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AUTHOR Kimanen Anuleena

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Critical approaches to religious diversity in education – what skills do future teachers need?

Abstract:

This chapter reflects on how critical approaches to cultural diversity in education have been and can be applied to religious diversity in the Nordic context. The aim is to identify skills or competences that future teachers need in order to face religious diversity in a socially just manner. Four dimensions of teacher competences regarding religious diversity are identified: critical awareness of the category of religion, critical self-reflection concerning one's personal worldview and relation to religion, religiously responsive education, and including power structures and social change in classroom discussions and activities. Some conclusions can be drawn from existing Nordic research on these topics. Religious literacy may offer a practice-oriented way to help future teachers to embrace critical analysis of the category of religion. Assignments involving worldview reflection may help teachers to gain critical self-reflectivity, especially if worldview is understood as an umbrella term for religious and secular beliefs, symbols and identities. Religiously responsive education and critical analysis of power relations in the classroom require commitment, care and the ongoing pursuit of broader knowledge.

Introduction

Growing awareness of cultural diversity in the Nordic countries means growing awareness of religious diversity. More than ever, schoolteachers in the Nordic countries need to take cultural diversity into account, but also to understand diverse conceptions and practices that can be recognized as part of institutionalized religious traditions or defined as lived or non-institutionalized forms of those traditions. This chapter reflects on how a critical approach to cultural diversity in

education can be applied to religious diversity in the Nordic context. The aim is to identify skills or competences that future teachers need in order to engage religious diversity in a socially just manner. This chapter leans on critical approaches to cultural diversity in education and reviews their implications specifically for religious diversity. I illustrate these approaches through existing Nordic research on religious diversity in education, focusing on identifying skills or competences that future teachers need. I conclude with implications for teacher education.

The focus on religious diversity does not mean that secular worldviews do not need attention in school education. There is, however, some evidence that in a Nordic educational context, religious diversity seems to be subject to problematic discourses and practices, like secular normativity (e.g. Berglund, 2017; Niemi et al., 2020; Rissanen, 2019) ethnicizing (Kimanen, 2022b; Ubani, 2018) and suspicious attitudes towards exclusive views (Kimanen, 2018). This highlights the need to discuss religious diversity as a special case within worldview and other cultural diversity. So, in Nordic education, topics and views arise that either the pupil or the educator, or both, experience as religious. In this chapter, these topics and views are defined as ‘religion’, although the common understanding of the category is problematized. Furthermore, the relationship between the secular and religious in the context of education in the Nordic countries will be briefly discussed from the perspective of power.

Recent researchers identified three fields where religious diversity poses new challenges to teacher professionalism, namely, religious education (RE) as a school subject, content related to religion in other school subjects, and diverse practices in the general school culture. First, RE, taught partly by specialized subject teachers but also by class teachers with thin education on RE, varies to some extent depending on the Nordic country in question. In Finland, RE and its secular alternative are basically taught in separate groups based on religious affiliation (see e.g. Sakaranaho, 2013), with

the exception of Åland, where an integrative subject on religion and worldviews was started in August 2021. In Sweden, there is a long history of a single RE subject for everybody, where neutrality and objectivity dominate, with a Lutheran Protestant keynote (Berglund, 2013). Denmark and Norway also have a common subject but with explicit emphasis on Christianity (Böwadt, 2020; Bråten & Skeie, 2020). In Iceland, RE is merged with other social studies subjects (Gunnarsson, 2020). This means that the growth of religious diversity on the demographic level affects the composition of the RE classrooms in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, and the size and number of diverse RE groups in Finland. Simultaneously, it affects the urgency for providing interreligious and inter-worldview competence but on a policy level there is pressure to contribute to social cohesion and preserve cultural tradition (Böwadt, 2020; Bråten & Skeie, 2020).

Second, religious topics can be discussed in history, literature and geography lessons, and religious views can come up in physical education, music, arts, home economics and health education – or virtually everywhere across the curriculum. These topics and views require professional skills to make sure that certain identities are not continuously silenced or offended in the classroom (Simojoki, 2021). Third, diverse school practices with no connection to specific school subjects can cause situations where religious claims are used in negotiations, like school meals, possibilities for individual prayer or institutional worship during school hours, and celebrations (Niemi, 2019; Rissanen, 2020).

