
RE DIDACTICS IN SWEDEN – DEFINED BY THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM? DISCUSSING DIDACTICS OF RE IN A SWEDISH CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

What is Religious Education (RE) didactics? This is a question frequently asked in many countries.¹ In Sweden, RE didactics is perceived to be a relatively new research discipline, and many practicing teachers are unfamiliar with the concept. In this study we show that the field in actual fact has a longer tradition – it is as old, if not older, as the Swedish school system itself. The teaching of religion was an emerging field of academic inquiry in the 1970s, but this historical background has largely been neglected or forgotten. We suggest that there currently is a lack of debate, both on what should constitute the core of the subject, and on what its overarching goals ought to be. This disregard of the ‘big picture’, if you will, could be one reason why active teachers seem to lack a professional vocabulary in RE didactics. They are therefore unable to critically reflect on their teaching. Since they are not equipped to use the theoretical tools of RE didactics, teachers tend to base their planning solely on the national curriculum.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, we examine how the subject area, role, and meaning of RE didactics are defined in the academic literature used in teacher education in Sweden. Secondly we investigate how Swedish RE teachers reason about didactical theory as the foundation of their teaching practice.

In order to understand the empirical material, we begin with a short

¹ Cf. Oddrun M. H. **Bråten**, “Hva er religionspedagogikk? Internasjonale perspektiver på den norske konteksten” – *Prismet*, 65/3 (2014) and Cok **Bakker** and Hans-Günther **Heimbrock**, “Introduction” – *Researching RE teachers*. Eds. Cok Bakker, Hans-Günther Heimbrock (Münster: Waxmann, 2007), 7-16.

historical introduction to RE in schools and outline the development of the field of RE didactics in the Swedish academic context. This is followed by the results from each category of empirical material, and a discussion.

The study shows a fragmented field. It is difficult to say exactly what RE didactics is in the Swedish school context. In general, few insights from the international field (from Germany or England, for instance) are implemented in the academic literature written for the Swedish teacher education, and not much attention is paid to neighbouring countries like Norway and Finland. This has, as will be seen below, repercussions for teachers' reflection on their practice.

RELIGION AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT IN SWEDEN

A short historical introduction

Religion as a school subject has a long tradition in Sweden. The Swedish Church Law from 1686 stated that parents had a duty to teach reading skills (through the study of the Bible) to their household – that is, to children and workers. Priests had to verify that this teaching had taken place.² In the School Law [*folkskolestadga*] from 1842, this responsibility was partially taken over by the state. In 1882 it became mandatory for all children to attend school [*skolplikt*].³ At this time Swedish schools in effect schooled pupils in Lutheranism, a form of Christianity that requires basic literacy of believers. Gradually, religion came to be perceived as a private matter, and schools took on more additional responsibilities – there was more to be learned than the catechesis or the Bible. Luther's catechism was no longer formally included in the 1919 curriculum, and the school system's ties to the Swedish Church were formally cut. Pupils now received a non-confessional Christian education. In 1962 this was changed into general teaching about religion. In the 1969 curriculum, the concept of 'life issues' [*livsfrågebegreppet*] was introduced, and in the 1980 curriculum this approach received even more emphasis. More prominence was

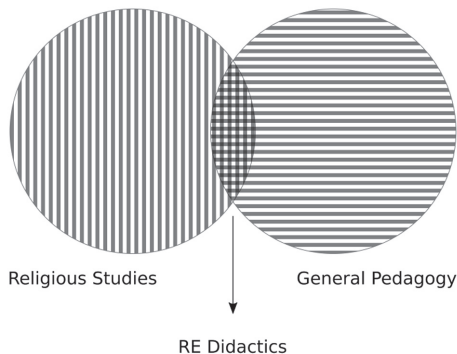
² Sven G. Hartman, "Hur religionsämnet formades" – *Livstolkning och värdegrund: Att undervisa om religion, livstolkning och etik*. Eds. Edward Almén, Ragnar Furenhed, Sven G. Hartman and Björn Skogar (Linköping: Skapande Vetande, 2000), 212-251.

