Dialogic Space and Religious Education

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This review hopes to present an alternative model to confessional religious education and the kind of role religion can have in teaching and education. It is framed by the conceptualization of education as simultaneously being and becoming (van Manen 1991, 67). This dichotomous description underlines the challenging tension of balancing present realities with future anticipations, a tension which is perhaps the defining feature of education. In theoretical terms this review draws on sociocultural and dialogic educational research, particularly Rupert Wegerif's notion of "dialogic space" (Wegerif 2007, 4), and a "Global Education: World Religions" -course recently run as part of the Summer School for Human Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä. The review opens by introducing the pedagogic orientation for the course and a simple cultural model developed within the course. Following this, the guidelines for the development of "dialogic space" are introduced with possible implications for Religious Education concluding the paper.

The annual Summer School for Human Sciences is open to domestic and international students comprising 13 interdisciplinary courses for undergraduate and/or graduate students. The Global Education course explicitly aimed to extend participants' appreciation of different and divergent views. The course participants came from a number of different cultural backgrounds with three Finnish participants, two students from North America, Poland and the Netherlands, and individual students from Belgium, Spain, Cameroon, Kazakhstan, Japan and China and the British course leader. Most of the students on the course were undergraduates majoring in various subjects from psychology to business, art education to journalism. Some of the students were acquainted with one another prior to the course, but not as a collective group.

Rather than aiming to increase the participants' knowledge and understanding of religions per se, the course was designed to use religious thought, educational experience and culturally-based identities as a meeting place. Course readings were assigned, and whilst participants were intended to gain understanding via the texts, the readings provided a "sign-posted landscape" for further dialogue. The authorial views were informative, not definitive. The texts framed the topic to be entered, even providing the skeleton of the dialogues, but no predetermined outcome motivated class discussion. This is a fundamental characteristic of "dialogic space" as presented by Wegerif explained in more detail in the review. Dialogic space is an opportunity to explore one's own understanding and the understanding of others, and as threads of established knowledge gently loosen, so understanding can grow and even novel understandings can emerge.

The notion of dialogic space as a place for encounter in some ways addresses Jerome Bruner's concern that within educational culture "we seem to be more prone to acting our way into implicit thinking than we are able to think our way explicitly into acting" and that "If we are not aware of what and why and how [– –], we cultivate a mindlessness that, in the end, reduces our own humanity and fosters cultural division even when it is not intended" (Bruner 1996, 79). These statements, coupled with education as being and becoming, indicate the importance of examining educational culture and content with an eye on both the present and future ramifications.

Perhaps the propensity to "implicitly think rather than explicitly act" is in part due to the ease with which habitually established actions and even good intentions readily become self-perpetuating. That is, communities more readily continue with what has been and add layers to established norms rather than return to initial assumptions and understandings for reappraisal. It is perhaps on these grounds that Religious Education (RE) within Finnish schools has been divided into a variety of separate groups in the name of equality. Whilst on the one hand this arrangement accommodates difference, it does little to support encounters between different groups neither in the present nor in anticipation of the future. When I signed our daughter up for first grade in the local school in spring 2011, I had to select her RE grouping from the outset. Would she belong to the "mainstream" Lutheran RE, orthodox or catholic RE, Islamic RE, Baha'i RE or ethics? As a qualified RE teacher I recognise the fundamental value of RE within a national curriculum. This is a rare subject which explicitly acknowledges a broader conceptualisation of humanity, highly complementary to the overall values of the core curriculum (FNBE 2004, 12). Life is more than academic learning, it is wonder at the created world, questions about the meaning and purpose of life, the struggle of living out values, a sense of responsibility for humankind and a need to understand life in community without pretending that living in community is in anyway easy – nor anything other than worthwhile. This broader conceptualisation, however, immediately raises the question as to how such a subject should be handled in the classroom.

Educational communities belong to the present and future

Before addressing the challenges of RE, however, I would like to return to the dichotomous nature of education. As stated, educational communities are communities in their own right in the here-and-now. The different members of educational communities live together on a daily basis over an extended period of time. Identities are negotiated in this context, interactional patterns established and developed, relationships are formed and broken, respect and responsibility are fostered – or negated, as valid ways of being and relating, future pathways are forged. In the midst of this complex web of educational community the primary business of teaching and learning academic subjects for future life takes place.