Teacher educators should provide the student teachers with the most valid approaches to each of these challenges. Cultural diversity in education has already been theorized for a long time, and there is a vast body of literature suggesting that education concerning cultural diversity should involve a critical review of power relations (e.g. Dolby, 2012; Gorski & Parekh, 2020; Kumashiro, 2000; May & Sleeter, 2010). Power structures have been discussed within research on religious

diversity in education, for instance power imbalances in inter-worldview encounters (Kimanen, 2019), or in dominant discourses in RE classes (Eriksen, 2010; Kimanen & Poulter, 2018; Kittelmann Flensner, 2015) and concerning certain religious traditions (von Brömssen & Olgaç 2010; von der Lippe, 2011). In this chapter, by ‘education’ I mainly mean primary and secondary schooling, starting in the Nordic countries at the age of 6 or 7, but concerning the development of teacher’s competences some examples will be taken from training for teachers in early childhood education.

Critical approaches to cultural and religious diversity

Critical multiculturalism or critical multicultural education is perhaps the most prominent label for approaches that scrutinize power relations when addressing cultural diversity. According to Sleeter (1996), multicultural education was anti-oppressive from its beginning in the 1960s in the United States (US), but critical approaches were marginal for a long time due to political shifts and practical obstacles. Multiculturalism was critiqued – for instance by the British antiracist movement – for its insufficient attention to structural inequalities, leading to the development of critical multicultural education. The focus on group-based identities and the threat of cultural essentialism have also been criticized (May, 1999).

To avoid cultural essentialism, some scholars have substituted the term ‘multicultural’ with ‘intercultural.’ For instance, Vavitsas and Nikolaou (2021) understand ‘multicultural’ as preserving diverse, distinct cultural identities at the expense of inter-group contact and favour ‘intercultural’ as a dynamic endeavour for respect and solidarity. In their view, intercultural education is critical throughout because it focuses on inter-group relations, addresses inequalities therein and improves society. In some contexts, intercultural stands for a decolonizing approach that brings indigenous

perspectives into conversation with dominant ones (Aikman, 1997; Gorski, 2008; Walsh 2015).

Indeed, some proponents of interculturalism have used multiculturalism as a label for ‘descriptive [...], apolitical, assimilationist approaches employed by dominant cultures’ (Bernardes et al., 2021, 503). These perceptions fail to acknowledge the work of May and Sleeter and others, hence Gorski (2008), for instance, defines both multicultural and intercultural similarly but sees multiculturalism as more devoted to formal education.

Some scholars are critical of the focus on culture in intercultural education. For instance, Dervin (2015), has outlined ‘post-intercultural education’ that focuses on identification and discourses of culture constructing identities. This approach recognizes the power that is embedded in use of terms and power relations that influence the processes of identification.

From another perspective, the problems of the concept of culture can be avoided by focusing on social justice, which as a whole is a critical approach (see Mikander et al., 2018). There is body of (mostly US) research on social justice education that addresses ethnic and racial minorities (e.g. Clark & Seider, 2017; Flynn, 2012; Morales-Doyle, 2017; Schindel Dimick, 2012; Welton et al., 2015), the same groups that often are in the focus of intercultural education. Social justice in education has been identified as redistribution (compensating deficits), recognition (attention to structures behind those deficits), activism (engaging pupils in questioning problematic assumptions) and capability (pupil agency in the school context) (Mills et al., 2017). Partly similarly, social justice education has been categorized as education about social justice (concepts, facts), into social justice (enhancing ability to recognize inequalities and willingness to act), with social justice (democratic teaching practices) and through social justice (pupil-led action projects) (Kimanen, 2022c).

It has been noted that ‘cultural differences’ are sometimes used as a ground for a ‘new racism,’ to disguise attitudes and hierarchies attached to ethnicities and races (May, 1999, 12). School policies, educational practices and concepts and all other similar structures are culturally and historically constructed where cultural background that deviates from the dominant culture may create a risk to school failure (Nieto & Bode, 2012, 262). In this chapter, I share the view that awareness of diverse cultural practices and conceptions (including those that can be interpreted as religious) and of their implications to privilege and power is a vital part of teacher professionalism.