³ *Ibid.*, 214.

given to knowledge of and reflection on different religions and worldviews in the 1994 curriculum.⁴ In the curriculum from 2011, there is a significant focus on different religions and worldviews: although more attention is paid to the relationship between religion/religiosity and society, there is less emphasis on developing the worldviews of individual students, when compared with the curricula from 1969 and 1980.⁵

RE didactics in Sweden

In Swedish the term *didaktik* [didactics, sometimes translated as ‘pedagogy’] can, in a broad sense, cover everything that has to do with education. Equivalent terms in English are *pedagogy* or *education*. We here use *didactics* to discuss RE in the context of the non-confessional Swedish school system. Although RE didactics is regarded as a relatively



young field of research in Sweden, it has recently come to thrive.⁶ A distinguishing trait of subject-specific didactics in general is that it is interdisciplinary.⁷ The disciplines involved could be illustrated as the intersection of two circles: the field of subject knowledge (in this case religious studies) and the field of general pedagogy (see Figure 1).⁸ The didactics of RE

Figure 1. RE Didactics, an intersection of two fields

⁴ *Ibid.*, 216-217.

⁵ Sven-Åke **Selander**, “Från livsfrågor, etik och reflektion till samhälle, kunskap och analys” – *Religion och livsförståelse*, 2 (2011).

⁶ Christina **Osbeck**, *Kränkningens livsförståelse: En religionsdidaktisk studie av livsförståelselärande i skolan* (Karlstad: Karlstad University Press, 2006).

⁷ Sigmund **Ongstad**, *Fagdidaktikk som forskningsfelt* (Norges forskningsråd, 2004), 80.

⁸ Cf. Svein **Sjøberg**, “Innledning: Skole, kunnskap og fag” – *Fagdebatikk. Fagdidaktisk innføring i sentrale skolefag*. Ed. Svein Sjøberg (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2001); Sigmund **Ongstad**, “Fag i endring. Om didaktisering av kunnskap” – *Fag og fagdidaktikk i lærerutdanning. Kunnskapigrensland*. Ed. Sigmund Ongstad (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2006), and Bengt **Schüllerqvist**, “Åmnesdidaktisk lærarforskning – ett angeläget

could thus be described as bridging the academic fields of religious studies and general education. When trying to survey the discipline of RE didactics in the Swedish context, however, the picture is all but clear.

A further complicating factor is that several terms are used to denote the field of RE didactics in Sweden. The primary ones are *religionsdidaktik* [didactics of RE] and *religionspedagogik* [pedagogy

of RE], but *tillämpad didaktik* [applied didactics] is also used. Sometimes *religionspedagogik* is seen as a broader definition, covering teaching of religion in the broadest sense and in different contexts (including schools, churches, adult education, etc.). *Religionsdidaktik*, on the contrary, is used in a more restricted sense to only denote the teaching of religion in schools.⁹ In this article the term *RE didactics* is used in an open sense¹⁰ and as a synonym for both *religionsdidaktik* and *religionspedagogik*, as we see no need to separate these terms.

In this context we distinguish three different types of practice (see Figure 2), each with its own, characteristic language.¹¹ The first practice is the academic study of the school subject RE. It uses an *academic research language*, which consists of terms and concepts that facilitate thinking

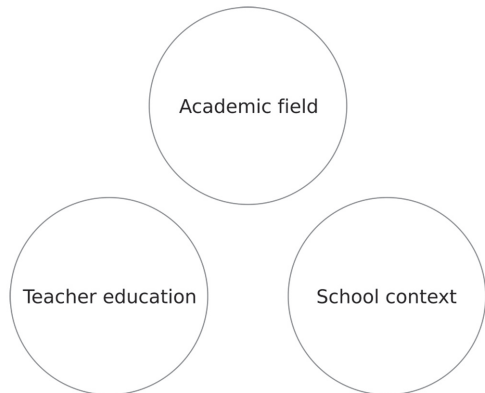


Figure 2. Three different fields of RE practice

forskningsfält” – *Ämnesdidaktiska insikter och strategier: berättelser från gymnasielärare i samhällskunskap, geografi, historia och religionskunskap*. Eds. Bengt Schüllerqvist and Christina Osbeck (Karlstad: Karlstad University Press, 2009), 9-32.

⁹ Christina **Kalloch**, Stefan **Leimgruber** and Ulrich **Schwab** (Eds.), *Lehrbuch der Religionsdidaktik: Für Studium und Praxis in ökumenischer Perspektive* (Herder: Freiburg, 2010), 21-22. Cf. **Lilja**, 1970, in Björn **Falkevall**, *Livsfrågor och religionskunskap: En belysning av ett centralt begrepp i svensk religionsdidaktik* (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 2010), 35-37.

