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Education and common values in a multicultural society – The Norwegian case

ABSTRACT

In most Western countries, a compulsory education system plays a key role in societal integration. In Norway approximately 98 per cent of all children between the ages of six and sixteen participate in a common, compulsory and public course of education regulated by a curriculum approved by the parliament. Both the schools' values base and the obligatory subject of religious education is best understood as contributions towards integration in contemporary Norwegian society, that is characterised by secularisation and disintegration of the Christian hegemony on the one hand and by the emergence of cultural and religious diversity on the other. In this case, secularism is identified not with distance from religion but with equity toward religions both in education and in the society, based on the assumption that everyone can unite around human rights, regardless of religious or cultural affiliation. This article discusses the Norwegian model of education and its effort to find a common values base and a religious education suitable for integration in a secularised and multicultural society.

KEYWORDS

education, religion, values, multicultural society, secularism, Charles Taylor

A renewed awareness of education as a common supplier of values

Norway has gradually during the post-war period become increasingly more cultural and religious diverse mainly because of immigration. In Norway, the immigrant population accounts for 15 per cent of the population as a whole in 2014, or just below 760,000 people, with backgrounds from more than 200 different countries.¹ Here means persons with two foreign-born parents: first-generation immigrants who have immigrated to Norway, and persons who were born in Norway of two foreign-born parents.² Around thirds of these people, have backgrounds from non-Western countries, of which approximately half came to Norway as refugees. There is today no getting away from the fact that Norway has become a multicultural society in the sense that people with different cultural and religious background are represented, even though this multicultural plurality with some exceptions is relatively new. However, if we take a closer look, there have in fact always been different ethnic groups present in the Norwegian society, the Sami people, the Kven people and others. Like all western societies, Norway is dependent on striking a balance between freedom and institutional control, in which case there will be a need to come up with institutions that can promote social integration of representatives of different cultural and religious affiliation (cf. Stark & Bainbridge 1996, Hovdelien 2013). This article is discussing how the compulsory education system with its values base and religious education subject is playing a key role in this effort in Norway.

Most classrooms today will have children who are brought up to believe in God, or a higher power, or some form of transcendental social order, whether they are Christians, Muslims or belong to other religions. Moreover, most of the children's parents want their children to be taught the same fundamental view of reality and ethics as they have themselves. The same will probably apply for the children of atheists and different types of agnostics, even if these often speak about their children's right to choose for themselves when they are old enough. The cultural pluralisation that Norwegian society has undergone in past decades has meant that it is not that simple for members of modern society to agree on 'one main narrative' in the sense of one common, meaningful view of reality. At the

¹ <http://www.ssb.no/befolkning/statistikker/innvbef> (Accessed 29 September 2014).

² Between 10% and 20% of the population in the Nordic countries are born abroad or have parents who were born abroad (Bäckström 2014:66).

same time, the school's curriculum clearly communicate the necessity to retain a clearly articulated values base, even in today's multicultural education system. Furthermore, this has led to a renewed awareness of the education system as a common supplier of values. And out of this a new discussion of the place of the education of values as subjects and religious education (RE) within the wider curriculum in school's has developed, and similar for the kindergartens even if they don't have a curriculum or subjects in the same sense as schools (Hovdelien 2011, 2013).

In an educational setting, some differences, such as Jewish and Muslim children not eating pork or secular-humanist children not celebrating Christmas or other holy days, cause few problems. Other differences, however, such as corporal punishment of children and perhaps patriarchal family structures, could cause significant challenges. Not least the public controversies that have taken place around Muslim difference have raised questions and put to the test established frames of thought (cf. Casanova 2009:146-147, Bäckström 2014:66-67). Both the problematic and unproblematic aspects of such differences represent expressions of cultural diversity. Nilüfer Göle and Julie Billaud point to how the principles of 'equality' and 'difference', two seemingly opposite principles, both have been influential in shaping our modern imaginations: "On the one hand, modern nation-states homogenise and unify different ethnicities, cultures and languages, while on the other recognition and representation of differences become a test for democratic mediation." (Göle & Billaud 2012:116). How can states strive for equality among citizens without imposing uniformity? asks Göle and Billaud. Cultural diversity in itself is not necessarily a positive phenomenon; for one thing, it depends on the consequences this type of diversity has for individuals, cultural groups, and society.