The work of Nieto and Bode (2012) is part of a vast body of literature on culturally responsive or relevant education. Similar to others presented above, this educational approach aims at social justice and emancipation and requires critical reflection from the teachers who adopt it, but also aims to ensure learning for all pupils regardless of their cultural identities and backgrounds. The main idea is to affirm identities and enhance engagement in education by attaching learning activities to each pupil’s prior knowledge and life worlds. There is evidence that these pedagogies do affect learning outcomes, attitudes and similar factors (Aronson & Laughter, 2018).

Concerning religious diversity, Small (2020) has pointed out that critical approaches have not gained much attention. She suggests critical religious pluralism to reveal the privileged position of Christianity in educational institutions that claim to be plural or secular. Her guidelines include critical examination of the intertwined nature of religion and culture, intersectional analysis, and understanding religion as a source for personal positive agency as long as religion’s potential for both liberation and oppression are recognized. These guidelines show the particular challenges of critical approach to religious diversity, and some of them will be elaborated on later.

Critical approaches to cultural diversity in teacher education

How to enhance intercultural competences in teacher education is an issue that has interested many researchers and teacher educators. There are problems with an essentialist view of culture as a fixed mindset that directly influences an individual's thinking and behaviour. Jokikokko and Järvelä (2013) suggest that if cultural identities are processes rather than products, intercultural competences should be taught and learnt as an ongoing process of accommodating new information, encounter and reflection. Teachers should base their praxis on an emancipatory knowledge interest, not on technical (positivist) or practical knowledge interests. This is because technical and practical definitions of knowledge, or competence in a prescribed set of skills, is not enough when the educators gain more experience and responsibility.

Reflection seems to be the cornerstone of a critical approach to cultural diversity in education. Byrd Clark and Dervin (2014) identify three forms of reflexivity in intercultural education: critical reflection to reveal power structures, becoming aware of representations and constructions, and hyper-reflexivity surpassing the limits of traditional reflexivity. An empirical study by Acquah and Commins (2015) shows that self-reflection and critical reflection on course materials can create dissonances for student teachers but also help them to resolve these dissonances.

Case-based methods are used in teacher education to enhance reflection, help students to acquire sociocultural knowledge and give them a repertoire of strategies to deal with sensitive issues. These methods fit well in teacher education concerning cultural and religious diversity (Brown & Kraehe, 2010; Kleinfeld, 1990). Kimanen and Innanen (2020) have analysed case discussions on intercultural encounters from the point of view of critical reflection and noticed that formulating questions concerning the cases helped student teachers and in-service teachers to question different assumptions and practices.

Some research on social justice in science teacher training that considers culturally responsive teaching as part of social justice education (Rivera Maulucci, 2013). Culturally responsive education in a certain school subject may fight underrepresentation of minoritized groups in certain field and empower them to use knowledge of that field to improve their living conditions. Research on social justice in teacher training contributes to our understanding of how teachers develop critical agency. Moore (2008) showed that the extent to which student teachers saw themselves as teachers determined how they saw themselves as agents of change. Student teachers are members of various groups, too, and some may be minoritized or privileged. Francis and LeRoux (2011) have analysed the interplay between those social identities and the formation of critical agency.

Critical approaches and religious diversity in education in a Nordic context

From the above literature survey, four requirements for educators can be identified. They will be discussed below in relation to religious diversity in the Nordic educational context in the following order. First, to avoid the pitfalls of essentialist or discriminatory use of the concept ‘religion,’ educators need a critical awareness of the category. Second, educators need to be able to reflect on their own worldview and relationship to religion. Third, educators need to know how to affirm diverse religious identities in their teaching. Fourth, educators need tools to include power structures and social change in classroom discussions and activities.

Critical awareness of the concept ‘religion’

The ability to critically review discourses concerning religion and one’s own position towards it is the basis of any other skills related to religious diversity. These skills have recently been listed

under the concept religious literacy, which has been developed in religious studies and adopted in research on RE (e.g. Enstedt, 2022). Two influential definitions of religious literacy are given by Adam Dinham and Diane L. Moore. Both include a certain amount of knowledge of religious traditions but for a critical perspective, other aspects are more significant. Dinham's definition contains 'category', i.e. understanding the complications in using the term 'religion' and drawing boundaries with it, and 'dispositions', i.e. emotions activated when encountering phenomena that are interpreted as religious (Dinham et al., 2017). Moore's definition, published by the American Academy of Religion (2010), stresses the necessity to understand the historical, social and cultural impact of religion and vice versa, which can be understood as a critical review of structures.