¹⁰ Cf. Ongstad, *Fagdidaktikk som forskningsfält*, 85.

¹¹ Cf. Geir **Afdal**, “Religious education as a research discipline: An activity theoretical perspective” – *British Journal of Religious Education*, 30/1 (2008), 59-67.

about and around the subject of religion on an academic level. A second language is *teacher language* as used in schools, i.e. how school teachers talk about and understand the subject they teach. In between these two practices, academia and schools, comes the mediating practice of teacher education. Its language might perhaps be called *teacher education language*.¹² Our discussion in this article makes reference to these three practices. RE didactics combines all the three fields discussed above. One of the ways in which its results are disseminated is through teacher education. Prospective teachers are thus given a RE didactics language in which they can discuss their practice professionally. But, as shown by the interviews below, when school teachers reflect and talk about their subject, few make use of theoretical models. This is perhaps not all that surprising, given that the second field of practice, teacher education, seems to offer limited perspectives on what constitutes the core of RE.

The development of the ‘third practice’ (Swedish schools and school teachers) is briefly outlined above. The academic field, on the other hand, is much younger. It might be said that it came into being in 1973, when the subject *religionspedagogik* [pedagogy of RE] was first introduced at tertiary institutions. Although the subject never got a firm foothold in Sweden, this was when its *academic research language* started to develop. However, the subject was defined differently by different scholars.¹³ Rune Larsson, one of its main proponents, defined *religionspedagogik* as follows:

The pedagogy of RE is a scientific discipline which deals with problems connected to the attaining of knowledge, values, and patterns of behaviour that are religious or philosophical in nature.¹⁴

In 2011 Malin Löfstedt defines *religionsdidaktik* [didactics of RE] as follows:

¹² Cf. Christina **Osbeck**, “Religionslärare” – *Ämnesdidaktiska insikter och strategier: berättelser från gymnasielärare i samhällskunskap, geografi, historia och religionskunskap* (Karlstad: Karlstad University Press, 2009), 157-204. A fourth language, which might be mentioned here, but will not be dealt with further, is pupil language, that is, how pupils talk about and understand the religious education. Cf. Anders **Karlsson**, *Vilket religionskunskapsämne? Ämneskonstruktioner i religionskunskap på gymnasiet med samtalsförhandlingar i centrum* (Karlstad: Karlstad University Studies, 2015).

¹³ Osbeck, *Kränkningens livsförståelse*, 90-92.

¹⁴ Rune **Larsson**, *Introduktion till Religionspedagogiken* (Lund: Teologiska Institutionen, 1992), 17. Our translation.

[T]hat branch of the science of religion that, from different perspectives, deals with the teaching of religion [*religionsundervisning*].¹⁵

Twenty years has passed between these two statements, but what has happened during this period? During the 1970s and 1980s there was a debate about religion as a school subject, as well as about the manner in which the subject ought to be taught. Different attempts of definition were made; these might be called embryos of different RE didactics. From the early 2000s until the present, however, the field has remained fragmented. Although narrower studies on certain components of RE didactics have been conducted, the bigger picture seems, in general, to be out of focus. Osbeck claims¹⁶ that the majority of academic texts on RE (1960–2006, and 2006–2011) deal with the ‘before’ phase of education (i.e. it deals with teaching material and what happens *before* teaching in the classroom commences) – and one important theme in those texts is the task of RE as such. Can this focus be seen in the material used in teacher education or, indeed, in how teachers talk about their profession? Has the academic field had an impact on the field of teacher education in this regard?

REFLECTIONS ON RE DIDACTICS

The first category of empirical material in this study comprises academic texts used in the education of RE teachers.¹⁷ As concepts from the academic field tend to find their way to the school context mainly (but not only) through teacher education, examining this material enables us to comment on the current debate among scholars of RE didactics, and more

¹⁵ Malin Löfstedt (Ed.), *Religionsdidaktik: mangfald, livsfrågor och etik i skolan* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2011), 12. Our translation.

¹⁶ See Osbeck, *Kränkningens livsförståelse*; Christina Osbeck and Sidsel Lied, “RE research in Hamar and Karlstad in a subject didactical and international context” – *Religionsdidaktisk arbeid pågår! Religionsdidaktikk i Hamar och Karlstad*. Eds. Sidsel Lied and Christina Osbeck (Vallset: Oplandske Bokforlag, 2012), 1-29 for RE research in Hamar and Karlstad in a subject didactical and international context.