The more specific topic of this article is the Norwegian model of education as means of cultural and religious integration. The issue at stake is how the schools' values base could contribute towards integration in contemporary Norwegian society, that is characterised by secularisation and disintegration of the Christian hegemony on the one hand and by the emergence of cultural and religious diversity on the other. The Norwegian model, with its relatively strong state control and a weak civil society is probably not representative for most European countries today. In spite of this, I hope the following discussion could serve as an interesting case for further discussion on the role of the modern liberal democratic state in cultural and religious integration in different parts of the world.

Norwegian education

Education in Norway is compulsory from the age of six years. Approximately 98 per cent of all children between the ages of six and sixteen participate in a common, public course of education under the auspices of the public school system, regulated by a curriculum approved by the Norwegian parliament. That leaves only two per cent to private schools and home schooling.³ This gives the state a unique opportunity to influence the upcoming generation and to shape it in its own image. The National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training (2006) states: "The school system shall offer all pupils equal education and contribute to reducing differences between individuals and groups".

Education is much more than acquiring basic skills in language, mathematics and digital tools, despite the emphasis on basic skills explicitly expressed in the Knowledge Promotion curricula. In educational institutions ways of life, attitudes, values and norms are legitimised and conveyed to the upcoming generation. This is also stated in the legally binding background documents, both in the Act relating to Primary and Secondary Education and in the national curriculum: "[e]ducation shall promote cultural understanding and contribute towards the development of self-insight and identity, respect and tolerance," (LK06 2006:4). And "[e]ducation in religion, philosophies of life and ethics shall present different world religions and philosophies of life in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner." (Education Act, Section 2-4). If we read the legally binding documents that regulate the practices in Norwegian kindergartens, we will find similar regulations (cf. The Kindergarten Act). The legally binding documents, naturally enough, contains normative phrases prescribing the direction in which the children is to be influenced. In these pedagogical institutions, children meet across divides of gender, ethnicity, religion and social class for participating in a ten-year compulsory course of education. Described in pedagogical terms, the schools are important arenas of socialisation, where the term 'socialisation' refers to the process by which a child develops into a unique individual at the same time, as he becomes part of the society and the culture (Frønes 2006:24-27, cf. Berger & Luckmann 1991:149–166). Since the influence of values and attitudes in the broadest sense represents

³ This has doubled since 1985, but this is still less than half that of Sweden, while in Denmark 12% of all pupils are attending private schools (cf. Skeie 2007: 224).

a key element of the socialisation that goes on within both the family and the school, the implicit assumption is that the set of values and attitudes that are instilled in the children is generally considered to apply for society. This is the case despite the fact that cultural diversity today is far more diverse than it was only one generation ago. We can see from the first paragraph in the preamble of the Education Act that no allowances are made for large deviations: "With the cooperation and understanding of the home, the education offered in the schools and training establishments opens doors to the world and the future, and gives pupils and apprentices historical and cultural insight and grounding." (Education Act, Section 1-1).

However, according to the Norwegian law and in line with the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the parents have primary responsibility for education, not the schools (Cf. Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948: Article 14 and 26). There is broad political consensus for this in Norway today, even if there are some tensions between the left and right wing parties on what it should mean in practice (cf. Hovdelien 2014). Furthermore, this implies that the parents' wishes for the education of their children should be supported in these common pedagogical institutions; an education that is inevitably influenced by different cultural factors, including religious and philosophical affiliations and related perceptions of reality, views of humanity, and values, irrespective of the background of the children. This gives rise to a challenge, because how are the education supposed to do their best to socialise the children into the society and thereby also influence them culturally, when the parents' wishes for their children are so diffuse due to their respective cultural and religious backgrounds? The solution lies in drawing a distinction between what types of differences can be tolerated by wider society and what should be clamped down on by means of argumentation and shrewdness and, if necessary, by forcible means. The political discussion on the content of the education system will to a large degree deal with what is to be tolerated and what should not by the state. This will always be written down in the legislation, which in turn is often the result of political compromise. Norway is hardly different from other countries in this sense.