In this sense educational communities are communities of the future, not just the present. School-based learning is geared towards the future participation of pupils in society, as workers, democratic citizens, experts in different fields. So whilst on the one hand educational communities exist immediately in the present, the focus of "being" is often on the future. A key belief underlying school life is that the more effectively pupils learn in the present, the more successfully they will be prepared for the future. Present activities – and the learning community – can become in effect beholden to the future, rather than valid in its own right and time. In effect an imbalance between 'being and becoming' is created. This review suggests a rather different position, the more effectively pupils learn to live

together now, the better prepared they will be to live together in the future. "Life" is not just later, "life" is now, and what happens now sets the foundation for later.

It is perhaps noteworthy that whilst the underlying values of the overall curriculum include "the endorsement of multiculturalism, [– –] responsibility, a sense of community, and respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual" (FNBE 2004, 12) and the Religion component aims to "value people who believe and think differently" (FNBE 2004, 206 and 211) with the Ethics component aiming to "broaden their general philosophical and cultural education; get to know values, belief systems and solutions to philosophical problems considered important in different cultures [– –]" (FNBE 2004, 217). It is somewhat ironic that these subjects are divided so effectively in practice. The full potential of learning to live within the educational community as a way to prepare for life together in the future is arguably not fully embraced within this system.

The basic position being argued for in this review is that learning to live with and across difference in educational communities now, is an important foundation for being able to live together in the future. Tolerance – often presented as the answer to encountering difference, too easily translates into segregated groups, reinforced by equality supporting the right to remain different. Whilst in the early days of institutionalised education, the socialisation of children into the dominant model for society continued without question, nowadays differences even within the domestic population suggests that maintaining the same model for the mainstream is untenable, and tolerated difference an uneasy solution. It is on this basis that Wegerif's notion of a "dialogic space" (Wegerif 2007) offers a useful framework for encountering and understanding difference, especially in the most sensitive areas of spiritual understanding, moral, ethical and cultural development.

The development of "dialogic space"

Wegerif defines a "dialogic space" as a space which "opens up when two or more perspectives are held together in tension" (Wegerif 2007, 4). This space encourages "expanding awareness and developing in students [people] a capacity to question and to be able to think for themselves" (Wegerif 2010a, 340). Wegerif goes further to say that dialogic space can be both widened and deepened, "increasing the degree of difference between participants" and "increasing the degree of reflection on assumptions and grounds" (Wegerif 2010a, 349). Particularly interesting about this notion is that it is not concerned with discussion participants persuading each other who is right or which argument is better. Dialogic space does not seek competition, nor does it encourage a dialectic approach to thinking, in that all participants think in the same way by the end of the session. Dialogic space does, however, seek for all members to identify with the space of the dialogue (Wegerif 2010b, 23), to enter together into an exploration of different ideas and understanding. Indeed it is the difference between ideas that creates the space for dialogue.

The notion of a "dialogic space" is rooted in Bakhtinian conceptualisations of language and interaction, voice and variety between voices. Valentin Voloshinov's illustration of two connected terminals creating a "spark" (Voloshinov 1973, 103) has been readily associated with dialogic space – a place created by a dynamic process, rather than a predefined product. The agreement of participants to come together around a certain topic or understanding, provides a framework for the joint exploration of ideas with almost infinite possible outcomes. The richness of the dialogue depends on the presence of multiple voices (polyphony in Bakhtinian terms), but the success of the dialogue depends on joint invest-

ment in the process of talk.

Valentin Voloshinov describes a word as a "two-sided act [– –] the product of the reciprocal relationship [– –]. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee" (Voloshinov 1973, 86). This definition highlights the interactive quality of dialogue and Voloshinov continues by exploring the notion of dynamic tension between the past and present meanings of signs (i.e. words) and the different accents associated with signs by different people. Whilst the Marxist philosophy behind this stance goes beyond the scope of this review, the need for meaning to remain alive, active, dynamic, in-tension for it to be meaningful is intrinsically related to the notion of dialogic space. Without conflict between understandings, the driving force for deeper understanding is lost – and in turn a vital element is stripped away from community.