¹⁷ This includes textbooks in *religionsdidaktik* and *religionspedagogik*; textbooks dealing with the nature of RE as a school subject; as well as textbooks on the teaching of RE in primary and secondary schools. For an overview of material from the academic field of RE as such (1960 to 2011), see Osbeck, *Kränkningens livsförståelse* and Osbeck and Lied, “RE research in Hamar and Karlstad in a subject didactical and international context”. Here, our focus is the field of teacher education.

particularly on the impact research has had. Introductory titles used in teacher education programmes cannot possibly cover everything discussed in the research discipline: the content of these texts is carefully selected, and it is necessary to prioritise material. In a manner of speaking, the essence of the scholarly debate is thus summarised for prospective teachers, as they are taught the professional language of their vocation. We investigate here which concepts, theories, and models are included in such textbooks.

The second category of empirical material comes from the school context, and comprises interviews with three teachers, who all are experienced RE teachers at upper secondary school level [*gymnasieskola*] in Sweden. One of the teachers has studied second cycle RE didactics, while two of them are educators in the practice-based part of the teacher training programme.

RE didactics in teacher education

Teacher education language, the bridge between the academic field of research and the school context, could be exemplified by three recently published titles aimed at prospective teachers and currently used at different levels of teacher education programmes in Sweden. The three books are entitled: *Religionsdidaktik: mångfald, livsfrågor och etik i skolan* [*RE Didactics: Diversity, Life Issues and Ethics in Schools*], edited by Malin Löfstedt (2011); *Att undervisa i religionskunskap – En ämnesdidaktisk introduktion* [*Teaching RE – A Subject-Didactics Introduction*], edited by Björn Falkevall (2013); and *Religionsundervisning* [*Teaching Religion*], by Christer Hedin (2014).¹⁸ The textbooks include chapters dealing with, for instance, science and religion;¹⁹ fundamentalism within religion;²⁰ what one might teach in class regarding rituals;²¹ or how approach human rights

¹⁸ There is a fourth title, Anders **Hedman**, *Undervisa i Kristen tro* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2015). It is not written for teacher education, but for priests and parish workers in a Christian setting, which is why it is not a part of the empirical material of this article.

¹⁹ Martin **Stenmark**, “Naturvetenskap och religion” – *Religionsdidaktik: mångfald, livsfrågor och etik i skolan*. Ed Malin Löfstedt (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2011), 79-96.

²⁰ Olof **Franck**, “Fundamentalismen som utmanar” – *Religionsdidaktik: mångfald, livsfrågor och etik i skolan*. Ed. Malin Löfstedt (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2011), 65-78.

²¹ Krister **Hedin**, *Religionsundervisning* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2014).

in the classroom.²² These are of course important aspects which should be considered when discussing RE in Sweden. But why are these phenomena in particular mentioned? What is the purpose of RE in the Swedish school system? How should one think about the subject as such? If the overarching goal of RE is mentioned at all in these textbooks, it is said to concern life issues, as motivated by the national curriculum.²³ Or rather: life issues, as *would have been motivated* by earlier curricula.²⁴ Alternative understandings are generally not discussed.

This means that even if one could identify a theoretical framework for RE didactics from these textbooks, it would be rather one-dimensional. Typically, a short excerpt from the national curriculum prefaces a textbook chapter, or serves as an introduction, and then the author starts to discuss appropriate content.²⁵ Often, however, the manner in which the content under discussion could be taught is not discussed. Possibly those aspects, and the development of an individual teaching approach, are seen as related to the teacher's professional identity. A historical overview of the field of RE may be presented, but no guidelines are given as to how the field itself may be understood. There is no sense of the 'bigger picture'; possible dimensions to consider and approaches to adopt are not mapped out. The various books and chapters do offer a diversified picture, but more in the sense of presenting scattered approaches, than in the sense of presenting a systematic overview of alternatives. Johnson Harrie describes similar results in her overview of the field.²⁶ We wonder whether included sections are, perhaps, the products of individual authors' special interests, rather than presentations of essential dimensions of the field of RE didactics.

The above could be said to characterise the latest wave of developments in the Swedish academic field of RE didactics. During the previous

²² Reinhold **Fahlbeck**, "Att undervisa i religionskunskap och mänskliga rättigheter – den rättsliga situationen" – *Att undervisa i religionskunskap – En ämnesdidaktisk introduktion*. Ed. Björn Falkevall (Stockholm: Liber, 2013), 55-77.