1 January 2009 marked an important change for the Norwegian education. It was the date on which the values as they were expressed in the old objects clause through the following wording: "Compulsory school shall, with the cooperation and understanding of the home, help to give pupils a

Christian and moral education", were replaced by more elaborate wording: "Education shall be based on fundamental values in Christian and humanist heritage and traditions, such as respect for human life and nature, intellectual freedom, humanity, forgiveness and solidarity, values that are also expressed in different religions and life philosophies and that are rooted in human rights." (Education Act, Section 1-1, second paragraph). Again, the similar amendments were made to the Kindergarten Act; even if this were delayed by several months because of juridical complications, concerning privately owned kindergartens (cf. Hovdelien 2013). The main reason for changing the provisions in the objects clause was the trend towards a more secularised, yet at the same time culturally diverse, society (cf. NOU 2007:6).

The secularisation process and the following cultural pluralisation

According to the classical secularisation thesis, societies are progressing, particularly through modernisation and rationalisation, and religion loses its authority in all aspects of social life and governance, but this "progress" does perhaps not always mean making society to be a better place. Max Weber refers to the secularisation process as the "disenchantment of the world". Such an understanding of the secularisation concept in Europe clearly has to do with significant social changes involving disintegration of the Christian hegemony. In this respect, most European countries have many features in common; support for churches and organised religion has weakened considerably during this period, at the same time as religious faith has become a more private and more individualised affair (cf. Wilson 2003, Hervieu-Léger 2003, Bruce 2003). This is also the case in Norway, even though the Norwegian state church system was not officially abolished until the summer of 2012. (cf. Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway, Schmidt 2010, Trägårdh 1997). Charles Taylor comments the secularisation process like this in his broadly conceived historical presentation in *A Secular Age* from 2007:

Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will also likely mean that at least in certain milieux, it may be hard to sustain one's faith. There will be people who feel bound

to give it up, even though they mourn its loss. This has been a recognizable experience in our societies, at least since the mid-nineteenth century (Taylor 2007:3. Cf. Taylor 2011:167-168).

This quotation can be linked to both ‘secularisation’ and ‘pluralisation’ as processes which together express key features of the developments which many Western countries has undergone during the post-war period. Religion and religious institutions have been losing their dominant role in society when it comes to expressing collective beliefs in the broadest sense of the word. Furthermore, the quotation cited above is about cultural pluralisation. According to Taylor, it would be difficult in today's society not to realise that there are alternatives to one's own religious and philosophical conceptions. The realisation that others think differently, also when it comes to fundamental existential questions and questions to do with values, will lead many of us to question our own way of thinking or perhaps make us open and inquisitive about how others view their lives.

This also brings us to an essential point in this part of Taylor's philosophy: according to him, this awareness of the existence of alternatives to our worldview unites us across religious and philosophical affiliations and represents a form of shared experience to which it is possible to subscribe in the search for a common, socially integrated, cultural framework. Moreover, this is where Taylor's concept of ‘secularism’ fits in. A more recent book by Taylor, written in co-operation with Jocelyn Maclure, provide a clearly reasoned, articulate account of two main principles of secularism – equal respect and freedom of conscience. Here the authors point to the separation of Church and State, and State neutrality vis-à-vis religions as two operative modes of secularism (Maclure & Taylor 2011:9-26). This is also in line with Taylor's earlier distinction between the secularism concepts he discussed in the paper “Modes of Secularism” in 1999. In this paper, Taylor draws a distinction between two main types of strategy on which to base the concept of secularism. The first one is called the *common ground strategy*. This strategy emphasises peaceful coexistence and political order. Today this can be linked to natural law and to a political doctrine that emphasises human rights or constitutional rights (Taylor 1999:33). The idea is that common rights could make it possible to agree on certain values in a multicultural society, across cultural or religious affiliations. Moreover, this

could be achieved without these affiliations being regarded as either irrelevant for public life and politics, and without one particular religion or philosophical tradition becoming dominant on the expansions of others. Such a *soft* secularism then is supporting state neutrality with respect to different religions and their practitioners, combined with an appropriate divide between state and religion or Church.⁴

Taylor calls the other strategy the *independent political ethic strategy*. This other strategy is requiring the state to distance itself from all forms of religion and to refrain from giving religious expressions any form of official status (Taylor 1999:33). Such secularism could therefore be criticised for representing a worldview or an ideology which in itself is based on a secular understanding of reality. On the other hand, it would be possible to claim that secularism as a political doctrine could be expedient, without any philosophical or ideological consequences being drawn. Norway is but only one state that clearly has undergone a secularisation on state level, but the question whether there has been a secularisation on the individual level is debated, and depends also on what kind of definition of the concept religion that is used. As we shall see, the processes of secularisation and pluralisation lead to changes in the Norwegian religious education subject.

