ARTICLE

Wayfinding Through Disrupting Controversies in the Religious Education Classroom: Teachers' Views

Niclas Lindström, niclas.lindstrom@umu.se

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4637-6903

Umeå University, Sweden

Kirk P.H. Sullivan, kirk.sullivan@umu.se

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9091-6458

Umeå University, Sweden

Wayfinding Through Disrupting Controversies in the Religious Education Classroom: Teachers' Views

Niclas Lindström, niclas.lindstrom@umu.se

Kirk P.H. Sullivan, kirk.sullivan@umu.se

Umeå University, Sweden

Abstract

Controversial issues are a teaching challenge that can either be accepted and pedagogically grasped by the teacher, or repressed. However, there is no generally accepted definition of 'controversial issues' in the literature. Most definitions contain behavioural, epistemic and political elements. Hence, controversial issues are topics about which individuals tend to disagree, about which individuals tend to hold conflicting explanations, and about which individuals create solutions based on different values (Cooling, 2012; Hand, 2008; Ljunggren et al., 2015; Stradling, 1984). We collected critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954) from teachers working in the north of Sweden in an *Indigenous language zone.* We found that the teachers do not consider an given issue as controversial per se, but rather they see controversiality as created in the specific classroom context. For example, one teacher expressed this as follows: "a controversial issue is created through the students in the classroom and what backgrounds they have." Globalisation and refugee flows have created classrooms with students from the North and South allowing more issues to be perceived as controversial than earlier when school was more homogeneous. In this paper, we problematise the teachers' construction of critical issue incidents.

Keywords: controversial questions, critical incidents, Sweden, religious education, wayfinders

Introduction

In the non-confessional Swedish school subject religious education (RE), teachers regularly address sensitive questions. Such questions concern, among other things, ethical problems and pupils' convictions (Jackson, 2014). Sensitive questions are sometimes referred to as controversial issues (Stradling, 1984). However, there is no consensus as to what constitutes a controversial issue in education. In fact, there is a large body of research discussing what a controversial issue might be (Cooling, 2012; Dearden, 1981; Hand, 2008; Ljunggren et al., 2015; Philpott, Clabough, McConkey and Turner, 2011; QCA 1998; Stradling, 1984). However, most definitions contain behavioural, epistemic and political elements. This means that they view controversial issues as topics about which individuals (and groups) tend to disagree (e.g. religious belief vs. atheism), about which individuals (and groups) tend to hold conflicting explanations (e.g. religion as divine inspiration vs. religion as an illusion), and about which individuals (and groups) create solutions based on different values (e.g. faith in God vs. belief in rationality) (Cooling, 2012; Hand, 2008; Ljunggren et al., 2015; Stradling, 1984). In this article, we do not evaluate the various ideas about and definitions of what a controversial issue might be.

Today many RE teachers work in schools characterised by pluralism with multiculturalism and invigorated Indigenous legal and educational rights increasing the challenge of reaching mutual understanding between individuals and groups in the classroom (Schreiner, 2007). Today's RE teachers, thus, have to be able to navigate in a school environment inhabited by pupils with different confessional backgrounds, and from various cultural, including Indigenous, refugee and minority, backgrounds.

In this paper, we problematise RE teachers' construction of critical incidents when approaching controversial issues in the classroom and consider how their wayfinder maturity and skills (Davis, 1998, 2009) affect how the RE teachers, working at the secondary school level in an Indigenous language zone, approach these incidents.

Background

Internationally, the purpose of RE in school is frequently understood as either confessional or non-confessional. If RE is understood as confessional, the aim of the subject is to socialise the pupils in a religious faith. If RE is understood as non-confessional, the aim of the subject is to give the pupils an opportunity to learn about different religions (Dewey, 1908; Grimmit, 1987). Even though there are alternative ways of understanding RE in school, the confessional/non-confessional distinction means that approaches to RE in school can be described as to teach *in* or *about* religion (Alberts, 2007; Cush, 2004, 2007; Jackson, 2004; Knott, 2010). In Sweden, the context of the study presented in this paper, RE is non-confessional. An aim of secondary school RE, according to the Swedish National Curriculum, is that "pupils should become sensitive to how people with different religious traditions live with and express their religion and belief [sic] in different ways" (SNAE, 2011, p.218). One interpretation of this is that RE teaching should focus on the development of the pupils' multicultural competence and help them learn to better understand their own and others' social, cultural and historical contexts.