Beyond these definitions, there is a need to develop the concept of worldview literacy (Kimanen, 2022b; Shaw, 2022). Kimanen (2022b) has suggested that analysis of power relations should be added to the definition of worldview literacy. Although this chapter mainly addresses recognizing and interpreting diverse religious worldviews and their practices, Kimanen's study (2022b) of Finnish pre-service and in-service teachers' worldview literacy shows the challenges they face in interpreting religious diversity. Only a handful of the survey respondents considered power imbalances in their interpretations of a case. An even smaller proportion expressed negative assumptions concerning religious worldviews, including embedded intolerance. Some responses showed signs of cultural essentialist thinking, for instance the idea that certain 'cultures' are more religious than the 'Finnish culture' and this difference in intensity has a powerful impact on pupils' behaviour. This essentialist thinking implies that children do not have the agency to form their own worldview, but follow their culture non-reflectively.

In their discussion of the relationship between religion and culture, Rissanen et al. (2020) noted that some Finnish and Swedish educators tended to strategically use distinctions between culture and

religion. By labelling certain practices as cultural and thus as secular they could move these practices outside the scope of religious freedom. Protestant Christianity was an important source of tradition in the school cultures they studied, but other religions were perceived as ‘too religious’ to have pedagogical relevance as cultural heritage. This culturalization of one type of Christianity at the expense of other confessions has been noted in the Norwegian and other RE curriculums, and it has been regarded as neo-nationalism or neo-confessionalism (Andreassen, 2014). Rissanen et al. (2020) also show that Protestant Christianity was often assumed to represent the essence of humanity, giving any similarities with it in a disproportionate role in representing other traditions as similar. These observations highlight the need to recognize privilege as part of religious literacy.

Another sign of lacking religious literacy is what Rissanen et al. (2020) call ‘religionization,’ a tendency to interpret any wishes or needs of (in their case) Muslim pupils or parents as dictated by religion. Berglund (2017) uses the term ‘religification’ to describe educators’ tendency to place Muslim youth who attend Islamic supplementary education into the category of ‘the religious’, which is not a desired identity in a secular school context. These tendencies may be one aspect of an essentialist view of religions, especially minority religions, as distinctive packages that individuals either follow as wholes or not (see e.g., Enstedt, 2022). Alongside several attempts to define culture in a non-essentialist way, discussed above, in cultural studies and intercultural education, similar moves are being made in religious studies. For instance, a cultural approach to religion stresses the internal diversity and dynamic, evolving nature of religions as well as the situatedness of any concepts and knowledge concerning religion (Moore, 2014). Lived religion pays attention to individuals’ choices and interpretations that may cross the boundaries of organized religious traditions (e.g., McGuire, 2008). Discursive religion addresses the purposes for which the category of religion is used (e.g., Taira, 2016).

To sum up, as theoretical as it might seem, teachers do need a critical orientation towards the use of the category of religion. Without that, a Protestant understanding of religion may dominate in the Nordic educational context, teachers may draw boundaries of secular and religious in an unreflective way, and essentialist views of religion may be reflected especially on non-Christian pupils and families. Hence, a hint of religious studies is needed in teacher education.

Critical self-reflection

Essentialist views, religification and the strategic use of the category of religion are often not entirely conscious, but in the Nordic context they are cultural assumptions and schemes that influence the educators' thinking and practices. Self-reflection in the sense of reflecting on one's assumptions and power position helps educators to overcome these assumptions.

For instance, Rissanen et al. (2016) noted that many Finnish student teachers, even if they considered themselves interculturally competent, saw religious diversity from the perspective of limitations to educational practices and difficulties with parents. Hence, they thought that the best solution would be to exclude religion from the school. After receiving instruction on religious diversity, containing some case examples and opportunities to reflect their own views, many of them started to see opportunities to affirm religious identities through public recognition of religious diversity. Similarly, Kimanen and Innanen (2020) showed that Finnish pre-service and in-service teachers were better able to question school practices in familiar cases like Muslim girls' swimming lessons than for less common ones such as how a pupil who was a Jehovah's Witness responded to national festivities.