Interestingly this notion of conflict as a necessary of component within dialogue does not contradict the role of dialogic space within educational community. Parker Palmer observes, "A healthy community [– –] includes conflict at its very heart, checking and correcting and enlarging the knowledge of individuals by drawing on the knowledge of the group" (Palmer 1987, 25) and further that "Communal conflict is a public encounter in which the whole group can win by growing" (Palmer 1987, 24). The removal of competition from dialogic space whilst encouraging conflict allows and encourages difference, broadening and widening not only the scope of the dialogic space but also the scope for participation within the community. Competition, the desire to beat someone else, suffocates both the potential for conflict and the prerequisite trust in the community that difference is sought.

"Dialogic space" has also grown out of sociocultural approaches to education. Wegerif cites his work with other sociocultural researchers and their initial claim that it was the introduction of "ground rules for exploratory talk" which enhanced the quality of classroom interaction, group and individual learning outcomes. These ground rules suggest that,
* all relevant information is shared;
* all members of the group are invited to contribute to the discussion;
* opinions and ideas are respected and considered;
* everyone is asked to make their reasons clear;
* challenges and alternatives are made explicit and are negotiated;
* the group seeks to reach agreement before taking a decision or acting
(Mercer, Dawes, Wegerif and Sams 2004, 362.)

These rules, rather than setting the classroom up as an arena for competition, seek to employ the different resources of different learners for the benefit of the wider learning community. The ground rules go to the heart of the cultural practice in learning. In effect, the rules reposition learners in relation to one another and the activity, thus creating a different context for interaction – indeed changing the nature of the interaction. Sociocultural research shows how change of this type requires time and conscious effort (e.g. Mercer and Littleton 2007). Research into this sociocultural approach is on-going and has been demonstrated to be successful with a wide-range of learners. The difference between the sociocultural position, however, and a more dialogic approach to education is that the established ground rules aim to support the learning of established cultural knowledge, and whilst learning to see from a different perspective may be implicit within this process, it is not an explicit aim of these ground rules. Dialogic space is not "merely" working through rationalised explanations; rather it is being committed to a shared space for exploration and

appreciating the opportunity to see from perspectives.

The notion of "learning to see from a different perspective" is perhaps at the heart of all learning, whether it is adding depth to understanding or providing a new way of looking at the world. Midway through the Global Education course a guest spoke on "Fundamentalism". Following an introductory definition of this term and the listing of positive and negative associations, the course participants were asked to identify their own fundamental beliefs, convictions they could not imagine giving up. Some mentioned equality between the sexes, some mentioned the indivisibility of their nation-state, one mentioned the right to live the kind of life he chose. As the participants began to recognise their own fundamental beliefs, it appeared to become easier to appreciate that sincere belief could surprisingly easily come across as an aggressive conviction. Recognising their own emotional overlay challenged the participants to consider how this would come across in a discussion touching their convictions, how readily the 'other' became pigeon-holed as someone viewed negatively, inadequately even. During the final review of the course, this topic was returned to and the participants were asked to compare the English term "fundamental" with the equivalent in their mother tongue. Several of the participants expressed surprise at how positive the associations were with the mother tongue equivalent, such as *periaatteellinen*, whereas the *fundamentaalinen* carried emotionally negative connotations. Participant journals included the following reflections,

> *The lecture on fundamentalism – I think this was one of the most important parts of the course for me. I remember I made myself many thoughts after it. [I especially remember the statement 'following the letter of the how, not the spirit', such an approach leads in my opinion to wrong conclusions. No ethical thinking for me means also no dialogic space].*

> *The lecture about fundamentalism made the whole group think about this subject and what it means. This illustrated the fact that one can change its mind and think about something differently than before by talking about it with others.*