Lindström (2020) conducted a mixed quantitative and qualitative web-based questionnaire to investigate (a) if controversial issues could be understood as topics that challenge or violate prevailing ideals, norms and values in a given context, and (b) if the classroom strategies RE teachers used to handle these issues tended to decrease or increase the frequency and depth of value conflicts. The teachers' questionnaire responses were analysed against two theoretical assumptions: one, a distinction between (1) individualist values (emphasising autonomy and self-realisation), predominant in secular societies, and (2) collectivist values emphasising common beliefs, practices and goals, predominant in religious societies (Inglehart and Oyserman, 2004; Greene, 2014); and two, that teachers' strategies for handling controversial issues, through routines and working methods, influence the values reproduced in education (Jackson, Boostrom and Hansen, 1993).

Lindström (2020) found that the topics their participants considered to be controversial issues challenged or violated the prevailing ideals, norms and values in an individualistic liberal society. The participants emphasised topics that generally involve conflicts between individual choice and collective sense of respect, for instance, related to ethical issues regarding sexuality, abortion and euthanasia. Interestingly, the RE teachers in this study tended to convey individualist values to their pupils. Indeed, the teachers strived for balance and neutrality in their teaching and encouraged their students to make independent decisions and take responsibility for these decisions. Lindström (2020) argue that this approach reinforces the predominant individualist values of Swedish society, and contributes to a continuation of the view of collective values as controversial in educational settings. That is, even if teachers try to avoid taking sides and remain factually neutral they may nevertheless contribute to the reproduction of a set of values.

There is relatively little international research on how controversial issues are handled in confessional and non-confessional RE. The few studies that do exist suggest that pupils who participate in confessional education become aware that the controversial issues they encounter in teaching often consist of a conflict between collectivist and individualist values (McDonough, 2016; Memon, 2009; Moore and Kyser, 2014), whereas, pupils in non-confessional education do not create such a tension between collectivist and individualist values (Flensner, 2019; Moulin, 2012; Sjöborg, 2015).

At the same time, other studies (von Brömssen, 2003; Flensner, 2017, 2019; Holmqvist Lidh, 2016; Thurfjell, 2015) suggest, that these results indicate that a person may become blind to their own individualist values and fail to perceive what might define these values as controversial for some. Individualist values such as freedom, tolerance and responsibility are taken for granted and are not subjected to critical examination or compared to collectivist values related to common beliefs, practices and goals. These researchers have pointed out that a predominantly individualist discourse tends to constitute religious people as the 'other' which in turn influences how these issues are approached in the RE classroom. One consequence of this is that pupils who are portrayed as the 'other' often become silenced in the classroom. In this way, the conversation between faiths and cultures fails.

Trevor Cooling's (2012) posited diversity criteria for controversial issues, which reflect two basic aims of education:

"(a) to value and practise fairness by embracing pragmatism in community building and a commitment to working alongside other people despite fundamental differences in belief; and (b) to develop rationality by valuing evidence, reason-giving and taking careful account of the arguments of others." (Cooling, 2012, p.177)

If we accept these educational aims, diversity criteria can be developed according to which it is important to: (a) respect others and provide reasons for our own points of view, (b) emphasise an epistemic humility to promote peaceful co-existence with those who do not share our beliefs, and (c) recognise that reason operates within prevailing paradigms or traditions which reflects the majority view (Cooling, 2012, pp.177–178). These criteria do not only provide an understanding of which issues that are considered controversial in a given context (e.g. opinions that goes against the majority view) but also an idea of how to approach them in pedagogical practice in the RE classroom. We use Cooling's criteria as points of departure in this paper, coupled with Wade Davis's (2009) concept of the wayfinder.

