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2017

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Malama , M & Kallioniemi , A 2017 , ' Student teachers' viewpoints of current RE solution and how RE should in future be profiled in the future in Finland ' , Nordidactica : Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education , vol. 7 , no. 4 , pp. 70-86 . <  
<https://journals.lub.lu.se/nordidactica/article/view/19058> >

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/326532>

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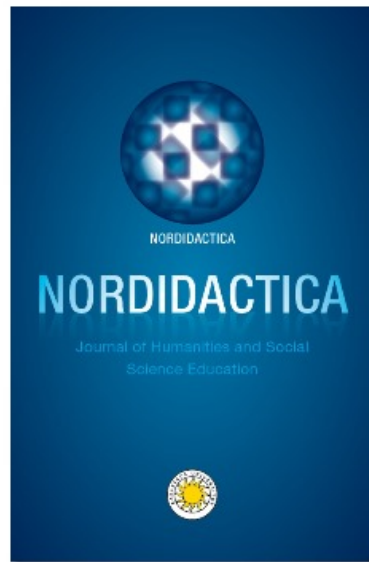
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# **Student teachers' viewpoints of the current RE solution and how RE should be profiled in the future in Finland**

**Mia Malama & Arto Kallioniemi**



**Nordidactica**

**- Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education**

**2017:4**

Nordidactica – Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education

Nordidactica 2017:4

ISSN 2000-9879

The online version of this paper can be found at: [www.kau.se/nordidactica](http://www.kau.se/nordidactica)

## **Student teachers' viewpoints of the current RE solution and how RE should be profiled in the future in Finland**

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*Abstract: This study focuses on Finnish student teachers' viewpoints of the current RE model and their views on how RE should be profiled in the future. The idea of this article is to formulate possible models to organize RE in Finland based on the data gathered by student teachers. The topic is very timely and urgent as Religious Education (hence RE) has been fiercely debated in different European countries. There have also been debates about the function and profile of, and the most suitable model for, RE in Finland. The data of this study consist of 149 essays written by 35 student teachers studying in a class-teacher program and 114 teacher students studying in a subject-teacher program. The data were analyzed by qualitative content analysis. The main research questions are: 1. What kinds of strengths and challenges do student teachers see in the current RE solution? 2. What kinds of RE-models would they prefer in the future? 3. According to them, what kinds of model scenarios could be formulated? Many student teachers prefer a model where RE is taught both according to an individual's faith as well as collectively, irrespective of the individual students' faiths. Could this kind of combination model take into account the strengths of both models (the current and joint models) and at the same time correct the problems associated with these models?*

**KEYWORDS:** RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE), SECULAR ETHICS, THE FINNISH RE MODEL, STUDENT TEACHERS

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Arto Kallioniemi is professor in the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Helsinki. His publications show a contextual approach and cover different fields of religious education. Kallioniemi holds the UNESCO Chair on 'Values, Dialogue and Human Rights.

## Introduction

This article deals with student teachers' viewpoints on the current RE model and their views about how RE should be profiled in the future. Beside presenting the data and comparing the two student-teacher groups we formulate possible models to organize RE in Finland based on the data. The article continues the theme previously examined in the *Religious Education Journal of Australia* in 2014 (2/2014), under the title "How Should Religious Education (RE) Delivery Models be Organised? Student Teacher Perspectives for the Finland of Today and Tomorrow" (Matilainen, 2014, pp. 3-8). That earlier article concentrated especially on RE student teachers and their views. In the present article the research data also includes student teachers studying to become primary school teachers. More data about subject teacher students have also now been added and analysed. The topic was also discussed in an article published in the *Journal of Theology* (Matilainen, 2016). A number of studies on RE in Finland have appeared in recent years (see e.g. Zilliacus & Kallioniemi 2015; Åhs, Poulter & Kallioniemi, 2016 & 2017).

Religious studies are needed more than ever before, but precisely what kind of RE is needed? In Finland, there has been much debate about the function and profile of the most suitable model for RE. The discussions have usually been very ideologically oriented, and in the background of these discussions there are often secularized conceptions of education connected to the democratic processes of societies and Western discussions of human rights (Kallioniemi, 2013). These discussions have focused on comparing two different kinds of models, the current one and the so-called joint model in Finland (Kallioniemi, 2013b).