Through this discussion and other topics on the course, a picture of the development of a culture and cultural encounters begin to form. It is added here to further illustrate the value of "dialogic space".
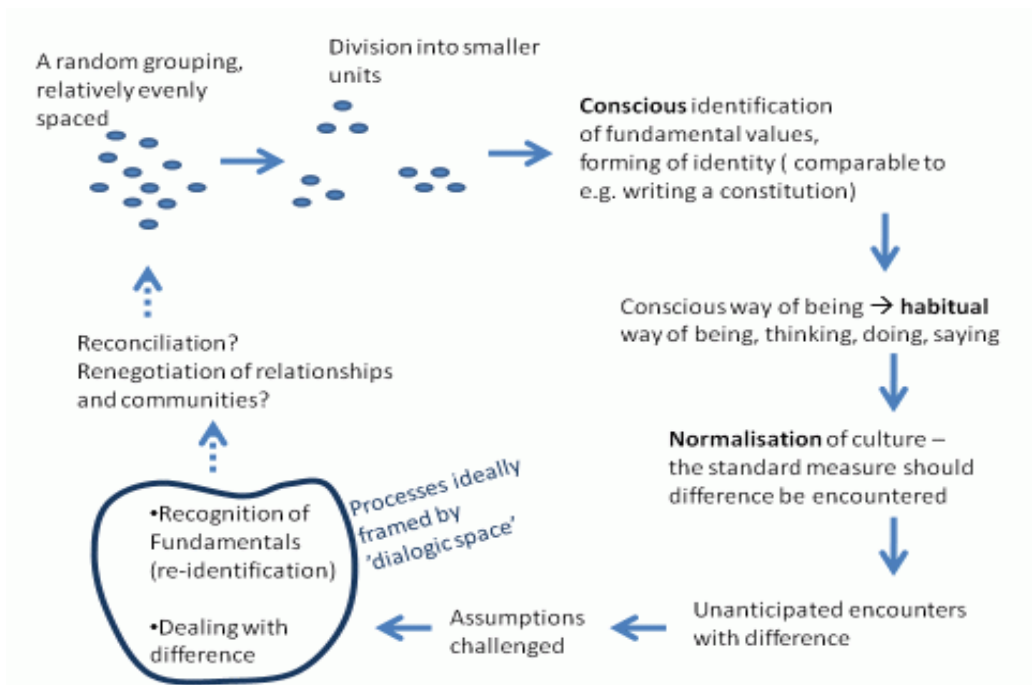
Figure 1. A simple model of cultural emergence and cultural encounters.

The basic understanding behind this model is that from an initial group of individuals over time certain members from the group draw closer together dividing the initial group into smaller units. As individuals draw together the relationship between them gradually changes from being a collection to a community – a community meaning a place where people feel a sense of identification with and belonging to one another. The reasons for drawing together are beyond the scope of this paper, but an important point is that whilst some individuals come together, they also move away from other individuals. Initially the gap between the newly formed groups also defines the difference between the groups, however, the model suggests that over time more fundamental differences between the group begin to form.

These fundamental differences form as the culture of the community develops. Within the classroom this could be when the rules framing classroom activity are agreed. This involves the identification of particular values and principles intended to govern the life of the community. This phase could be understood as the conscious formation of a cultural identity. This conscious activity over time, however, becomes a habitual. The initially consciously framed principle of, for example, the right to equal representation becomes the habitual way of being, thinking, seeing, imagining, speaking, relating (terms Bruner uses to define cultural life). The more habitual the ways of being and doing become, the more difficult it seems to be to consciously reason through what is done and why. This is what Bruner appears to be referring to in his *Culture of Education* (1996) referenced above. Indeed within a homogeneous community the need for this explicit statement of the whys and hows appears to be a relatively academic task with little practical relevance to the life of the overall community. The habitual becomes normalised, in that not only is the cultural way "normal" way but also the "standard measure" for how things should be. If for some

reason someone within the group decides to act "unconventionally" the often them-
selves at odds with the majority community. When difference comes from outside the
group, it is often more ardently resisted. What the model is hoping to suggest however, is
that encounters with culturally different groups can be difficult, not only due to the differ-
ence but also due to the fact that difference is/was unanticipated and unmanageable.