Wayfinders

In this article, we will use ethnographer Wade Davis concept 'wayfinders' as an analytical concept to identify a holistic approach to the pluralism and multiculturalism teachers face in their pedagogical practices. The wayfinders refer to the traditional navigators of Polynesian archipelago, who relied on their intuition and observational skills alone, to steer their vessels in the right direction over vast distances. They had to take account of astronomy, meteorology, and oceanography to cultivate an ability to read the ocean in a way that they would not get lost (Davis, 2009). Davis (2009) warns against applying a non-holistic, deconstructivist lens to wayfinding:

"the genius of Polynesian navigation lies not in the particular but in the whole, the manner in which all of these points of information come together in the mind of the wayfinder… The navigator must process an endless flow of data, intuitions and insights derived from observation and the dynamic rhythms and interactions of wind, waves, clouds, stars, sun, moon, the flight of birds, a bed of kelp, the glow of phosphorescence on a shallow reef — in short, the constantly changing world of weather and the sea." (Davis, 2009, p.60)

Thus, the wayfinder serves as a metaphor for a certain attitude towards other human beings, characterised by an ambition to step back from our prejudices, and try to understand the world from their point of view (Davis, 1998, 2009). It is also possible to understand the wayfinder concept as an approach to teaching that emphasises the ability to shift perspectives and understand the pupils and the educational content, on their own terms. This includes an acknowledgement that culture is the fabric that provides the individual with references to understand oneself and others in a social and historical context:

"Culture is a body of laws and traditions, a moral and ethical code that insulates a people from the barbaric heart that history suggests lies just beneath the surface of all human societies and indeed all human beings." (Davis, 2009, p.198)

As Davis (2009) demonstrated, the Polynesian wayfinders through their cultivation of their intuition and observational skills along their adoption of multiple perspectives to form an holistic point of view were

better at navigating the oceans than the European colonialists, who depended on technical innovation for navigation.

The western colonialists, in turn, illustrate what we call a particularistic or instrumental ideal that teachers may embrace as they face pluralism and multiculturalism in their pedagogical practices. The instrumental approach is associated with an ability to identify and measure particular factors in order to take appropriate action. For the explorers, as Davis (2009) pointed out this would mean to determine latitude and (if possible) longitude in order to be able to navigate to the determined destination. The instrumental approach to teaching has been characterised by an ambition to measure the correlation between input and output in order to facilitate systematic improvements of the education system. This approach to education has, for instance, been criticised for its one-sided focus on results without consideration of what is normatively valid (Biesta, 2009).

In this context, we will use the distinction between the wayfinder and western navigator or between a holistic and particularistic/instrumental approach to education to analyse teachers' stories about critical incidents that have occurred when treating controversial issues in the classroom. We want to explore and identify tendencies in the teachers' stories about these incidents while recognising that even if they sometimes express clear ideals that they try to live up to they are often torn between ideals or express hesitation or even self-doubt. Our intention is to apply the model in a context-sensitive manner in order to construct a fair understanding together with teachers from our study.

Method Qualitative Research Interviews and Critical Incidents

In this study we conducted a series of qualitative research interviews inspired by the Critical Incident Technique. This means the participating teachers were asked to describe situations, where controversial issues were treated, that contributed, positively or negatively, to their pedagogical practice (Flanagan, 1954). To identify these incidents is a way to develop an understanding of how teachers, in an *Indigenous language zone*, handle controversial issues in multicultural classrooms. The interviews were conducted using a protocol with open-ended questions on two themes where RE teachers were asked to describe:

1. a situation where you have dealt with a controversial societal issue, when teaching the subject religious education, where you have experienced problems;
2. a situation where you have dealt with a controversial societal issue, when teaching the subject religious education, where you felt that the lesson was successful.

In addition to these themes we asked supplementary questions to give the teachers an opportunity to provide a more detailed account of their experiences and we encouraged the teachers to illustrate with examples from their pedagogical practices (see Brinkman and Kvale, 2007; Bryman, 2008; Flanagan, 1954; Yin, 1994).

The participants were four certified and registered RE teachers with 4–20 years of experience in the profession. The teachers were briefed about the general purpose of the study and invited to participate voluntarily under the condition that they could discontinue at any time. The participants were informed

that their answers would be anonymised, treated as confidential, and used for research purposes only. No personal data or sensitive information, that is information concerning, for example, political, philosophical or religious conviction, were collected during the study. Thus, this study was designed to ensure compliance with general research ethical principles of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and precautious use of collected information (Flanagan, 1954; Swedish Research Council, 2017). The study was approved by a Swedish Regional Ethical Review Board (ref: 2018/371-319).