A new paradigm for religious education

In the early 1990s, the Norwegian school system underwent comprehensive and profound changes. The reforms came in rapid succession: in the summer of 1993, the parliament decided to lower the school starting age from seven to six years. In the spring of 1994, it was decided to extend the length of compulsory school to 10 years with effect from 1 July 1997. The justification given for undertaking such a comprehensive reform was that living conditions of children had changed dramatically during the course of a few generations and that the schools were now lagging behind. The education was transformed from one that used to be characterised by a primarily homogeneous Christian culture that

⁴ A similar concept is found in the British sociologist Tariq Modood's theoretical development. Modood's term is "moderate secularism", i.e. a secularism that includes "anti-discrimination measures in areas such as employment, positive action to achieve a full and just political representation of Muslims in various areas of public life" (Modood 2007:85).

lacked relevance to today's reality of value pluralism with its overwhelming plethora of information. The time had therefore come to reform the school system to bring it in line with the new era (NOU 1995:9, St.meld. nr. 29 (1994-95), Haakedal 2001: 93-95, Halse 2010: 364-366). This development is in line with Geir Skeie's argumentation for a more contextual RE in his PhD thesis (cf. Skeie 1998, 2007: 235-236) and theoretical works of Sissel Østberg (Østberg 1989, 1992, 1998). The abovementioned reality of value pluralism was also the result of the sharp increase in the number of people with non-Norwegian or non-Western cultural backgrounds during the 1980s and 1990s, particularly in Oslo and other large cities. This in turn created new challenges for Norwegian society, and the schools were assigned new tasks.

In addition to the introduction of a 10-year educational program, the most notable change ushered in by the new national curriculum, L97, was the new way of organising religion and worldview education. A new subject called Knowledge of Christianity with an Orientation in Religions and Worldviews, known by the acronym KRL,⁵ now replaced the earlier two-subject model (L97:87-108).⁶ The reasoning behind this was that it was considered unfavourable to have two separate subjects in religion and worldviews in the schools because it meant that many classes were divided into two groups to be taught a subject that focused heavily on values of community, tolerance, and love for fellow man (NOU 1995 (9):10-11). The prime political mover behind the introduction of the new school subject was the Labour Party and its minister of education Gudmund Hernes. The relatively strong emphasis on Christian education in the new RE subject was justified based on the Christian faith tradition being a deep and broad current in Norwegian and European culture and history, and that knowledge about Christianity was therefore necessary for understanding Norwegian culture. The KRL subject should provide knowledge about, not instruction in, a certain faith. It should also take account of the identity of each individual pupil based on his/her personal affiliation while at the same time

⁵ KRL and RLE are well established acronyms in the Norwegian school system and education policy. I have therefore opted to use them in this presentation, even though they may be unfamiliar to non-Norwegian readers. For an overview of models of religious education in other European countries, cf. Kuyk et al. (eds.) 2007, Willaime 2007, Fancourt 2013. See also Council of Europe, *Signposts* 2014.

⁶ The changes in Norwegian religious education has attracted many researchers since the 1990-ies, see: Skeie 1998, Sødal 2003, Gravem 2004, Lied 2004, Bråten 2010, von der Lippe 2010, Anker 2011, Hovdelien 2011, Leganger-Krogstad 2011, Iversen 2012, Afset, Valen Kleive and Hatlebrekke 2013, Bråten 2013, Fuglseth, K. ed. 2014. For historical accounts, see Haakedal 2001, Halse 2010.

promote dialogue in a common culture (cf. NOU 1995 (9), Haakedal 2001: 93-94, Hovdelien 2011: 197-198).

Simultaneously, it was explicitly stated that the subject should “take account of the identity of each individual pupil based on his/her personal affiliation” (L97:89-90). The educational profile of the KRL subject thereby entailed that, as well as being what can be described as a purely education subject, such as natural science or mathematics, KRL also contained a religiously formative identity component. The principle for this model was that each individual pupil should receive education in religion and worldviews that was adapted to his/her own cultural and religious background. Elisabet Haakedal points to this new RE subject “as a middle way between the bureaucratic functionalism of the nation-state and the ‘free choice’ ideology of modern individualism (Haakedal 2001: 88. See also Skeie 1998. Leganger-Krogstad 2011: 154-156).