Encounters with different cultures challenges normalised assumptions which can
prompt two related responses: the re-identification of the fundamental values of a com-
munity (which may no longer be relevant), and secondly the need to deal with difference. It
is at this point that the model suggests "dialogic space" is particularly useful. The non-
competitive arena for the exploration of ideas and growth in understanding serves a number
of functions. The prerequisite to make assumptions clear helps to counter the tendency to
"think implicitly" rather than to act explicitly. An expectation that different perspectives
will be duly considered is intended to reduce the defensiveness of group members. If dif-
ferent stances are regarded as positives they add to the group resources. Thinking-in-com-
munity benefits from the understanding that the sum total is greater than the individual
parts; different perspectives resource novel understandings perhaps previously unantici-
ated. This exploration of difference not only creates the space for thinking between parti-
cipants, but also supports the witness position defined by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 256). As
a participant shares his/her own thinking, he/she becomes a witness to his/her thoughts cre-
ating the opportunity to revisit and possibly revise what is thought and why.

The process outlined here is not intended to simplify difference within communities, but
to propose that it is a goal worth striving for. Palmer's observation that "community is vital
and important, but it is also terribly difficult work for which we are not well prepared"
(Palmer 1987, 20) is perhaps relevant here. The underlying hope behind this model is that
such a process would lead to positive engagement with and across difference, a greater
sense of community without assimilation of the other. The full implications of engaging in
this process need far more research than this course and reported experiences offer, but it is
hoped that this is a promising beginning. The dotted lines included in the model further
emphasize the uncertainty of the future. Nevertheless, the model intends to imply that the
future is born out of the present.

This leads to the important question as to how dialogic space can be formed within edu-
cational communities. As with the ground rules for exploratory talk, it is necessary that par-
ticipants agree to enter into and invest in the process. On the Global Education course the
participants found that for our dialogic space to widen and deepen shared expectations for
the nature of the dialogue needed to be agreed. Having spent one day talking together in
smaller and larger groups, the participants were asked what would make the discussions
more fruitful, what guidelines could – perhaps should – be implemented. Together we pro-
duced the flowing list:

1. The discussion may flow forwards and backwards
2. Consciously swap between listener and speaker roles
3. Not all contributions have to go through the course leader
4. Anticipate value in all contributions
5. Be prepared to share ideas and add reasons to opinions or positions
6. Disagree with ideas rather than individuals
7. Freedom to change one's mind

The mutual agreement of these guidelines was hoped to create a sense of ownership within
the community and support the sense of a public forum – everyone knew what the expecta-
tions were. By negotiating these guidelines, it gave me as the course leader some sense of

how the participants had experienced our discussions so far. These guidelines deserve further comment as they help illustrate the nature of "dialogic space".

Guideline 1: The discussion may flow forwards and backwards

The first guideline was directly born out of the participants' experience from the previous day's discussions. Several participants said they felt that the moment to contribute passed before they had had time to properly formulate their contributions. Possibly the normal push-forward of institutional education was preventing the participants from entering into the dialogues as deeply as they wished and this guideline hoped to counter this tendency. As one student wrote in her final report, "I spent a lot of energy trying to understand others. I also made a lot of efforts in explaining my ideas as clear as possible. Therefore, there was not enough time for me to digest everything during the class." This sentiment was repeated by several students.

Perhaps also a sense of incompleteness contrasts with "normal" educational conversations that often pursue a predetermined end, the "right answer" sought in classroom contexts. No participant complained, however, that the inconclusiveness of the dialogues invalidated the dialogues. This is maybe an important point reiterating Wegerif's point that it is the process of the discussion that is valid in and of itself (Wegerif 2010a, 344).

Guideline 2: Consciously swap between listener and speaker roles

The second guideline intentionally sought to create space for contributions, supporting active participation within different roles, as well as responsibility inside the group for the development of the dialogue. This guideline repositioned authority within and between the group members, rather than residing in an external figure and also encouraged participants to adopt different roles rather than being identified with one particular role. This guideline (as with the others) does indicate the maturity of the group and their readiness to enter into a dialogic space with one another. The opening day of the course aimed to create positive interactions between participants and space for each participant to share his/her experience and to relate that to a broader conceptualisation – or reconceptualisation – of education.