The first author conducted the interviews in Swedish. They lasted between 41 minutes and one hour, with an average length of 45 minutes. All four interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to enable further analysis and serve as a background to our upcoming discussion (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2014). After transcription in Swedish, we read the transcriptions independently. During our readings and explorations of the transcribed interviews we looked for indications of which issues the teachers considered to be controversial in their RE classrooms and for wayfinding acts. Here, we define wayfinding in teaching as being able to navigate controversial issues adeptly in an expert, skilled, and knowledgeable way. For example, a teacher might pick up on a comment from one student and agilely develop this comment to challenge the paths of the other students. We later meet to discuss each of the interviews one-by-one and attempt to place them on a continuum of wayfinding maturity, and select pertinent citations from the interviews. Once we were had agreed upon the citations that best illustrated various in wayfinding skills, the second author translated these extracts into his native English.

Findings

Our exploration led us to realise, in line with Trevor Cooling (2012), that the teachers did not consider an issue as controversial per se, but rather they saw controversiality as a consequence of and created in each specific classroom contexts. The teachers articulated how they viewed and handled the controversial issues in different ways, yet they all pointed in the same general direction. Our readings of the four interviews suggested these variations in direction in the articulation of controversial issues align well with how much of a wayfinder the teacher had become (Davis, 2009, 51). We present these here as four brief sketches of the teachers highlighting our findings of wayfinding in controversial issues in RE classrooms.

Teacher 1

Considering Teacher 1, we noted that this teacher stated that their classroom is homogeneous with few foreign students (and we interpreted this to suggest few Indigenous or minority pupils as well):

> "It is easy to get into controversial issues but I have not experienced any serious confrontations. I work at a school, with suburban children who have educated parents, which is rather homogenous. There is no natural mix of people, relatively few pupils have foreign backgrounds, at this school." (Teacher 1)

This teacher also hinted that the level of parental education is a factor in reducing "serious confrontation". This teacher viewed "educated parents" as holding similar views due to their homogeneous liberal Swedish education. This education delimits the range of views the parents hold,

and the teacher's comments suggested they see this common ground as inhibiting "serious confrontations". Hence, controversiality is minimised as a consequence of the homogenous classroom context.

The minimisation of controversiality is reflected in our conversation with this teacher around the core interview themes where we discussed (1) a situation where the teacher dealt with a controversial societal issue and felt they successfully navigated and (2) a situation when they felt the controversial issue was not successfully navigated in their classroom and they encountered problems or were challenged by the situation. We position Teacher 1 as least wayfinder among our four teachers. In fact, we see this teacher as particularistic-instrumental in their teaching.

If we consider the following extract from our interview with Teacher 1 in which they summarised a successful controversial issue teaching experience, we again note this teacher's aim to remain neutral and avoid emotional reactions in the classroom.

> "Radicalization has become a part of the public debate because of actions by IS [Islamic State] and right wing extremists. At the same time, what used to be right wing extremism some years ago have become a part of the mainstream today. It is difficult to handle these issues and sometimes you are grateful for being able to have a good conversation… where it is possible to speak about radicalization as a neutral concept. It is possible to remain neutral… and we have relatively few strong emotional reactions at this school." (Teacher 1)

The need to remain neutral is challenged in this teacher's example of a teaching experience they felt was unsuccessful:

> "I have experienced discussions in the classroom where groups with different perspectives have been divided and the purpose of the exercise has been lost… with accusations of what is, for instance, typically female or male. Often when the conversations become bad, I find myself in a situation where I cannot be neutral. I need to step up and defend one of the groups." (Teacher 1)

It is also clear from this teacher's description of an unsuccessful discussion in the classroom that they cannot remain neutral, but "need to step up and defend one of the groups". Our readings of this teacher's interview have led us to construct a picture of a teacher who thinks all views are equally valid, yet views which deviate from the mainstream are thankfully, as far as this teacher is concerned, rare in their classroom as it is homogeneous. It is possible that this teacher's notion of neutral is the position that best aligns with their own beliefs. This situation, we argue, reflects mainstream liberal Swedish society that is increasingly challenged by immigration and growing minority and Indigenous rights. As we continue to consider the other three teachers, it is useful to consider how RE teachers become wayfinders. For example, has Teacher 1 not been provided with a context that supports their development into a wayfinder, or does this need the security of the known so they subconsciously avoid contexts that may support wayfinder development?