Cultural assumptions and personal privilege are often close-knit with one's own worldview. Personal life history and worldview affect our perspectives on the relationship between diverse organized worldviews. Thus, the concept of worldview is needed as an overarching term for both religious and secular identifications (Bråten & Everington, 2019). Following Valk and Tosun (2016), worldview should cover not only beliefs and values, but also identities, rituals and symbols. Such a definition of worldview communicates the fact that having beliefs and strong views, symbolic language and rituals is not confined to religious people but that secular people also base their values and norms on a worldview. Poulter and Tosun (2020) found out that Turkish and Finnish student teachers gained four things through inter-worldview dialogue: increased knowledge of one's own worldview, recognition of that everyone's worldview is unique, multiple perspectives and openness to new questions. Lamminmäki-Vartia et al. (2020) have also reported that inter-worldview activities, particularly practical encounters, benefit trainee teachers in early childhood education.

Religiously responsive education?

Whereas culturally responsive or relevant education is a widely researched concept, its religious equivalent is not as commonly discussed. Niemi et al. (2020) found that Finnish in-service and pre-service teachers took a religiously responsive approach to worldview diversity. It differed from both a secularist approach that avoided public display of any religion and an equal visibility approach that focused on equal recognition of diverse worldviews. In contrast, the religiously responsive approach took a positive stance towards exemptions from certain school activities, gender-based grouping of students based on religious needs when necessary, and providing students with spaces to pray in the school. In their interview study, Lipiäinen et al. (2022) found five teacher's attitudes towards worldviews in school, of which emphasizing freedom of religion came closest to a

religiously responsive approach. However, this approach appeared in the interviews mostly together with emphasis on the school's neutrality, an attitude that accepted religion at an individual but not an institutional level. Silencing religion in teacher discourse and teaching materials cannot be seen as particularly religiously responsive.

From the pupils' perspective, many Finnish Muslim pupils interviewed by Vähärautio-Halonen (2021) experienced allowing prayer at school as an important sign of acceptance. Although some of them adopted the dominant discourse that open religiosity does not belong in school, those who negotiated prayer opportunities in their educational contexts experienced agency, using different strategies and arguments. As far as affirming diverse identities is considered important in culturally or religiously responsive education, the equal visibility approach (Niemi et al. 2020) works towards that end. There is a lot to be done to ensure that teachers provide all learners an inclusive learning environment. This has been a lively area of research, especially in the context of RE.

First, RE teachers in the Nordic countries often seek to maintain a scientific or non-confessional atmosphere through secularist discourses that generally construct religious identities as the Other (Eriksen, 2010; Kimanen & Poulter, 2018; Kittelmann Flensner, 2015). Second, religious traditions are frequently presented stereotypically, so that religious pupils do not recognize them as their own. There are several tensions in adopting the role of a defender, explainer, questioner or a mere representative of a certain faith, but especially minoritized pupils seldom have the choice (Buchardt, 2010; Holmqvist Lidh, 2021). Other subjects are not necessarily safer spaces: religiously positioned young Swedes interviewed by Holmqvist Lidh (2021) reported science teachers' disrespectful discourses towards religious truth claims and difficulties to get support when contrasting religious convictions with views on evolution theory, abortion or homosexuality. In contrast, teachers who respect religious views and practices and use their knowledge of them in negotiations gain trust

from both pupils and parents (Berglund, 2012). Third, historical, religious and political conflicts bring about tensions in religiously diverse RE classrooms – and no doubt also in other subject classrooms, partly heightened by media representation. Pupils may start self-censoring their words and teachers may avoid topics that lead to conflicts (Vikdahl & Skeie, 2019) although bringing diversities and conflictual issues up in the classroom would be vital for affirming identities and cultivating the pupils' religious literacy.