²³ See Falkevall, *Att undervisa i religionskunskap – En ämnesdidaktisk introduktion*; Hedin, *Religionsundervisning*.

²⁴ See Selander, "Från livsfrågor, etik och reflektion till samhälle, kunskap och analys".

²⁵ Malin Löfstedt, *Religionsdidaktik: mangfald, livsfrågor och etik i skolan*.

²⁶ Anna **Johnson Harrie**, *De samhällsvetenskapliga ämnenas didaktik. Rapport från en inventering* (Linköping: Linköpings universitet, 2011), 14-15.

wave (of the 1970s and 1980s), there was a lot of debate about the field. The latest wave started in the 2000s. As can be seen in the historical sketch above, there has been a gradual development of both RE and RE didactics in Sweden, but there is reason to focus on these latest two waves of development. We here use the term *wave* to signify a movement, and more particularly, a movement carrying and depositing content. Just as a wave deposits sand to the beach, so these two waves have deposited content in the debate on RE didactics. Although both waves belong to the same body of water, with one following the other, they can be distinguished from each other – at least artificially – with regards to content matter and direction. Additionally, when looking at the second wave, it seems that much of the content deposited by the first wave is ignored.

Considering the long history of the curricular subject, it is striking how seldom the second wave refers to the tradition which might be said to have the longest history of teaching religion: catechesis.²⁷ The first wave still had some ties to this tradition.²⁸ On the one hand, this seems striking because it might be said that up until 1962 the role of the teacher in the subject of religion was in effect that of a catechist. But on the other hand, this negligence is perhaps characteristic of the second wave. The second wave builds to a lesser degree on the content matter deposited by previous waves.²⁹ The curricular changes of the 1960s required a different approach to RE, and thus contributed to setting the first wave in motion. A debate on the overall purpose of the school subject became necessary. In the 1970s, some of the questions that had to be answered included: what does it mean to move from a confessional, Christian school subject to a nonconfessional subject? Which content should a nonconfessional, ‘objective’, school subject have? We argue that today there is perhaps reason to take up these questions again, to a greater extent than is currently the case. Is the main

²⁷ For the Catechetical tradition in Sweden, see for example Fredrik **Dahlbom**, *Den svenska folkskolans kristendomsundervisning 1842–1919* (Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsens bokförlag, 1927) and Ann-Christine **Vallberg-Roth**, *De yngre barnens läroplanshistoria* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2002).

²⁸ Rune Larsson, *Introduktion till Religionspedagogiken*, 5-20 and Birgit **Lendahls**, *Religion i skolan – men hur?* (Uppsala: EFS-förlaget, 1986).

²⁹ Although, see Christina Osbeck, *Kränkningens livsförståelse: En religionsdidaktisk studie av livsförståelselärande i skolan* and Björn **Falkevall**, *Livsfrågor och religionskunskap: en belysning av ett centralt begrepp i svensk religionsdidaktik* (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 2010).

task of RE an education in life issues?³⁰ Or is the task of a more general, edifying character, focusing on hermeneutics and the cultural heritage?³¹ Or is the goal of the current national curriculum in Sweden rather, as Selander claims, to provide education about religious beliefs and practices in the world?³²

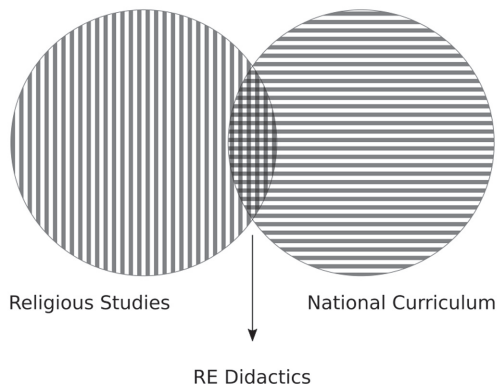


Figure 3. The Influence of the National Curriculum on RE Pedagogy

Returning to the intersection of the two fields (Figure 1), one might say that the field of RE didactics in many ways is *reduced* to the intersection of the national curriculum with the discipline of religious studies (Figure 3). In practice, RE didactics is a result of the amalgamation of content knowledge of religious studies and the national curriculum. Or, using the terms of practices or languages: what informs the practice of RE teacher education is primarily not the academic field, but the school context.