Teacher 2
When reading Teacher 2's interview transcript, we saw that this teacher was more open to aspects of their students' lives that may affect their opinions and how their students navigate controversial issues:

"The different opinions pupils have depend on the conditions they grew up in. It can be their cultural background or which media content they are exposed to". This teacher, in contrast to Teacher 1, did not focus on how their classes were constituted or on one specific context. That is, they talked generally about pupils and the conditions in which they grow up. This teacher viewed background as more complex than being from homogenous suburbia. They showed awareness of the importance of 'media content' forming and informing their students' ideas and thereby suggested that life outside of the home can lead to the creation of a controversial issues in the classroom. Whether this teacher has encountered students who reside in the dark net or are being radicalised (Ghannouchi, 2020; Taylor and Soni, 2017) in their RE classroom is unfortunately not transparent from the interview discussion. Further, in contrast to Teacher 1, this teacher referred to "cultural background" rather than delimiting this to the white Swedish liberal suburbs. Teacher 2 thereby recognised the relevance of these backgrounds regardless of whether these were the dominant culture, or a minority, immigrant or Indigenous, backgrounds.

How these conditions interact with the teacher as a wayfinder was pinpointed by this teacher as they discussed controversial issues in their RE teaching that have been challenging or less successfully navigated. This teacher honed in on the Scandinavian Indigenous population that have historically been repressed by the majority colonial state, and who experience daily discrimination in contemporary Scandinavia.

> "It is difficult to give a fair account of the position of another ethnic group that you don't belong to yourself. I tell the pupils that I am not Sámi and that general information about an ethnic group are not valid for a specific individual… The generalised view of the Sámi, which is represented in the school environment, is associated with reindeer husbandry in the forest or the mountains. Some pupils express their prejudices when people are labelled in that way… and are condescending to them." (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 showed an outsider perspective as they referred to "another ethnic group", and placed themselves within an ethnic group that was not this other—that was neither minority, Indigenous or other ethnic group. This revealed an awareness of the dangers of stereotyping groups. Further they expressed displeasure when "some pupils express their prejudices". This teacher was aware that there are different cultural and ethnic perspectives, recognises the importance and relevance of these perspectives, yet they were unable to navigate a path through these perspectives from the position of the insider. This potentially limits the possibilities they have in their classroom to act as a wayfinder for their students. Given that this teacher is new to the classroom, we consider them to be becoming a wayfinder.

We see their path towards becoming a wayfinder clearly in the way they articulated successful controversial issue teaching moments:

> "I believe that the pupils are expected to have an opinion about certain issues and are supposed to be able to share their points of view. These issues concern something that the pupils think about, not only during lessons at school, as they affect them personally on another level. Maybe that is why these issues become special." (Teacher 2)

This teacher saw it as a positive that the students have opinions and can "share their points of view", not least because these thoughts "affect them personally on another level". This quote from our interview discussion with this teacher also shows this teacher's interest in wayfinding as a way to bring the students forward from where they are in their thoughts, views and opinions. This teacher finds some controversial issues safe, and in these contexts, they are able to be a wayfinder for their pupils, whereas other topics are currently less safe.

Teacher 3

Teacher 3 was perhaps the teacher who stated most succinctly that controversiality depends on students' backgrounds and not on the issue per se. This teacher articulated their thoughts as follows:

> "I think that issues become controversial depending on the background of the pupils in the classroom. That is what makes something into a controversial issue. Nothing is controversial per se; a controversial issue is created through the students in the classroom and what backgrounds they have." (Teacher 3)

This teacher's example of an unsuccessful controversial issue incident failed "when the pupils were not interested in understanding 'the other'", as follows:

> "I worked at a school with many Christian orthodox refugees from the Middle East. It was especially difficult for pupils, with that background, when they were expected to get an understanding of Islam. On several occasions, pupils accused Muslims for being undemocratic or terrorist… It was challenging to respond to them because of their strong convictions. The conversation failed when the pupils were not interested in understanding 'the other.' It was a very hard environment to be a teacher." (Teacher 3)

However, this example shows how this teacher worked hard as a wayfinder to help the students understand the other, the Muslim. These students were Christian orthodox refugees to Sweden and far from the homogenous educated suburban students Teacher 1 has experienced. This example demonstrates the difficulty of wayfinding conversation varies with the openness of the student. The ability of the wayfinding teacher in the RE classroom to agilely find new directions when reading the class is beautifully exemplified in Teacher 3's successful example:

> "We were speaking about Judaism and how the Jews consider Israel to be their Holy Land when one of the pupils objected that it was called Palestine. I tried to explain that when we speak about Judaism, we do it from a Jewish perspective and when we are considering another religion; we do it from their perspective. You do not have to agree with their perspective but you need to be aware of it… When he questioned Israel's right to exist, it gave me an opportunity to explain a controversial issue, which became clearer to the other pupils." (Teacher 3)

Here we see how Teacher 3 was able to pick up an objection from one student and turn it into a wayfinding moment for other students in their classroom. The Teacher 3's examples show that wayfinding in the RE classroom is demanding and requires energy and agility.

Teacher 4

Teacher 4's interview presented a more nuanced idea of when things have the potential to become and not become controversial in the RE classroom. That is in this interview we encountered a similar perception to Teacher 1 about the homogenous area in which the school is situated:

> "It has never happened that we in this municipality have had a segregation of residential areas, schools and other things. It is still a fairly homogeneous place in terms of population and background and other things. This community is a small town with a population where many have not successfully completed compulsory education, which is generally a pretty good breeding ground for prejudice. They, the prejudiced, are there, of course, but not so that prejudice has really taken over." (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 suggested that a low-level of education is a "pretty good breeding ground for prejudice" and also thought that in some way education towards democratic liberal Swedish values strengthens homogeneity and thus reduces the chances of controversial ideas arising in the RE classroom. Even so this teacher explained in their interview that it can be difficult to raise controversial issues in their classroom. A core element for Teacher 4 was their focus on the students "in a classroom that you risk hurting". This idea Teacher 4 developed in detail with specific examples, shows the importance of understanding the other, and is clear in their wayfinding function in the RE classroom in relation to the perspectives and values of the other and minority groups (we have highlighted key sentences in bold).

> "One thing that makes me go a little extra on eggshells is if I have to teach about Jehovah's Witnesses and have a Witness in the class. Because it's something that most people have heard about, they are hardworking, go and knock on doors, are crazy because they do not celebrate Christmas, etc. Then it often happens that you become overly correct and concrete in your teaching and do not take the turns. But it is also the case that I try to turn the perspective… I usually tell a story about my mother who was an anaesthesia nurse who was called to the maternity ward. She was to put to sleep a woman who had had a difficult birth and needed surgery. It turns out that the man and woman were Jehovah's Witnesses, and when she finds out that she needs blood to cope with this, she says thank you but no thank you. So the man sits there and with the newly delivered child on one arm and holds his wife's hand in the other while life flows out of her. It makes the students react - "why do they do this?". We must try to see it from their perspective. Yes, they could have had 40-50 more years together but then you have to think at the same time that they see eternity. And what is 40-50 years against eternity? It is also such a thing, a shift in perspective, that one can think in different ways and have different perceptions of what is important. It is the same as when you are Buddhist and start thinking about what materiality really means. Do we really get happier by accumulating a lot of property and money? What is happiness?" (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4's wayfinding abilities were further illustrated in both the example of a successful and an unsuccessful controversial issue incident in their classroom. The successful example considered radicalisation and how to begin to understand that most people in all groups "only wish for a good life for themselves, their children and everybody else". The unsuccessful example linked back to this teacher's wish not to hurt students in their classroom, and the difficulties of selecting between possible directions as a wayfinder:

> "I was teaching law and justice from a historical perspective and explaining blood feuds during the medieval period. One of my pupils approached me afterwards, a Romani girl, who said, "It's like

that among us too". In retrospect, it was an occasion I could have handled differently. I chose to speak to her separately; maybe I should have tried to address the issue together with all the pupils in the classroom." (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 had at least two directions to choose between. One would have helped the class grasp blood feuds as something that is experienced today, and the other, the one chosen, protected the Romani girl from her peers who may not all have taken the supportive, shifting perspective cue from their wayfinder teacher. This example shows how difficult wayfinding is in the RE classroom when navigating controversial issues.