Teaching religion in state schools has been arranged in different ways in different European and Nordic countries (for RE models in Europe, see for example Schreiner, 2002, 2007). In the Finnish model, RE is given according to one's own religion. Religious Education is defined as a non-confessional subject, and teachers are not permitted to include any religious practice in the teaching of RE. The relationship between the concept of one's "own" religion and religious practice has not been very clear in Finnish education (Zilliacus & Kallioniemi, 2015, p. 340). Secular Ethics,<sup>1</sup> a subject largely based on philosophy, is an alternative subject for students who do not belong to any religious community (Kallioniemi, 2010; Matilainen, 2014). The Finnish model has also attracted great interest internationally as it emphasizes the rights of religious minorities within the state-school system (for more about the Finnish RE model and the Finnish cultural context, see for example Kallioniemi, 2010 and the article dealing with the viewpoints of subject teacher students presented in the *Religious Education Journal of Australia 2* /Matilainen, 2014.)

Another interesting current phenomenon in the Finnish RE context is the so-called "Kulosaari" innovation and research findings related to it. In Kulosaari High School, a private school located in the Finnish capital area, a new approach to RE was introduced

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<sup>1</sup> Translated into English as "Life Philosophy," "Life Questions and Ethics" and "Life Perspective Studies" (Sakaranaho, 2007; Salmenkivi, 2007).

in 2013 (Grönholm, 2013). Jyrki Katainen, the Prime Minister at that time, called it a significant social innovation (Ijäs, 2013). In the school, a new form of partly-integrated RE and secular ethics was introduced to students who had previously been separated. In this new innovation some themes are taught in the joint instruction regardless of the student's religious or ideological background while other themes are still taught in segregated instruction (Grönholm, 2013; for more about the Kulosaari innovation, see for example Åhs, Poulter & Kallioniemi, 2016 & 2017).

After examining this innovation, some other schools have become interested and have started to investigate possibilities for new initiatives in RE teaching and structuring. They have started to develop a partly integrative, dialogical approach to RE with the aim of educating pupils with different religions together to enhance their dialogue skills, thus preparing them for life in a multireligious world. The teaching is non-confessional and it focuses on teaching ethics and different religions and worldviews from a non-religious standpoint while at the same time dealing with religious plurality. This has also led to intense public discussions (Åhs, Poulter & Kallioniemi, 2016). Surprisingly, these discussions have focused on comparing joint and separate instruction from very ideological standpoints but they have not handled a possible combination model and the pedagogical perspectives related to this issue (Matilainen, 2014; Matilainen, 2016). Teaching about religions and religious literacy is needed nowadays more than ever. Multiculturalism and globalization as well as terrorism and growing levels of prejudices between different religious and ideological groups make teaching and discussing religions important, as has been highlighted by intergovernmental organizations in Europe. Worldviews have come to play an important role in discussions concerning religious diversity and how education should be developed to include both the religious and non-religious. (For more precise examples, see Jackson, 2007, 2009, 2014; OSCE & ODIHR, 2007 Matilainen, 2014; Mediema, 2014). At the same time RE has been fiercely debated in different European countries as well as worldwide. In recent years RE has been renewed in some societies, e.g. Norway and Quebec in Canada (Leganger-Krogstad, 2011, p. 93; Grelle & Jensen, 2011, p. 187).

The developing trends in RE can be labelled as follows: 1) The aims and tasks of RE are increasingly being integrated with the general aims of education. In many European countries, there is a tendency to promote pupils' development as responsible citizens in diverse societies. 2) There is currently an increasing openness to include the diversity of religions and worldviews in RE. This can especially be seen at the curriculum level in several European countries as attempts to accommodate Islamic culture in schools either by organizing special Islam education or including the study of Islam in the general levels of school curricula. 3) Attempts to develop RE in many European countries have given rise to conflicts. In Spain, for example, there has been continuous conflict about Catholic RE, some critics wanting to replace it with non-confessional, religious-based studies. The subject, Orthodox Culture, which has recently been developed and introduced into the Russian education system has been criticized. The critics want comparative religion to be taught instead (Willaime, 2007, pp. 87-90).

