možemo učiniti da bismo pomogli studentima da razumiju kako ovi diskursi funkcioniraju te kako ih proširiti.

Ključne riječi: međureligijski dijalog, religijsko obrazovanje, religija koja se živi, reciprocitet i interakcija između različitih oblika znanja, vodeći diskursi u učionicama, diskurs identiteta druge generacije useljenika, Carl Anders Säfström, Karin Kittelmann Flensner, Christina Osbeck

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الحوار بين الأديان والتربية الدينية من منظور سويدي

الملخص

أود المساهمة في الحوار بين الأديان والتعليم الديني بناءً على تجاربي الشخصية في تدريس التعليم الديني العام في المدارس السويدية، وتدريب أعضاء هيئة التدريس في الجامعات السويدية لهذا النوع من التعليم الديني، والمشاركة في الحوارات السويدية وكذلك في لحظات السعادة أو خيبات الأمل التي شاركتُ فيها الأصدقاء من خلفية دينية مغايرة عن معتقداتي، ومن بينهم مسلمون بوشناق. وأشير إلى أن أسلوب التدريس لدينا، أو على الأقل في السويد على وجه الخصوص، كثيراً ما يقلل من رغبتنا واهتمامنا بالحوار الخالص بين طلابنا. أحد أسباب ذلك هو أن المعلومات حول الأديان والتقاليد الدينية تميل إلى جعل الأديان "ثابتة" وغير علائقية، متجاهلين حقيقة أن الدين الحيّ هو عملية تستمر مدى الحياة وأنك أثناء تلك العملية تتغير ويتوقع منك أن تنضج. وسبب آخر هو آثار الخطابات الرائدة التي يفسّر فيها الطلاب محاضراتنا. لديّ مناقشة حول ماهية الخطابات في الفصول الدراسية السويدية اليوم، وكيفية إنشاء خطاب هوية المهاجرين من الجيل الثاني، وما يمكننا القيام به لمساعدة الطلاب على فهم كيفية عمل هذه الخطابات وكيفية توسعها.

الكلمات الأساسية: الحوار بين الأديان، التعليم الديني، الدين الحي، المشاركة والتفاعل بين أشكال مختلفة من المعرفة، الخطابات الرائدة في الفصول الدراسية، خطاب هوية المهاجرين من الجيل الثاني، كارل أندرس سافستروم، كارين كيتيلمان فلنسنر، كريستينا أوسبك