Experiences gained from the KRL subject⁷ resulted in a revised subject curriculum was introduced in August 2002 and published in a curriculum guide entitled *KRL-boka* (2002). The name of the subject was changed to Knowledge of Christianity with an Orientation in Religions and Worldviews to express more explicitly the equal treatment of the respective components. The acronym KRL could therefore be retained. The curriculum was given a new structure that was somewhat simpler than its predecessor was. In addition, the Christianity component was reduced from 60 per cent to 55 per cent, and the number of subtopics that had to be covered during 10-year primary and lower secondary school was reduced. Another important amendment to the subject curriculum was the possibility to make local adjustments to the learning content based on parental rights. This made it easier to adapt the academic content to local conditions than was the case under the national curriculum in KRL97 (Sødal 2003: 164-169, Hovdelien 2011: 198-199).

⁷ Two evaluation reports were written on the request of the Government, see Hagesæter, Sandmark and Bleka 2000; Aadnanes and Johannessen 2000.

RE after decision of the European Court of Human Rights and exemption provisions

Ever since 1997, a group of parents had, with the support of the Norwegian Humanist Association, been involved in a lawsuit against the state, demanding that their children be fully exempted from an obligatory RE subject (KRL97). This request had been denied by the Norwegian courts, but the case was then filed with the UN Human Rights Committee and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (Lied 2009: 263-264, Skeie 2007: 230-231, Hodne 2009: 89-92). The Human Rights Committee's decision reached in the autumn of 2004 led the Government to make amendments to the subject already in the spring of 2005 (Rundskriv F-15-07). In the autumn of the same year, a new revised edition of the RE subject was developed. The new curriculum was published in *KRL-boka 2005*, again along with a curriculum guide, two circulars, and an information letter explaining the exemption rules. The new curriculum entered into force on 15 August 2005, one year before the rest of the National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training (cf. Hodne 2007). The reason for preparing a new curriculum for the subject only three years after the previous revision was mainly due to a comment by UN Human Rights Committee in a statement dated 3 November 2004 that the rules for partial exemption from the RE of 1997 (KRL97) subject violated parents' freedom to give their children a religious and moral upbringing (Human Rights Committee 82nd Session 18 October–5 November 2004. Communication No. 1155/2003, cf. Lied 2009: 271-273). The Government followed up on this comment, first by amending section 2-4 of the Education Act to sever the link between the RE subject and the Christian object clause for primary and lower secondary schools. In addition, a separate paragraph, section 2-3a, was inserted into the Education Act dealing with exemptions in primary and lower secondary education in general and making it mandatory to provide information on the exemption rules. Exemption should be granted from those parts of the tuition which parents/guardians perceived as practice of or adherence to another religion or worldview or which were perceived as offensive or insulting. From then on, notification of exemption would suffice; no further explanation of the grounds for such requests should be necessary. It would still not be possible to request exemption from what was described as knowledge content (Hovdelien 2009: 133-134. Cf. Lied 2009: 271-273). Head teachers were thereby charged with assessing the

reasonableness of the grounds on which parents/guardians requested exemption. This demanded considerable knowledge about the general understanding of what religion and worldviews was and about the individual religions and worldviews represented among the pupil population.

Furthermore, the exemption provisions implied that they applied not only to the RE subject but also to all school activities. This was a new feature. It was also decided that, to simplify the practice of the exemption rules, the curriculum should clearly state which elements could be regarded as religious practice. The quantitative distribution between the Christianity-related subjects (55 per cent) and the other subjects (45 per cent) was maintained. In its judgment of 29 June 2007, the European Court of Human Rights ruled against Norway with the smallest possible majority and upheld the applicant parents' complaint that the RE subject of 1997 violated human rights as they are expressed in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Rundskriv F-15-07). The Government responded to this by amending the Education Act to make it easier to practice the exemption rules, but it still did not allow full exemption from the subject (cf. Kunnskapsdepartementet 2007, Lied 2009: 270-272). It is also worth noting that the much-debated exemption rules have had relatively little practical significance, despite their significance in terms of principle. Few parents have exercised their right to request exemption (Hovdelien 2009: 137-140).