## **Religious Education in Finland**

Religious Education is a subject taught in basic education in all school classes in Finland. The legislative status of RE is in principle similar to other compulsory school subjects. At the comprehensive school level, grades 1-9 pupils attend one to two lessons of RE a week. The current Finnish model used to organize RE is a religion-based separated model. The Finnish model differs from the models in other Nordic countries but has similarities to the Austrian RE model (see Pollit, 2007), but the religious communities in Finland have much less influence over what is taught than, for example, in the Austrian model.

The historical roots of the Finnish RE model date back to the 1920s when it was deemed that RE in primary schools should be taught according to the religion to which the majority of the pupils belonged. Finland at that time had a rather homogenous religious background. Pupils who did not belong to the majority Lutheran or Orthodox churches had the right to be exempted from RE. The non-confessional history of religions and secular ethics were taught to the few students who were not members of any religion (Kallioniemi, 2005; Kallioniemi, 2010). Islamic Tatars (Jamisto, 2007) and Catholic students received their religious instruction from their own religious denominations and followed Lutheran education in school (Jaanu-Schröder, 2007).

In the 1990s, school laws were renewed making organizers of instruction responsible for arranging minority RE for groups with three or more minority religion pupils, if their parents requested such classes (Kallioniemi, 2008). This changed the situation in RE and led to increasing practical difficulties in schools. The Board of Education wrote the national curricula frameworks for 13 different religions. These curricula were for the following religions: Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Steiner Society, Latter Day Saints, the Free Church, Adventist, Baha'i, Hare Krishna and the Lord's People (Protestant Society) RE and Secular Ethics. These alternatives are offered in the public-school system, which has a strong status in Finland as the country only has a few private schools. At the school level, in the Helsinki Capital area, there are some schools that provide RE lessons in at least six or seven different forms (Zilliacus & Holm, 2013).

The Finnish Parliament renewed the Act of Freedom from Religion in 2003. After the Freedom from Religion Law, the Law for Comprehensive School (454/2003) and the Law for Senior Secondary schools (455/2003) were also amended. The new law made changes to RE in schools, so that, for example, confessional RE was changed to "RE according to one's own religion." Students have the right to RE according to their own religion in schools if, e.g., the Board of Education has accepted the curriculum for that specific form of religious education and there are three students whose parents have asked for it. As religious diversity has increased remarkably in Finland, some schools may have to provide RE lessons in many different forms. The concept of "minority RE" is used to refer to RE other than Lutheran majority RE in the Finnish educational system.

Despite the increasing secularism, multiculturalism and plurality in Finnish society, in 2015 91% of comprehensive school pupils still participated in Evangelical Lutheran religion lessons, only 5% of pupils participated in Secular Ethics lessons, 2% in Muslim

religion lessons and 1% in Orthodox religion lessons (for more about the Finnish RE model, see for example, Kallioniemi, 2007, pp. 55–76; Sakaranaho, 2007; Sakaranaho & Jamisto, 2007; Statistics Finland, 2015; Kallioniemi & Ubani, 2016).

## Research Problems, Data and Analysis

This article deals with student-teachers' viewpoints on the current RE model and their views on how RE should be arranged in the future. The main research questions are the following: *What kinds of strengths and challenges do student teachers see in the current RE solution? What kinds of RE-models would they prefer in the future? According to them, what kinds of model scenarios could be formulated?* Following the analysis of the data, various model scenarios were formulated.

The data consist of essays written by teacher students and they were analyzed by qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic, rule-guided approach made up of different techniques (Kynge & Vanhanen, 1999, p. 4). In this study the analysis followed different phases in which data were condensed into themes from which categories were then built. The basic categories were constructed from the strengths and weaknesses the students presented. In the same way, categories were also constructed about the different future model scenarios the students had. The number of students holding different views in different categories were also compared quantitatively to get a more precise picture of the phenomena.