Guideline 3: Contributions do not have to go through the course leader

The third guideline was an attempt to create space between all participants, rather than through the course leader. The hope behind this was that dialogue would more naturally grow – and indeed indicates a positive expectation that dialogue would grow without the continual prompting of the course leader. This was not an attempt on the part of the course leader to surrender responsibility, but to reposition myself in relation to the participants validating their voices. This guideline creates a worthwhile dilemma – where does a teacher stand in relation to the other participants, alongside them or apart? In a sense the course leader simultaneously participates and remains apart. "Dialogic space" cannot grow between participants if the course leader does not abide by the guidelines, however, the leader is not the same kind of participant. If the guidelines were being broken or the discussion became unhealthy, the ultimate responsibility always lies with the teacher. One of the journal entries described the alternating role of the course leader:

> *Several time a day there was a discussion time, when not only a teacher talked to students, but even sometimes the interaction between students was in the centre of attention* [– –] *During the group work or discussion the teacher took a role of advisor if needed, but mostly acted as an attentive listener.*

> *By changing this role, the floor was given to the "followers" to practice their skills.*

Guideline 4: Anticipate value in all contributions

This guideline is indicative of a key value built into the classroom culture. In the discussion around this guideline one student suggested a "talking stick". With a "talking stick" only the one holding the stick is permitted to talk. When the stick is laid down, another participant can take up the stick. The idea is to allow each participant to have his/her say without being interrupted. This positive anticipation was hoped to create space for ideas to grow and to feed the thoughts of other group members. One participant's interpretation of this was framed as equality,

> *Another thing is the assumption that other people may have different views and that these views are equal with mine. This is a very important point, because a successful discussion requires equality! When discussing, people have to listen carefully to the opinions and views of others. The more they listen to, the bigger the space becomes. The more their will is to understand others the deeper the space becomes.*

Guideline 5: Be prepared to share ideas and to add reasons to opinions or positions

Adding reasons to opinions and positions was to provide depth to and greater understanding within the dialogues, rather than a commitment to formalised presentations of knowledge. When participants are encouraged to explain the background thinking to their position, they have the opportunity to hear how they have constructed their understanding and to revisit why a certain opinion is held. This revisitation within a group context can also prompt other participants to explore and question their own opinions. Doing so with the group greatly increases the thinking resources and possibilities of the group members. Mutual agreement to share ideas and thoughts further adds to the resources of the group and the collective sense of responsibility located within and between discussion participants. This is not to imply, however, that these are easy activities readily entered into – as with most worthwhile endeavours, patience and practice are vital components.

Guideline 6: Disagree with ideas rather than individuals

Disagreeing with ideas rather than individuals is also an ideal very difficult to implement, but it is perhaps a reiteration of the commitment to explore ideas and understanding within a non-competitive space. This guideline also challenges participants to reconsider how they relate to one another. This guideline does of course raise other dilemmas, and it does not intend to suggest the opinions should be depersonalised. However, it does perhaps suggest that an individual is more than a particular opinion or position and that to reject the person as well as an opposing opinion is perhaps the mindlessness Bruner refers to above. Could it be that this mindlessness is sometimes enacted towards oneself as well as towards others? One student's reflections noted:

> *The main thing that amazed me was that I became more aware about my own communicating skills, i.e., within the dialogic space, I was not just an active receiver, but afterwards, I also actively re-evaluated my own personal communicating skills. Somehow I'm just learning that maybe I have something to tell, some thoughts and experiences, which may have some value to be shared.*

Guideline 7: Freedom to change one's mind

All of the above guidelines hopefully benefit from the final guideline, that each participant has the freedom to change one's mind. This guideline arguably goes to the heart of education, at the heart of be-coming (van Manen 1991, 34). Perhaps omitting this basic principle is why learning can so easily become an object of shame rather than freedom to grow in understanding.