RE didactics: voices from the school context

Our next focus is on *teacher language*: what is RE didactics according to teachers? The short answer might be, to be blunt, not much. In interviews, teachers were asked to give their view on what the RE didactics might be. Follow up questions were asked, to ascertain whether they use some framework or model when planning, even though they do not use the term *RE didactics* to describe this. And the picture was quite clear: apart from the curriculum, there did not appear to be any other framework or model.

³⁰ Sven G. Hartman, *Barns tankar om livet* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1986).

³¹ Björn Skogar, "I stormens öga – några inledande teoretiska vägval i religionsdidaktiken" – *Livstolkning och värdegrund: Att undervisa om religion, livstolkning och etik*. Eds. Edward Almén, Ragnar Furenhed, Sven G. Hartman and Björn Skogar (Linköping: Skapande Vetande, 2000), 102-116.

³² Selander, "Från livsfrågor, etik och reflektion till samhälle, kunskap och analys".

In these interviews there was no sign of a professional language for talking about the teaching of RE.

Maja³³ explains what RE didactics is as follows:

Maja: Well it's [faked, low-pitched voice] the questions about...what and... with whom and [how] and when and why and the like, right...

Interviewer: Mm.

Maja: ...which are to be answered? And then...with regards to the religions I'm thinking that... ..well you could set it up in many different ways... um ... in order to reach... ..[tsk] these goals that there are... .. for... the subject of religion... [—]

Interviewer: And these goals...

Maja: Well those in the curriculum is what I had in mind.

The understanding of another experienced teacher, Tove, can be seen in this example:

Interviewer: A question regarding your reasoning about teaching. Have you...got any type of...eh...any framework for it? Like this about similarities [between religions, which was mentioned earlier]...is that...is that something you might talk about?

Tove: Mm?

Interviewer: But have you got any... theory of RE didactics or some...

Tove: Eh...

Interviewer: Some... Do you relate to anything like that at all—

Tove: No...I mean...I really can't say that I but...for me I guess it's...it's a bit about...My goal...when I...let's say...have a class. First and foremost I need to get a feel for the class.

Interviewer: Mm

Tove: Where are they

Interviewer: Mm

Tove: ...then my...goal is really to...Naturally partly...eh...to give them a knowledge base. [...] But I don't really know if I've...got...really like any...shall we say... .. Like...a didactical style or how should I put it but...um.

³³ The names used are pseudonyms.

The teachers reflect, and have reasons behind their choices of method, content, etc. But in effect this seems based on their own interpretations of the national curriculum, as illustrated by the quote above. Having interviewed four teachers, Christina Osbeck identified four different intentions, which might be developed into theories of RE didactics.³⁴ In her analysis, Osbeck uses what may be termed an embryo of a professional language. But in the interviews, both in Osbeck's and ours, the teachers do not seem to have access to such a language.

So how do teachers arrive at their respective intentions? Naturally, intentions do not appear in isolation, but are influenced by various factors. In one of our interviews, when Lars was asked how he arrived at his current approach, he explained:

Lars: Both [from] university...colleagues...but also *my old college teachers...eh...that I had myself once upon a time. Because... apparently it worked.*

We do not mean to say that his approach did not work, nor that it is not a good approach. But his approach is rather arbitrary. This can, again, be related to Osbeck's findings.³⁵ The approaches used by different teachers seem to be, more or less, a matter of happenstance.³⁶ Or perhaps: a result of their respective life histories:

Interviewer: Do you know if there are different ways of...thinking about the approach [...] [to teaching RE] that might go under different... labels?

Maja: Mm

Interviewer: Different models or theories.

Maja: Mm

Interviewer: Do you know if there are such... Which...like... That's according to that model. That one teaches according to that model or-

Maja: Yes there might be but if so I don't remember what they're called.

³⁴ Osbeck, "Religionslärare".

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 197-199. Also see Björn **Falkevall**, *Hur formas undervisning? En studie av lärares tänkande om sitt handlande inom skolämnet religionskunskap* (Stockholm: Häften för didaktiska studier, 1995).

Interviewer: Mm

Interviewer: Does it work well without something like that or might it be something which could contribute?

Maja: Like some sort of concept? [...] That might be...that you could have some different entry point that you're...thinking of like that you'd, instead of life-questions would think...um [breathes out]. Nah I don't know what you mean [laughs].