The data were gathered between 2011-2014. The teacher students wrote two essays and were told that it was important for them to give their own viewpoints about the topics. Each teacher student wrote two essays, but in this article the focus is on the theme of the first essay. When they wrote the first essay they did not yet know the title of the second essay. This was done to avoid the second essay influencing the topic of the first essay. The essays were written consecutively and the themes of the essays were:

*1) Evaluate the current RE solution and argue how, in your opinion, RE should be organized in the future. 2) Evaluate the current RE solution from the viewpoint of implementing human rights.*

We will focus on the essays written for the first task in this article: *Evaluate the current RE solution and argue how, according to your opinion, RE should be organized in the future.* The data of this study consist of 147 essays written by 35 student teachers studying in a primary teacher program and 114 student teachers studying in a subject teacher program.

The subject student teachers were all studying to be teachers of religious education and beside that many of them were also going to be teachers of some other subjects, including, for example, psychology, philosophy, secular ethics as well as mathematics and geography. Subject teachers teach subjects in schools to grades 7-9 (pupils from 13 to 16 years old). The primary school student teachers were studying to become class teachers, teaching in grades 1-6 (pupils from 6 to 12 years old). All the students were studying at the University of Helsinki in the Department of Teacher Education. The essays were written as part of their studies in the pedagogy of religious education. The

focus of this study is on the viewpoints and conceptions found in essays written by the student teachers.

The students were clearly informed that the views they expressed in their essays would remain anonymous and had nothing to do with their course evaluation. No names of the students were written on the essays. It was highlighted that participation in the study was voluntary and students could also choose to do another task than these essays during the time which was allocated to this in the course. They also had the possibility of writing essays but not giving the essays to the research. No one wanted to opt out of the research study. The data gathering was done in just one university as part of the courses for practical reasons. This made it easy to students to attend the study and find time to attend the study. It also made it easier that all the students attended, not merely the students who were interested in the topic. This created unique data consisting of all the students who had participated in the courses during the research period without the problem of many missing responses. The writing process made it possible for students to have time to reflect on their views as part of the course and they found it in general very useful, and the feedback was very positive. The data was not read and analyzed until the courses were finished.

The data gathering in one university and inside course settings created enough data for this study, as analyzing the qualitative data is time consuming. It was also taken into account that the design of the data collection can have an effect on the data and its objectivity. While it was highlighted that it was important for research purposes that everyone wrote his or her own views, students could anyway hold views of what could be preferred way to write and reflect the issue. In the future, it would be good to gather and compare data in different universities and also gather data from outside the course settings. Comparing these different data gathered in different settings would then provide different perspectives on the issue. an interesting view of the issue. This could make it possible to gain a broader understanding of the viewpoints of future teachers studying in different years and in different universities.

## **The Results of the Study**

### **Student teachers' viewpoints of the current RE solution and their future preferred RE models**

The difference between RE in schools and religious instruction and nurture in religious communities was highlighted and RE was seen as a broad subject in the research data. The subject student teachers especially wanted either to develop or change the current model. This means that they were very conscious of the problems connected to the current model and also that the student teachers who did not want to change the model, wanted to have the current model developed further. Many students also found disadvantages in the other possible RE models, especially in the so-called "joint model." On the other hand, quite a number of the students were also ready to change the model if needed. The favourite alternative models were the "joint model" –



which is the same instruction for all students regardless of their religious or worldview backgrounds, and a combination of both RE according to one's own religion as well as instruction where all the students study together.

The teacher students were divided in their support of the different RE models. It should however be noted that this means that most of the students also wanted to have joint instruction as well as the present "own religion" RE. The need for space to discuss religious and ideological matters together was acknowledged, and the lack of whole class discussions was seen as a major problem. At the same time, the idea of pure joint instruction was criticized with the students expressing different concerns. Some students preferred the teaching to be religiously neutral. They were also unclear about what were the common sources of ethics that are taught as part of RE.

The combination model preference category was the biggest single category in this data. Sixty-four student teachers favoured this kind of RE model. The *subject student teachers* were more eager to change the model either to a combination or a joint model than the *primary student teachers*. For example, the *primary student teachers* were divided, as 13 wanted to have the combination model, 10 wanted to continue with the current model, and 10 wanted to have the joint model, whereas 51 *subject student teachers* wanted to have the combination model, 33 wanted to have the joint model and 21 wanted to continue with a developed version of the current model. There were also 9 essays from *subject student teachers* and 2 essays from *primary student teachers* which were written with no stance taken on how RE should be organized in the future from the viewpoint of the RE model used. These essays, for example, dealt more with the contents of RE.