This guideline also reflects the close connection between sociocultural and dialogic theories of learning. From a sociocultural perspective if learning first happens on the social plane before becoming part of an individual's psychological make-up it is vital that there is freedom for one to change one's mind for learning to take place. Similarly from a dialogic perspective without freedom for one to change one's mind or for one's position to grow the whole concept of a dialogic space is constrained. A participant reflection beautifully captures this sentiment,

> *During the group discussions we not only shared our knowledge and thoughts but also had to respond and reflect each other's statements. I felt it was very demanding to have a class based on discussions. I also felt that I had to be present mentally and be responsible to what I say. Many discussions went further than we are supposed to discuss and the time was never enough. And many discussions developed unexpectedly and this 'unexpected' turns left great impressions afterward. Dialogic space offered new perspectives by hearing other people's opinions and by questioning my own opinions at the same time.*

Dialogic Space and Religious Education

Now that these guidelines have been presented in some detail, however, what are the implications for a dialogic space with reference to the development of Religious Education in Finland? If the notion of learning to build community with and across difference is accepted, then hopefully the experiences outlined above indicate the relevance of dialogic space to educational communities particularly within the RE classroom. The current national curriculum does not reflect this position neither in arrangement (different courses for different groups) nor in the written curriculum. The mainstream Lutheran or Orthodox aims and contents adopt a more dialectic approach sharing and maintaining traditional cultural positions. Indeed there is value in this and adopting a more dialogic approach does not mean the exclusion of traditional content. However the curriculum is based on a number of significant assumptions. One assumption is the way in which the learner is positioned as a participant in a religious community, rather than an educational community. The curriculum emphasizes the aim to "familiarize the pupils with his or her own religion" (FNBE 2004, 202) and it is from this "inside-out" approach the curriculum work towards valuing "people who believe and think differently" (FNBE 2004, 206). Christianity has clearly played a fundamental role in the formation and maintenance of Finnish society and culture, but the curricular stance could be seen to suggest an "us and them" boundary line which might perhaps sow seeds for division rather than community.

The ethics curriculum, on the other hand, is based on different assumptions foregrounding moral responsibility and active participation in a democratic society, positioning participants as "players who renew and create their cultures, who experience and produce meaning in mutual interaction" (FNBE 2004, 214). The fervent assertion of building firm moral and ethical foundations is intriguing in its minimisation of religious or spiritual dimensions

of humanity in the past, present and future. Equally disconcerting in the midst of a curricula subjects explicitly seeking to develop pupils as "independent, tolerant, responsible, and judicious members of their society" (FNBE 2004, 214) or able to "know how to respect people who believe and think in different ways" (FNBE 2004, 205) is the apparent segregation of learners from an early age.

What dialogic space offers these contradictory positions within the curriculum is a place to encounter and explore different perspectives. Ethics cannot explore the depth of the subject whilst denying the presence of religion or belief as a fundamental dimension in much of life and society. Religious education cannot encounter and explore difference if it is premised on the idea that those belonging to a specific group are all the same and believe the same ideas. Furthermore, this reinforces the distance between groups, rather than providing a forum for engagement and positive encounter. To reiterate here, "positive encounter" is not equated with giving up or imposing personal values religious or non-religious. A positive encounter is intended to imply that people with different backgrounds, interpretations and understandings can meet across the boundaries of their differences. Anticipating value in this encounter involves both having something to share, and something to learn. With RE learning could be understood as a rich understanding of difference and variety within humankind, as well as the freedom to maintain the beliefs of one's home community. Any decisions as to which life-stance should be adopted personally should arguably remain outside the domains of the classroom for ethical reasons. This would hopefully also increase the freedom in the classroom to explore beliefs and values, similarities and differences in a non-confrontational, non-competitive manner. Whether the school upholds religious festivals of the traditional culture is again another question, and an increasingly important one.

To return again to the example of the course referred to in this paper. Most of the dialogic activities were based around texts participants read outside and sometimes inside the course. The texts were chosen as valid contributors and initiators for discussion, but the dialogues did not conclude with what the text said. One activity involved reading transcripts of three conversations between a sceptic and adherents of different faiths entitled "In search of God" (initially published on a BBC Religion and Ethics broadcast). The participants individually read one transcript and then with other students who had read the same text, they checked how they had understood the conversation. The participants then regrouped with representatives from each conversation. At this point different positions were explicitly represented in the discussions, but the aim was not to decide who presented the most convincing argument. The task framing the discussion was to share how different themes were handled within the different conversations, for example, what does it mean to believe? What does "afterlife" mean for the different participants? How do the adherents reconcile their belief with the challenges of modern life? Thematically exploring the different texts was intended to create "dialogic space" between the positions. As the participants shared the different ways in which the themes were handled, a clearer context for exploring difference was being created. This framework then provided a context for the participants to introduce and explore their own responses to these ideas.