Introduction of a new RE subject in 2008 and a new objects clause in 2009

In 2008, the time had come for a new revision of the curriculum for religious education in Norwegian schools. After the social democrats returned to power, KRL was replaced by Religion, Worldviews and Ethics (RLE08) (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2008, cf. Hodne 2009). Since the exemption provisions applied not only to the subject in religion and worldviews but also to all school activities, the transition from KRL to RLE did not entail any major amendments to section 2-3a of the Education Act. The only amendment made was the addition of a new, initial paragraph, which read as follows: "The school shall respect the religious and philosophical beliefs of pupils and parents and ensure their right to an equal education." This wording represented no dramatic change beyond explicitly specifying parental rights that had previously only been implied. However, the subject in religion and worldviews

was now subjected to such extensive amendments that RLE08 was regarded as a new subject in religion and worldviews. This was also apparent in the amendment made to the Education Act in connection with the introduction of the new RE subject. What complicated the situation was that – as well as being subjects that had “education *about* religion” as their dominant educational perspective – the teaching of Christianity in the two-subject model and the KRL subject also contained the abovementioned perspective of religiously formative identity (cf. Hovdelien 2011: 197-200). Such a perspective would entail an orientation towards a “denominational approach” to religions and worldviews, even if the instruction was provided by the state school and was compulsory. This is because the fundamental idea behind religiously formative religious and worldview education is that it should be disseminated in a way that is familiar to representatives of the relevant religious and worldview traditions (cf. Schreiner 2007:12).

Removal of the religiously formative identity perspective

From a religious education perspective, one particular feature was lost in the transition from KRL to RLE, namely the abovementioned religiously formative identity component, which had been a key component in the KRL subject (cf. Hodne 2009: 77-93, Engen & Lied 2010: 42). This came about because the wording “The use of adapted education is necessary to accommodate the pupils’ religious and philosophical backgrounds” was removed. This was also made apparent by the fact that the curriculum for RLE was based on the assumption that it was possible to present world religions and worldviews in an “objective, critical and pluralistic manner.” What this meant in practice was that a phenomenological approach to both Christianity and other religions had become dominant. In educational terms, what can be deduced from this statement is that the broad-based concept of knowledge in the subject, wherein the formative perspective lay implicit in the KRL subject’s religiously formative identity component, was narrowed down to a instrumental subject (Hovdelien 2011: 199-200).

Consequently, the fundamental idea behind the subject, as expressed in the term *identity* and *dialogue*, disappeared. In addition, this change would in some cases be perceived as a threat against pupils' religiously formative identity development, which in turn may increase the need for exemption. Thus, from a multiculturalist perspective, RLE would be seen as a step backwards the latest KRL-subject (KRL05) from KRL05. Indeed, the curriculum for RLE did state that "account should be taken of both individual and local considerations", but this cannot be said to adequately replace the insistence in the KRL subject curriculum on the importance to take account of the identity of each individual students based on his/her personal affiliation, i. e. all students independent of background. This was not a "learning to be Norwegian"-project, to borrow a quotation from Lars Laird Iversen's research (cf. Iversen 2012). From this perspective, KRL05 was better equipped to take account of the religious and worldview diversity in Norway than was RLE.

The way forward: Yet another reform?

In October 2013, it was revealed that the parties looking to form a minority government led by Conservative Party leader Erna Solberg had agreed on the following: The name of the RLE subject will be changed to Christianity, Religion, Worldviews and Ethics (Kristendom, religion, livssyn og etikk (KRLE)), and a requirement that 55 per cent teaching of the subject should be reserved for Christianity related themes. This was later changed to about half of the curriculum. Although the agreement between these four parties says very little about what this planned change will entail in practice beyond changing the name and stipulating half of the teaching would be allocated to Christian learning content, there is nothing to suggest any major changes. The main perspective of the subject model continues to pursue what Schreiner terms a "denominational approach" to religions and worldviews, only now the majority religion is assigned quantitatively more space. It was therefore

specified that there should not be any changes in the competence aims as they were referred in the curriculum for RLE08. But it is worth noticing that the intention has never been that the choice of the terms ‘religion’, ‘worldviews’ and ‘ethics’ for the subject title should signify that the competence aims and quantitative emphasis of learning material in the teaching should be divided into three. The competence aims should govern the teaching by indicating what the pupils should have learned on completion of tuition in the respective grades, and the main component, Christianity, contains more competence aims than the other religions and worldviews in all grades. In the RLE subject, too, the pupils should learn more about Christianity than about other topics.

Education and common values in a multicultural society?