### **Strengths and problems related to the current model**

The possibility of receiving instruction according to one's own religion as well as the possibility of familiarizing oneself with one's own cultural heritage were the most mentioned strengths of the current model. The *class student teachers* highlighted the following strengths of the current model: the possibility of getting instruction according to one's own religion (4 mentions) and the possibility of familiarizing oneself with one's own background and cultural heritage (4 mentions). The pedagogical rationale for one's own RE model starting from one's own familiar surroundings was also seen as a strength of the current model. Beside these mentions there were also many separate mentions of the various strengths of the current model.

The *subject student teachers* highlighted the following strengths of the current model: in the current model pupils familiarize themselves first thoroughly with one religion, their own religion, this was seen as a help for the pupils to then familiarize themselves with other religions (18 mentions). The second biggest strength of the current RE model noted by the students was the importance of teaching one's own religion from the viewpoint of strengthening and supporting the pupils' own identities and their developing processes (13 mentions). The third recorded biggest strength of the current model was the importance of instruction in the students' own religion from the

viewpoint of familiarizing them with their own cultural heritage or making them more knowledgeable about their own cultural heritage (11 mentions).

Both similarities and differences were found when comparing the viewpoints of *subject student teachers* and the *class student teachers* about the challenges of the current RE model. The challenges of the current model highlighted by the *class student teachers* included the different practical difficulties arranging the different kinds of “one’s own” RE instruction groups (7 mentions). The second biggest category were mentions highlighting the fact that the current model does not give pupils enough knowledge about other religions and worldviews especially at the primary school level (5 mentions). The *class student teachers* claimed this was a problem of the current model although this was not, at least theoretically, a problem of the model itself, but was more connected with the content and focuses of the curricula. It was also mentioned in another category, that the problem of the current model was its concentration on one’s own religion (2 mentions). So, all in all, the instruction in one’s own religion theme was mentioned both as a strength and as a weakness. This was related to the model itself although it can also be seen as a consequence of the curricula. Other mentions of challenges/problems with the current model included, for example, things related to equality between majority RE and minority RE. Minority RE seemed to be more concentrated on dealing with just this minority religion. Students had also heard rumours about cases where minority religion instruction was conducted in a confessional manner regardless of the changed law. Other equality-related challenges mentioned in relation to the current model included, for example, the fact that minority RE did not seem to give as rounded an education as majority RE (3 mentions). Also placing pupils into different groups in RE and thus producing “grouping” was viewed negatively (3 mentions).

The serious challenges/problems in the current model highlighted by *subject student teachers* were the lack of qualified teachers in minority RE (23 mentions). The second biggest category, namely the dividing of students into different groups, was labelled by some as “stalls” which in the current RE model physically divided people (21 mentions). The perceived hierarchization of dividing different pupils into different groups was also mentioned (8 mentions). The third biggest category was the lack of dialog and communication between students who held different beliefs (20 mentions).

The *class student teachers* did not highlight the lack of qualified teachers as being problematic as the *subject student teachers* did. This can be due to the different stances taken by *primary* and *subject student teachers*, with the latter highlighting more the need for sufficient quality and special education in order to teach RE. *Class student teachers* teach many subjects while *subject student teachers* concentrate on one major and two or perhaps three minor subjects. (For more about minority RE teachers and teacher qualifications, see Matilainen, 2014.)

### **The strengths and problems related to the joint model**

The joint model was presented as an alternative to the current model in the essays.

*Subject student teachers* thought that the new system of a joint model would be more equal in that all the students would get the same kind of instruction (20 mentions). This was seen as a strength of the system and the possibility that the joint model could increase the understanding between people from different backgrounds. *Subject student teachers* highlighted the possibility for all the pupils in a class to discuss religious and worldview matters together as one of the strengths of possible future joint instruction (15 mentions). Also the possibility of religious dialog was seen as a strength of the joint instruction. At the same time a few students pointed out that it should be taken into account that perhaps it is not ideal to dialog with others if you are alone representing a minority group while all the others represent the majority. This issue can be seen to have connections to the issue of "safe space," which will be dealt later in this article when dealing with the views of the students related to the combination model.