A second example was a discussion around an article "Cosmologies and Lifestyles" (Bayliss and Dillon 2007). This was a challenging text in many ways for the participants. The text was divided between "Setting the scene" for a cultural-ecological framework for education and the framework itself. The initial reading of the texts was hoped to familiarise the participants with the basic gist of the article, however, to fully understand the article a careful reading of both parts of the text was required. The resources of the group were also

enlisted to help with this process. Participants working with the same text read the enlarged text in groups, highlighting and discussing points of interest and their own understanding. This was an intense period of work within the course. The original aim was to then re-divide the participants as before, for them to share their different halves and to construct together a broader picture of the framework presented in the article. The intensity of the course required a different approach, however, and the two halves were constructed in a whole class discussion around the blackboard. During this session the course leader acted as both scribe and guide, mapping participant contributions on the board and sharing the course leader's understanding of the text. One participant effectively captured the challenge of the text:

> *After reading my half I did now understand it, I was not able to give any summary. But during the discussion we covered many details and the picture became clear for me. Also the scheme of the article served as a summary or conclusion of the day's discussion.*

Had this course continued, we would have selected another text to work with in a similar way and over time the course leader role would hopefully become increasingly positioned "alongside" the other participants as their expertise increased.

These are only two examples, but they hopefully indicate how "dialogic space" can be incorporated within the classroom context. On the basis of this course and the literature on "dialogic space" it could be said that to create a culture favourable to "dialogic space" requires time, positive expectation and practice. Topics need to be worth discussing in the eyes of the participants and engagement with difference needs to enrich understanding, both in terms of revisiting existing understanding, and adding new perspectives. Introducing "dialogic space" within the classroom offers a context for dialectic learning with regard to curricular content, but the learning experience does not stop there. Dialogic space offers course participants (students and teachers) the opportunity to experience new understandings of familiar content and novel understanding of self in relation to others. If education is two simultaneous communities, one learning together now and the other preparing for life in the future, ensuring that pupils learn to live together now to enable them to live together in the future seems to be of the utmost importance. The notion of "dialogic space" within education, particularly a rich subject such as RE, offers a means of encountering and engaging with difference that is surely worthy of further exploration.

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Uskonnollinen kognitio ja uskonnollinen kasvatus

Tapio Puolimatka

Kognitiivisen uskontotieteen tutkimustulokset ovat muuttaneet käsityksiä lapsen uskonnollisuudesta ja uskonnollisesta kasvatuksesta erityisesti verrattuna niin sanottuun indoktrinaatiohypoteesiin. Tutkimustulokset saavat erilaisen tulkinnan riippuen tulkitsijan maailmankatsomuksellisesta viitekehyksestä. Kognitiivisen uskontotieteen tulokset saavat erilaisen merkityksen suhteessa uskonnolliseen kasvatukseen riippuen siitä, tulkitaanko tutkimustuloksia pelkistävässä naturalistisessa vai ei-pelkistävässä teistisessä viitekehyksessä.

Lapsen uskonnollista kehitystä ja uskonnollisia näkemyksiä koskevat käsitykset ovat kokeneet voimakkaan murroksen viimeisten parinkymmenen vuoden aikana erityisesti kognitiivisen uskontotieteen nousun vaikutuksesta. Kognitiivinen uskontotiede soveltaa kognitiotieteen teorioita selittääkseen uskonnollisen ajattelun ja käytännön yleisyyttä ja uskonnollisten ilmiöiden ominaispiirteitä. Kognitiivisen uskontotieteen keskeisenä päämääränä on löytää tieteellisiä selityksiä ylikulttuurisesti toistuville uskonnollisille ilmiöille. Kognitiivisen uskontotieteen mukaan uskonto on ihmiselle luontaista toimintaa, joka nousee ihmismielen rakenteesta.

Kognitiivisen uskontotieteen kehitys on ollut nopeaa viimeisten kahdenkymmenen vuoden ajan, ja se on lyhyessä ajassa saanut merkittävän aseman. Kognitiivinen uskontotiede