Summary and Future Directions

Our analysis of the interview discussions with the four teachers helped us construct an understanding of what teachers consider and frame as a controversial issue in the RE classroom. Before we proceed to summarise what we have found, it is important to point out that this study is based on only four teachers' discussions. It is, however, possible that we have captured the continuum from non-wayfinder (particularistic-instrumental) to wayfinder. How positions along this continuum are distributed across RE classrooms regionally, nationally and internationally requires future research.

Yet, one commonality is that all the teachers do not consider any issue controversial per se, but rather they see controversiality as created in the specific classroom context, and coupled to the students' backgrounds. Aspects that form a student's background include cultural encounters, for example, white Swedish liberal, immigrant, Indigenous, and media usage, for example, the students' interaction with social media, the darknet, and extremist and other groups.

Globalisation and refugee flows have created classrooms from the North and South allowing more issues to be perceived as controversial than earlier when schools were more homogeneous. It is unclear from our data how the interaction of the teachers' RE class experiences assist or hinder their development as wayfinders. Indeed, the non-wayfinding teacher works in a school environment that they refer to as homogenous educated suburbia. Does this delimit the teacher's possibilities, as they do not encounter Indigenous students or the other? How RE teaching experience and teacher-training-programme content support becoming a wayfinder in RE classroom warrants investigation. Further, how this may interact with personality type and other personal background experiences of the teacher should also be investigated in futures studies of the type we have presented here.

In this paper, we have problematised teachers' construction of critical issues and demonstrated that Davis's articulation of wayfinding provides a useful way of approaching critical issues through wayfinding conversations in the RE classroom. The complexity of wayfinding that is evidenced by Teacher 4 suggests that it would be fruitful to support the development of wayfinding skills in professional development and initial teacher training programmes.

References

ALBERTS, W., (2007). *Integrative religious education in Europe: A study-of-religions approach*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

BIESTA, G., (2009). Good education in an age of measurement: on the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability,* **21**(1), pp.33–46.

BRINKMANN, S., AND KVALE, S., (2014). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. London: SAGE.

BRÖMSSEN, K. VON, (2003). *Tolkningar, förhandlingar och tystnader: elevers tal om religion i det mångkulturella och postkoloniala rummet*. [Interpretations, negotiations and silences; Pupils' talk about religion from within multi-cultural and post-colonial spaces] [Doctoral dissertation, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg] http://hdl.handle.net/2077/10525

BRYMAN, A., (2008). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

COOLING, T., (2012). What is a controversial issue? Implications for the treatment of religious beliefs in education, *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, **33**(2), pp.169–181.

CUSH, D., (2007). Should religious studies be part of the compulsory state school curriculum?, *British Journal of Religious Education*, **29**(3), pp.217–227.

DAVIS, W., (1998). *Shadows in the sun: Travels to landscapes of spirit and desire*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

DAVIS, W., (2009). *Wayfinders – Why ancient wisdom matters in the modern age*. Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press.

DEARDEN, R.F., (1981). Controversial issues and the curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, **13**(1), pp.37–44.

DEWEY, J., (1908). Religion and our schools. *Hibbert Journal,* **6**(4), pp.796–809.

FLANAGAN, J., (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, **51**(4), pp.327–358.

FLENSNER, K.K., (2017). *Discourses of religion and secularism in religious education classrooms*. Cham: Springer.

FLENSNER, K.K., (2019). Samma konflikter men olika inramning. *Nordidactica*, **9**(3), pp.73–100.

GHANNOUCHI, R., (2020). Deradicalization through religious education. In: S. J. HANSEN and S. LID, eds., *Routledge handbook of deradicalisation and disengagement.* London: Routledge. pp.156–162

GREENE, J., (2013). *Moral tribes.* London: Atlantic Books.