Beside these mentions there were also many separate mentions of the possible different strengths of the joint model. There were not the same kinds of clusters of highlights found in the data of *class student teachers* as strengths of the possible future joint instruction. There were separate mentions about the possible growth of tolerance, dialog between different pupils, and the possible widening of the worldview of the pupils.

The biggest challenges in possible future joint instruction as seen by the *subject student teachers* was that if the model was changed this could lead to opposition by different interest groups (8 mentions). There were not the same kinds of highlight clusters in the data of *class student teachers concerning the* challenges/problems in the joint model. The separate mentions dealt with the focus of possible joint instruction, namely would there be enough time to deal with any of the religions in great enough detail, and especially could the minority religious groups get sufficient instruction on their own religions. The students also wondered if there were also other kinds of aims for the joint instruction than just knowledge of different religions and worldviews and appreciating diversity. If so, could these aims be fulfilled in the joint instruction? Could, for example, the experience of holiness and the spiritual dimension be part of the content of the joint instruction?

### **The strengths and problems related to the combination model**

Both the *subject student teachers* as well as *primary student teachers* presented either some kind of combination models or joint instruction as possible alternatives to the current instruction. The strengths of the different combination models that were highlighted were very similar to those seen as the strengths of the current or the proposed joint models.

The strengths of the combination model included possibilities for dialog and encountering different religions (21 mentions) A specific strength found only in the combination model was that the combination model offered the possibility of combining both the strengths of the current model (strengthening and supporting the pupil's own identity and its development process, the pupils becoming more familiar with their own cultural heritages, the pupils becoming first familiar with their own cultural heritage)

and the strengths of the all-together instruction (making it possible to encounter people from different backgrounds) (13 mentions).

*I think one realistic model could be to have the current model but change it so that some of the courses would be compulsory for all in joint instruction. For example, the course handling different religions could be meaningful and interesting if different students from different religions could join in the same course together. ... I don't have any ready solution for the new model, but combining the current model and the idea of joint RE could be activating. This model could have the best features from both models.* (Student 86, translated by researcher).

The student teachers who were studying to be *primary school teachers* combined tolerance and acceptance of difference (3 mentions) and the specific possibility of discussing ethical questions as a class (4 mentions) as the strengths of the combination models. No bigger clusters of the strengths of the combination model emerged in *class student teachers'* data. The challenges of the combination model that emerged included some separate mentions in *the subject student teachers'* essays. It was pointed out in two essays that the problems concerning finding qualified teachers would continue. The *primary student teachers* did not mention any challenges associated with the possible combination model. Of course, this does not mean that there were no problems associated with this model, but that the students did not foresee these problems in their essays. The essays concentrated more on dealing with the current model and comparing it to the possible joint model perhaps because these two models have been the subject of current public debate. All in all, combination models were seen positively by many of the student teachers, while at the same time they criticized the unaltered current and joint models for giving a too narrow perspective of RE for today's society.

What is interesting is that the idea of a "safe space" was mentioned both as a strength of the current model and as a strength of the joint model (for more about the concept of a safe space in the RE context, see for example Jackson 2014).

*It would be very important for people to enter into a dialogue with others from different religious and other kinds of backgrounds, starting at school. Joint instruction could offer a safe space to learn this kind of dialogue.* (Student 1, translated by researcher)

It was seen that there is a need for "safe space" discussions within one's own religious group as well as in joint groups. This can be interpreted to mean that the idea of a safe space is seen as very central in RE. The current model was seen to give a possibility to discuss religious issues in a safe space with students holding the same kind of religious background. The joint instruction was then seen as a platform and safe space to discuss and have dialog with students holding different religious beliefs and worldviews.

It could certainly be argued that both kinds of safe space are needed in young people's lives – a safe space to discuss religious and worldviews in groups where others are from similar religious or ideological backgrounds, and a safe space to discuss religions and worldviews in diverse groups with an adult, qualified teacher. This can be seen as a strength of the combination model. Concentrating on creating safe spaces in

simply one group setting is perhaps not sufficient to fulfil the aims of RE. Careful consideration should be given to the use of the limited resources and time in RE so that the different aims of RE are fulfilled. It could also be argued that although safe space discussions within a religious group are important, is that the task of state schools? At the same time, discussion possibilities in groups of pupils with similar kinds of religious background with a qualified teacher in a secular school setting were said to have the benefit of preventing marginalization (see, for example, Zilliacus & Holm 2013). Alternatively, joint instruction and learning to dialog in worldview matters can also be a very important tool in increasing tolerance and preventing radicalization (see, for example, Jackson 2014).