The competences of the ideal teacher in a religiously diverse school context range from inter-worldview reflectivity (Kimanen & Innanen, 2020) to worldview (cf. cultural) awareness (Holm et al., 2021). Kuusisto and Lamminmäki-Vartia (2012) have used the concept of worldview sensitivity, derived from cultural sensitivity, as part of a teacher's 'moral compass' with an obligation to foster worldview democracy, derived from cultural democracy, enabling members of minorities to maintain their identities and practices. However, the concept of religiously responsive education shifts the focus from the educator to the educational practices. What would it mean to provide student teachers the ability to educate pupils in a religiously responsive way? In addition to critical self-reflection and ability to critically review the category of religion, it would entail commitment to include different, also religious, viewpoints in discussions and to gain information about them. No doubt, this kind of education would involve dealing with conflicts between school knowledge and religious truth claims, liberal rights and religious moralities. Sometimes there is a need to detect the oppressive within a religious tradition (Small 2020). However, when respect and understanding have been expressed, identifying oppression in a tradition should not break the relationship of trust altogether. A religiously responsive approach is needed to ensure that education is relevant for religious pupils and that they do not have to hide their religious identity at school.

Teaching about social justice and enhancing agency concerning religious diversity

When future teachers have gained the ability to critically review the category of religion in their practice and the skills to positively affirm diverse religious identities, something is still missing. Future teachers also need the ability to address the justice of power structures with the pupils and to foster pupil agency (Kimanen 2022c; Mills et al. 2017). RE in all the Nordic countries has content about religious diversity. Commitment to addressing power structures and fostering pupil agency concerning religious diversity involves paying attention to past and present majority and minority relations, stereotypes and discrimination, and possibilities for change. From another perspective, any intercultural or social justice education provided in school should somehow recognize religious diversity. In the following, I will use Kimanen (2022c), discussed above, on categories of education about, into, with and through social justice.

Concerning education about social justice, the curricula in Sweden and Finland cover human rights and democracy. However, researchers have called for a more transformative commitment and explicit mentions of structures that create inequality in religious and ethics education (Osbeck et al., 2018; Kimanen, 2022a), intercultural education (Zilliacus et al., 2017) and social justice education (Sporre, 2020). There is little research on fostering critical agency (education into social justice) in Nordic schools. Apart from studies by Kimanen (2022b, 2022c, 2022d), the project called EthiCo II (Sporre et al., 2022) can be regarded as related to social justice. It addressed multidimensional ethical competence, defined as moral sensitivity, moral judgement, moral motivation and acting morally – abilities that are partly also outcomes of education into and through social justice.

Teaching into social justice to pave the way for change-making is challenging. First, a classroom with pupils from both dominant and minoritized groups is a tricky context because each group could need different kinds of awareness and action strategies. The power relations of the wider

society are reflected in the classroom (Welton et al., 2015), and that probably leads many educators to avoid directly addressing minoritized identities when discussing social justice (Kimanen, 2022a, 2022c). Second, pupils may hold both dominant and minoritized identities; since very many layers of identities cannot all be addressed in depth in the same classroom activity, certain identities may be excluded (Flynn, 2012). The lack of explicit curricular instruction also explains why support for pupils' sense of agency in social justice matters is not very frequently seen in the classroom. Kimanen's study (2022a, 2022c) has shown that even when RE teachers taught about and into social justice, formation of agency was often left incomplete: discussions about who could and should act on certain topics were frequently vague and pupils' expressions of powerlessness were not always followed up by empowering discourses.

Teaching with social justice is a way to practice what you preach. Kimanen (2022d) shows that Finnish teachers who taught minoritized pupils either in their own groups (like RE or Finnish as the second language) or as substantial proportions of their classes saw listening to pupils' views and creating class rules together as an important tool in social justice education. In another study (Kimanen, 2022c) listening to pupils' concerns about the school's practices was an important exception when pupils' minority positions were addressed: as non-privileged members in the school community none of the pupils was constructed as less privileged than the others. However, applying democratic teaching methods does not address religious diversity in any special way.

Teaching through social justice would probably be very efficient in enhancing agency because it gives the experience of action and hopefully also change-making. However, there seems to be no Nordic research on this kind of activities in the context of RE. Pupil-led social action projects probably are not very common teaching methods in RE and ethics education (Kimanen, 2022d). There is US research on the influence of project-based, justice-centred learning (Morales-Doyle,

2017; Schindel Dimick, 2012;), but other research suggests that minorities, at least, may gather agency from education into social justice (e.g. Clark & Seider, 2017; Flynn, 2012; Welton et al., 2015). Education without direct action can also construct forms of delayed agency, like plans and dreams for the future (Kimanen, 2022c).