At least one of the teachers clearly did not know what else, other than life issues, could be the subject matter of RE. Having that as the sole possible entry point would mean that content and teaching methods are both limited. Any other way of thinking seems inconceivable.³⁷ This could perhaps be seen as especially troubling, given that life issues are no longer the main topic in the current curriculum.³⁸ So it is not just that national curricula define the overarching aim of RE, but also that the subject is defined by outdated national curricula.

THE CURRICULUM AS RE DIDACTICS

So what is RE didactics in Sweden? One might say that the task of the academic practice is not to prescribe what schools ought to teach, or how it is to be taught, but rather to provide alternatives, as well as a language in which practicing teachers can discuss these matters. Yet alternatives could not be seen in the literature used in the training of prospective teachers, or in the interviews we conducted. Further, teachers seem to lack a language, with which to discuss alternatives.

There is an evident risk with pedagogy of religion which leaves the questions of fundamental views, the questions of goal, content and evaluation, as well as the critical research and future-oriented perspectives,

³⁷ Also, see Christina **Osbeck**, *Att förstå livet: Religionsdidaktik och lärande i diskursiva praktiker* (Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009), where she, arguably, discusses a RE-model. The model might be called “learning to understand life” [livsförståelselärande], and is developed in a discussion concerning didactics in the Swedish Church. Could it be that the model is seen as viable in the church context, but not in the more “objective” context of the school classroom?

³⁸ Cf. Selander, “Från livsfrågor, etik och reflektion till samhälle, kunskap och analys”.

unconsidered. The subject loses its holistic structure and lacks the ability to discuss criteria for the most fundamental questions of teaching.³⁹

The quote above dates from the first wave. One characteristic of the second wave is that fundamental issues seldom are questioned or defined – perhaps they are not even described at all. Instead the focus is on bits and pieces within a given framework.

The interviewed teachers did not seem to have access to a map of different dimensions that might be included when teaching religion, or to descriptions of theories of RE didactics, or models ('tools') that might be used in the classroom. No such overview was offered in the introductory textbooks we studied. This map and these dimensions must be constructed from the Swedish situation, but can make use of the terms and theories developed in, for instance, the German and British discourses. The 'RE didactical intentions' identified by Osbeck may be a good place to start.⁴⁰ Those intentions could be developed into theories or models of RE didactics, perhaps utilizing insights from other contexts, such as those mentioned above.

We think it more appropriate for teachers to come to conclusions having reflected on alternatives. Ideally, they would have acquired the suitable knowledge(s) and method(s) – i.e. a *research language*, a professional language – required by a particular intention.⁴¹ Preferably different didactical perspectives on RE would be formulated, and those formulations would be a part of the toolbox available to teachers. We would want them to arrive at the intentions or approaches through reflection on these perspectives. This would be part of possessing a professional vocabulary in RE didactics. It is, however, no surprise that the teachers did not appear to have access to this vocabulary, given that these frameworks and such a professional language are absent from the practice of teacher education (and, perhaps, from the practice of research as well). Teachers are not exposed to alternatives, and therefore no choices have to be made, and no debate is needed. This state of affairs may indicate that the Swedish field of RE didactics is underdeveloped⁴².

³⁹ Rune Larsson, *Introduktion till Religionspedagogiken*, 15. Our translation.

⁴⁰ Christina Osbeck, "Religionslärare".

⁴¹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴² Cf. Schüllerqvist, *Ämnesdidaktisk lärarforskning – ett angeläget forskningsfält*.

Insofar as there is a vocabulary in the school context, this vocabulary is practical in nature; it is not informed by the academic field, but arises from the school context itself. The influence of the academic field diminishes, and didactical issues are resolved by teacher education and the school context (Figure 4).