### **Possible combination models to arrange and develop RE in a future Finnish context**

The student teachers also presented their own ideas about how the possible combination model could be arranged in different levels of education and what themes should be taught in joint instruction and what themes should be taught as separated groups. Most student teachers thought that older pupils should be given more joint instruction than younger pupils. Most students thought that, for example, at the upper secondary level the instruction should be joint instruction. Concerning primary (comprehensive school, grades 1-6 in the Finnish system, children aged between 7-12) and secondary schools (children aged 12-15) the opinions varied about the amount of joint and separate instruction. Compared to secondary and upper secondary level, it was thought that in primary schools and especially the first years of schooling, RE should be taught separately to pupils of different faiths much as is done now in the current RE model. At the same time, many student teachers claimed that in the secondary and upper general secondary schools (young people aged between 16-18), it would be very necessary to have joint instruction also, or in the opinions of some of the student teachers, just joint instruction. They had a broad view of the aims of RE instruction.

Some student teachers presented ideas about which themes should be taught in separate groups and which themes could be suitable for joint instruction. The themes which were thought most suitable for joint instruction were world religions and ethics. In their opinion, themes such as the pupil's own religious identity and the holy book of one's own religion were best taught separately. Bearing in the mind the different suggestions of the student teachers, some alternative models for a possible future combination model of RE in the Finnish context were constructed. The model alternatives found in the teachers' essays are presented in Table 1. The table gives a brief summary of the main ideas categorized into different school levels.

STUDENT TEACHERS' VIEWPOINTS OF THE CURRENT RE SOLUTION AND HOW RE SHOULD BE PROFILED IN THE FUTURE IN FINLAND

Mia Malama & Arto Kallioniemi

TABLE 1.

*Model alternatives*

<b>Model A:</b>
-primary school: <i>separate instruction</i> -secondary school: <i>both separate and joint instruction</i> -upper secondary school: <i>joint instruction</i>
<b>Model B:</b>
- <i>New joint subject which would have both joint instruction as well as "sub courses" in the pupils' own religions or secular ethics</i>
<b>Model C:</b>
-primary, secondary and upper secondary school: <i>both separate and joint instruction</i>
<b>Model D:</b>
-primary school: <i>separate instruction</i> -secondary and upper secondary school: <i>joint model</i> - <i>beside this, voluntary courses in the pupils' own religions and secular ethics (thus it would be open to all)</i>
<b>Model E:</b>
-primary school: <i>joint instruction</i> -secondary school and upper secondary school: <i>joint instruction</i> - <i>beside the joint instruction, pupils would have voluntary instruction in their own religion as well as secular ethics courses which would be open to all students</i>

As can be seen from the above table, there are many ways to arrange the combination model and these possibilities vary depending, for example, on the amount of joint and separate instruction and depending on which school stage the joint instruction is carried out. There are also different ways of formulating the model from the mildest reform of the current model to include some joint courses to a new joint instruction subject with a range of options within it. What is needed is to carry out pilot studies to investigate the different possibilities. The experiments should focus on pupils' needs and not be carried out for economic reasons.

## Conclusions

The results show that the student teachers see both challenges and strengths in the current model as well as in the joint model. One possible alternative to these above-mentioned models is a combination model. There were many kinds of ideas concerning combination models which differed in the amount of joint and separate instruction and in the timing of these different modules. All in all, these different new model

alternatives showed that the question of the RE model is not just about joint or separate instruction, but is much more multifaceted. The student teachers were quite open to all the different kinds of RE model alternatives.