What principles can we teach the future teachers so that they can effectively promote pupil agency and ability to recognize power imbalances in matters of religious diversity? First of all, it takes sensitivity, commitment, diverse approaches and activities (Kimanen, 2022d). Discussion is important, and the teacher needs to be open to use those occasions when pupils bring up topics that are relevant for them. Teacher-initiated discussion about inequality is also needed, and may be enhanced through pictures, narratives and drama (Kimanen, 2022a, 2022d). Reading fiction has been successfully used to foster ethical competences (Sporre et al., 2022). It is important to positively affirm and engage non-privileged identities as well as suggest forms of action for both privileged and non-privileged pupils – that is, to male, female, white and racialized pupils as well as pupils who identify with discriminated and privileged religious or non-religious groups (Kimanen, 2022c). Most importantly, it is important to give the future teachers the conviction that despite the challenges, social justice education is possible.

Implications for teacher education

In this chapter, I have sought to show how critical approaches to cultural diversity in education have already been used in relation to religious diversity and how they could be further elaborated. The findings have implications for all teacher education: not only specialized RE teachers need competences concerning religion.

First, recognizing the use of power in categorizing is vital in any field, including religious diversity. Research in the Nordic context shows Protestant Christian underpinnings, unreflective use of the categories of culture and religion to draw boundaries between the secular and religious, and some essentialist views. Religious studies have developed several tools to better deal with these problems. Religious literacy, although also a contested concept (see Andreassen, 2019), can serve as a title for the necessary knowledge and tools of critical analysis that teacher preparation should offer, with a tight connection to educational practice.

Second, in critical forms of education, teachers always need critical self-reflection and to recognize their own assumptions and privilege. In the context of religious diversity, educators need to recognize their assumptions concerning religion as a phenomenon, diverse religious traditions and the boundaries between the secular and religious, as well as their power position as teachers negotiating school practices. In the Nordic context, this includes revealing the Lutheran Christian assumptions. Considering that a diminishing number of future teachers have religious worldviews, the concept of worldview as an umbrella term for secular and religious notions, values and symbols is important for cultivating future teachers' self-reflectivity and avoiding the conception of the secular as neutral.

Third, religiously responsive education has not been outlined comprehensively before, although there is a body of research that shows religious pupils' identities are insufficiently affirmed in the Nordic educational context. Admittedly, religiously responsive education can be included in other concepts, such as worldview sensitive (Kuusisto & Lamminmäki-Vartia, 2012) or reflective (Kimanen & Innanen, 2020) education. In the context of this chapter, it is important to recognize that religious viewpoints may appear in almost any subject and that a teacher needs skills to address

them in an inclusive way. This means that teacher education should provide tools for creating an atmosphere of respect and trust, for instance through participatory ground rules and providing relevant and understanding examples of religious diversity, so that conflicts and oppression can be dealt with in a safer space.

Fourth, social justice education provides the view that pupils are future agents of religious freedom and equality between diverse religious and secular identities. Hence, teachers need awareness of the ways to teach about, into, with and through social justice (Kimanen, 2022c) and to enhance pupil agency.

The research on cultivating these four skills in future teachers shows that reflection assignments, case-based methods, and worldview reflection can help students to develop reflective abilities (Acquah & Commins, 2015; Kimanen & Innanen, 2020; Poulter & Tosun, 2020; Rissanen et al., 2016). To learn and use these skills, teachers may need to form an identity as an agent of change (Francis & LeRoux, 2011). Far from being mechanical tricks or tools, these skills are analytical, deep-reaching and require moral commitments. Teachers need to maintain their knowledge of religious traditions, their internal diversity, sacred texts, various interpretations and global historical, social and political relationships in which religious identities are embedded. Thus, it is vital to regard these skills more as an ongoing process that can be started and supported by teacher education than a product acquired when teachers qualify (Jokikokko & Järvelä, 2013). More research is needed on how trainee teachers acquire all four skills, but also on the motivations and resources that help in-service teachers keep their knowledge-base and skills updated.

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