It is apparent that the introduction of new objects clauses for the schools in Norway can be understood on the background of the process of secularisation and the following pluralisation, as it would have been difficult and perhaps undesirable to maintain an object clauses rooted in Christian values in a society characterised by cultural and religious diversity. The wording of the objects clauses can be read in different ways, like most texts. First of all, they can be read as lists of values that are rooted in equally ranked religious and philosophical traditions (including human rights), as Norwegian culture-historian Helje Kringlebotn Sødal has postulated (Sødal 2014:25). Based on this understanding, in practice this would probably mean that the values that should apply in the schools would be the values that are common to those religious and philosophical traditions, like a kind of values-based lowest common multiple. As it would be difficult to arrive at such a lowest common multiple based on the different religions and philosophical traditions, it would be an obvious solution to understand human rights as an expression of these lowest common multiple values. The new objects clause will then in practice probably be understood to the effect that the Norwegian pedagogical institutions should be based on the values that are common to the abovementioned religious and philosophical traditions as long as these comply with human rights. Such an emphasis on common values across cultural, religious and philosophical convictions, combined with an emphasis on human rights as an expression of general values, point in the direction of Taylor's first type of secularism, common ground

secularism, or what I have referred to as soft secularism. In this way, parental rights, an important part of human rights, could also be respected.

On the other hand, the wording of the objects clause could be also be understood in such a way that emphasis is placed on positioning the wording “fundamental values in the Christian and humanist heritage and traditions” at the beginning of the clause. This could then be understood to mean that the religious traditions that are mentioned first are considered to be more important than the traditions that are referred to as “different religions and philosophies” and human rights. An important premise for such an understanding is given in and through the wording of the previous objects clause. This is based on an assumption that there was perhaps a lack of political will to introduce radical changes after all, in spite of the rhetoric of politicians both perhaps a lack of political will to introduce radical changes after all, in spite of the rhetoric of politicians both to the left and the right wing of the political scale. Such an interpretation means that continuity in relation to the previous objects clause for the Norwegian kindergartens and schools is emphasised, and that the order of the elements in the new version of the clause is considered to be more significant than their content, perhaps at the expense of grammatical constraints. It seems therefore clear that if we take such an interpretation of the objects clause in the Education Act as our basis, we are removed from both of Taylor's types of secularism. It is more a case of rhetorical concealment whereby some words have been replaced but otherwise everything is as it was. Such a reading implies an assertion that the objects clause does not take into account any of Taylor's categories of secularity, something that would also imply that parental rights are set aside with the following violation of human rights.

Naturally, the reference to Christian and humanistic traditions in the objects clauses signals a certain degree of continuity between the former versions of the objects clause. At the same time, it is difficult to deny that the amendment represents a break in the sense that it formalises the values bases other than the exclusively Christian. A secularist mentality has gained more ground in the schools through the adoption of the new objects clause, even if this comes about in a rather undramatic way. The thought from the governmental authorities is quite clear. It is their opinion that a form of soft secularism should become a unifying values base for these educational institutions in the future, regardless of the children's cultural or religious affiliations. On the other hand, the other category of

secularism, referred to here as hard secularism, would be unacceptable from the perspectives of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and human rights, since such secularism would be more intolerant of other religious and philosophical traditions than would one specific secular philosophical tradition. Since the human rights are ratified by Norway and incorporated into the national legislation, this would be illegal. In my view, the new secularist values bases of these pedagogical institutions should then be seen to allow for the promotion of both secular and religious values in the kindergartens and schools of the future. In this connection, these institutions could perhaps prove to be integrating institutions in the best sense of the term. At least that seems to be the intentions of the Norwegian government. The decision of the European Court of Human Rights and the demand of exemption provisions show that perhaps these subjects was too ambitious. The new RE subject from 2008 (RLE08) was a less ambitious RE subject, but also a subject that clearly prioritises the needs of societal integration at the expense of a multiculturalist perspective (Hovdelien 2011: 199-200). From this time on the religiously formative identity, perspective is removed. We do not yet know what the latest Norwegian RE reform that probably will be introduced in 2015 will mean. There is political agreement about making no changes in the competence aims of the subject. This means that the changes probably will be small, and in practice perhaps only be a symbolic change where a K for Christianity (kristendom) is reintroduced for political and not for pedagogical reasons. However, religious and cultural minorities will still be entitled to have their wishes for their children's religious education respected or at least not opposed by the schools. Moreover, the discussion of the school's values base and what kind of religious education that is appropriate will continue, including the discussions on issues relating to the Christian cultural and religious heritage and tradition.

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