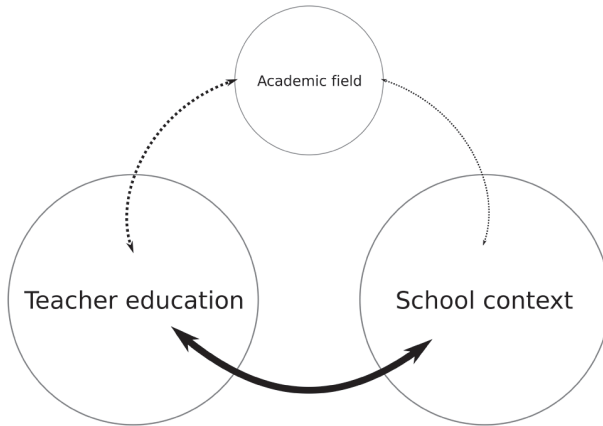


Figure 4. The diminished influence of the academy on RE didactics

However, in the German and British contexts, it seems more justified to talk about an academic discipline of RE didactics. In Germany, for example, prospective teachers are given different perspectives, as well as a professional language. Introductory German titles to RE education, such as *Religionsdidaktik – Ein Leitfaden für Studium, Ausbildung und Beruf* [Religious Education Didactics: A Guide to Studying, Training and the Profession]⁴³ or *Lehrbuch der Religionsdidaktik – Für Studium und Praxis in ökumenischer Perspektive* [Textbook of Religious Education Didactics: Study and Practice from Ecumenical Perspectives]⁴⁴ offer several religio-didactical dimensions and principles that prospective teachers can relate to. A toolbox, containing different sets of tools, is offered; different perspectives on the purpose

⁴³ Georg Hilger, Stephan Leimgruber and Hans-Georg Ziebertz, *Religionsdidaktik: Ein Leitfaden für Studium, Ausbildung und Beruf* (Kösel: München, 2010).

⁴⁴ Kalloch, Leimgruber and Schwab, *Lehrbuch der Religionsdidaktik*.

and manner of teaching are included. This gives prospective teachers a vocabulary, a professional language that can be used when reflecting on their own teaching practice. In the UK an introductory title like *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogic Practice in RE*⁴⁵ mentions models like Smart's phenomenological approach⁴⁶ or the interpretive approach⁴⁷ – to name but a few. In the German and British contexts there is a discussion, a debate on the core of the subject. And this is one distinguishing feature of a discipline.⁴⁸ Different options are presented, and every teacher has choices to make, such as: what is aesthetical edification, and how does one go about integrating that dimension into RE? What is interreligious learning? What is the performative teaching of religion? Different models, which may be included to tackle different dimensions, are described. A holistic image of the field is thus presented, enabling teachers to make informed choices after reflection on which goals should be attained and which of the available models should be used.

From informal discussions it has emerged that several Swedish universities use international material in their teacher education programmes for teaching RE didactics, including material written by authors mentioned above, such as Jackson and Grimmitt. However, we would like to point out the value of having a national debate. The Swedish context is not the same as the British one, for instance. The school context does matter. We argue that the research discipline should have a more well-defined voice in the discussion between academia, teacher education, and the school context. A discussion is needed on the ways in which RE can be understood, and at least some of the alternative understandings need to be clearly described. This debate is currently absent from the Swedish context, where the life histories of RE teachers seem to be more important than critical reflection on the school subject.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Michael **Grimmitt**, *Pedagogies of religious education: Case studies in the research and development of good pedagogic practice in RE* (Great Waking: McCrimmons, 2010).

⁴⁶ Ninian **Smart**, *Secular education and the logic of religion* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1968).

⁴⁷ Robert **Jackson**, *Religious Education: An interpretive approach* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997).

⁴⁸ Cf. Bengt Schüllerqvist, *Svensk historiedidaktisk forskning*.

⁴⁹ Cf. Osbeck, "Religionslärare".

In *Signposts*, Prof. Robert Jackson gives examples of possible aims for intercultural education, of which RE is a subset.⁵⁰ Two models of RE are described by which these goals could be attained.⁵¹ Jackson suggests these models should be adapted to local circumstances. Verbalising the dimensions relevant for the Swedish situation is perhaps the most important challenge faced by RE didactics in Sweden.⁵² Arguing about what the map should look like, and which models should be included, is what, in fact, would make this an independent, academic field – set apart from general education,⁵³ and independent from the national curriculum. We argue that this kind of reasoning is absent from our empirical material. The national curriculum, authored by the state, serves this purpose instead. In practice, the national curriculum currently more or less defines what RE didactics is, while the direction of influence should be the other way around.

⁵⁰ Robert **Jackson**, *Signposts: Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2014), 34.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 35-45.

⁵² Cf. Michael **Uljens**, *Didaktik – teori, reflektion och praktik* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1997) and Schüllerqvist, *Ämnesdidaktisk lärarforskning – ett angeläget forskningsfält*.

⁵³ Cf. Bengt Schüllerqvist, *Svensk historiedidaktisk forskning*.