The ideals of the combination model are also problematic. For example, if there are different kinds of joint and separate phases included, how can we ensure that the subject does not become too fragmented? Could the combination model also result in a situation where problems connected to the joint model as well as problems connected to the separate model become interlinked? Experimenting with different combination models and developing models based on these experimental results would be of vital importance in the search for optimal solutions for these models. Some experiments are already being carried out, but these are based on the practical challenges of the current model and are solely concentrated on the interests of individual schools. Their focus should be changed to model development research with an ultimate aim of changing the RE model into a combination model.

The research results in some private schools seem to be very promising. The results of quantitative studies indicate that pupils generally have positive attitudes towards joint RE as a subject as it gives them the knowledge they need and they also do not have any doubts about the new subject. Qualitative data confirmed the same results: the pupils strongly favour joint RE lessons and do not wish to be separated according to their religious communities when studying religions and worldviews (Åhs, Poulter & Kallioniemi, 2016). Parents, teachers other than RE teachers and head teachers also viewed joint RE positively. They saw it as an opportunity to increase the meaning and relevance of RE in our multireligious world. Joint RE was seen as a way to develop a sense of understanding towards different cultures and religions (Åhs, Poulter & Kallioniemi, 2017).

When talking about the combination model and joint RE instruction as part of it or just joint instruction as a RE model in schools we have to remember that in the current situation in Finland besides different RE groups there are also pupils who study secular ethics as an alternative to RE. The possible joint instruction should then include these students as in Kulosaari innovation (Åhs & Poulter & Kallioniemi, 2016 & 2017). It could then be named, for example, religious and worldview education.

When thinking about joint religious & worldview education in schools it is important to think about its basis and content focus. What kind of value base and core themes could joint instruction have? There is experience of joint RE instruction in different countries in Europe (about different RE models in Europe, see for example Schreiner 2002 & 2007) which should be taken into an account when thinking about the value base, aims and content of joint instruction. Educating for human dignity, which is already important in both RE and in secular ethics, could be one joint theme and value base of joint instruction. This kind of human rights education focus could then act as one core theme in instruction. (For more about education for human dignity and human rights education in RE, see for example Matilainen & Kallioniemi, 2012a & b.) Besides this, it is important that the instruction deals sufficiently with different religions, which has not been always the case in secular ethics. The focus on religions is important as religious literacy is of vital importance in today's multicultural society. Besides

religions, instruction should contain teaching about secular worldviews, as stated in international guidelines on RE (see for example Jackson, 2014; OSCE & ODIHR, 2007).

The discussion about the RE model has been quite black and white in the Finnish media as they have compared just two different model alternatives – the joint and the current model. In this discussion new experiments have been labelled a joint model even when they actually represent more than one kind of combination model. Could the combination model provide us with an opportunity to develop the Finnish RE and secular ethics model while at the same time taking into account the strengths of different models (the current and joint models) and correcting and fixing the problems related to these models? The combination model would give us a chance to do research about the challenges and possibilities of these models, thus encouraging the development of RE. Researching and assisting the combination model and its different components could make it possible to decrease or increase the number of different types of RE at different levels of schooling. In the discussions about RE two options have been outlined about how the current RE model could progress: a proposal for one common joint RE for all students or continuing with the current model while including some joint instruction for older students in that model (Kallioniemi & Ubani, 2016). Compared to these two alternatives we can see from this research data that many other alternatives are available, such as the alternative of one joint subject containing separate instruction modules. It is very important to research and reflect upon different models. Having said that, it must be acknowledged that there are restraints on making radical changes to RE in Finnish schools, and the model of one joint subject containing separate instruction models might prove too complicated in practice. From the school perspective, RE is one school subject and it is unlikely for schools to be able to organize many separate RE lessons.

The significance of which model is used in schools is of great importance in the state school system, as the model used reflects the curriculum, which in turn reflects the pedagogical aims of the country and influences pedagogical ideals in teaching and learning. Discussions about international literacy in RE have mostly concentrated on the most suitable model of RE in state schools public schools. This article and its results will hopefully offer new perspectives in these discussions and debates. It will also give international audiences a perspective from Finland, which is a country where school education is almost totally based on state-funded public schools. Moreover, Finland is an example of a country which historically has been very religiously homogenous, and where the majority of people have been and still are members of the Lutheran church. It is also an example of a Northern European post welfare state. We hope the perspectives presented in this article will benefit discussions on the profile of RE in different societies.

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