HAND, M., (2008). What should we teach as controversial? A defence of the epistemic criterion. *Educational Theory*, **58**(2), pp.69–86.

GRIMMITT, M., (1987). *Religious education and human development.* Essex: McCrimmons.

HOLMQVIST LIDH, C., (2016). Representera och bli representerad: elever med religiös positionering talar om skolans religionskunskapsundervisning. [To represent and to be represented : Students with religious positioning speak about the school´s religious education]. [Licentiate dissertation. Karlstads University, Karlstad, Sweden] http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:kau:diva-46886

INGLEHART, R. and OYSERMAN, D., (2004). Individualism, autonomy and self-expression: The human development syndrome. In: H. VINKEN, J. SOETERS and P. ESTER, eds., *Comparing cultures, dimensions of culture in a comparative perspective.* Leiden: Brill. pp.74–96.

JACKSON, P.W., BOOSTROM, R.E. and HANSEN, D.T., (1993). *The moral life of schools.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

JACKSON, R., (2004). *Rethinking religious education and plurality: issues in diversity and pedagogy.* Routledge.

JACKSON, R., (2014). *Signposts – Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews in intercultural education.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

KNOTT, K., (2010). Insider/outsider perspectives. In: J. R. HINNELLS, ed., *The Routledge companion to the study of religion.* Routledge. pp.259–273

LINDSTRÖM, N., (2020). Controversial issues and their role in RE. In: PIXEL, ed., *The Future of Education, Proceedings of the 10th International Conference.* Filodritto Editore pp.489-493.

LJUNGREN, C., UNEMAR ÖST, I. and ENGLUND, T., (2015). *Kontroversiella frågor, om kunskap och politik i samhällsundervisningen.* [Controversial issues, knowledge and politics in social science teaching]. Malmö: Gleerups.

MCDONOUGH, G.P., (2016). How do Catholic adolescents respond to church structures, teaching, regulations, and practices they cannot change? *Journal of Religious Education*, **63**, pp.37–49.

MEMON, N.A., (2009). From protest to praxis: A history of Islamic schools in North America. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada]. http://hdl.handle.net/1807/19154

MOORE, M.E. and KYSER, J., (2014). Youth finding and claiming religious voice: Coming out religiously in an interreligious multivalent world. *Religious Education,* **109**(4), pp.455–470.

MOULIN, D., (2012). Religious education in England after 9/11, *Religious Education*, **107**(2), pp.158–173.

PHILPOTT, S., CLABOUGH, J., MCCONKEY, L. and TURNER, T.N., (2011). Controversial issues: To teach or not to teach? That is the question! *The Georgia Social Studies Journal,* **1**(1), pp.32–44.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CURRICULUM AUTHORITY (QCA), (1998). *Education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools (Crick Report).* London: QCA.

SCHREINER, P., (2007). Religious education in the European context. In: E. KUYK, R. JENSEN, D. LANKSHEAR, E. LÖH MANNA, and P. SCHREINER, eds., *Religious education in Europe*. Oslo: IKO – Publishing House.

SJÖBORG, A., (2015). 'One needs to be free': making sense of young people's talk about religion in multicultural Sweden. *British Journal of Religious Education*, **35**(19), pp.36–54.

SNAE (2011). *Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare* REVISED 2018. Stockholm: Swedish National Agency of Education.

STRADLING, R., (1984). The teaching of controversial issues: an evaluation. *Educational Review*, **36**(2), pp.121–129.

SWEDISH RESEARCH COUNCIL, (2017). *Good research practice*. Stockholm: SRC.

THURFJELL, D., (2015). *Det gudlösa folket: de postkristna svenskarna och religionen*. [The godless people: the post-Christian Swede and religion] Stockholm: Molin and Sorgenfrei.

TAYLOR, L. and SONI, A., (2017). Preventing radicalisation: a systematic review of literature considering the lived experiences of the UK's Prevent strategy in educational settings, *Pastoral Care in Education*, **35**(4), pp.241–252.

WORLD VALUES SURVEY (WVS), (2016). *World values survey*. http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp

YIN, R.K., (1994). *Case study research – Design and methods* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.