Modes of Learning and the Making of Religion. The Norwegian and Finnish Curricula for Confirmation

Abstract

This article examines religious learning in curricula documents for confirmation in Norway and Finland. In the article we ask two questions: (1) What are the modes of religious learning in curricula for religious education and confirmation in Norway and Finland? (2) How do the modes of learning constitute religion in the texts? The analysis is based on a comparative analysis of two Nordic curricula for Christian education and confirmation. From Norway: God Gives – We Share (2010) and from Finland: Life-Faith-Prayer (2002). The findings show that the Finnish document has a dominant logic of belief and establishes a cognitive mode of learning. This mode negotiates a logocentric notion of religion. The Norwegian document has two conflicting modes: the logic of participation and the logic of faith and learning are either a situated practice or inward faith experiences. These modes negotiate religion as practice or religion as an existential issue.

Keywords: Religious learning, curriculum, confirmation, religious education, modes of religion, modes of learning, religion as practice

Introduction

Lately, attention has been given to «religion on the edge» (Bender et al. 2013) and how religion is practiced differently in politics, health, law and education. These perspectives have consequences for rethinking what religion may be. The practice of confirmation is interesting in this context, due to its ambivalence as a border practice between a faith community and the larger society. Confirmation is simultaneously a key educational activity for churches and a significant public and private tradition (Salomonsen and Jensen 2005; Salomonsen 2007). In this article, we ask how religion is constituted and conceptualised in confirmation, by analysing religious learning in the confirmation curricula in Finland and Norway. That is, how is religion done in an ambivalent border practice? Initially, we assume that religion is not an entity that is learned; religion is shaped and done in different ways in the process of learning.
Different modes of religious learning frame and construct what is assumed to be religion. Religious learning does not only change participants, it also changes religion (Afdal 2013).

One area where religious learning and religion are constructed and negotiated is the curriculum for confirmation. As official documents in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Church of Norway, the curricula for confirmation and religious education are sites for encounters between church policies, religious interests groups, political aims, theological and social science research and the civil society. The texts are tools used in development of educational materials and in educational practices. Although there is no causal or linear relationship between curricular texts and educational practice (Afdal 2006), the curricular texts are interesting as conceptual negotiations and textual ordering of reality and, in this case, religion.

This article is based on a comparative analysis of two Nordic curricula for Christian education and confirmation: God Gives – We Share, Norway (The Church of Norway National Council Council 2010) hereby abbriviated (NC 2010) and Life-Faith-Prayer, Finland (The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland Publications of the Church Council 2002) abbreviated (FC 2002). In both cases, the educational practice of confirmation has seen a substantial development with the production of curricula for confirmation and religious education. A comparison enables analyses of similarities and differences between the curricula as well as complexities within each curriculum. We ask two questions: (1) What are the modes of religious learning in curricula for religious education and confirmation in Norway and Finland? (2) How do the modes of learning constitute religion in the texts? As a theoretical entry, we use the metaphors of learning developed by Sfard (1998) and the concepts of the learning subject, tools and activities as sensitising devices in the analysis of modes of religious learning. In the analysis of how religion is made, we use the typology by Woodhead (2011) and the contributions by Bender and others (2013). After reviewing the literature to clarify our theoretical perspectives on learning and religion and discussing methodology, we analyse modes of learning in the Finnish and Norwegian curricula. Finally, implications for the concept of religion are discussed, as is the relationship between modes of learning and the making of religion.

The choice of the confirmation curricula in Finland and Norway as comparative cases was done because they are the two Nordic countries with a high level of national regulation and directed aims towards confirmation (Petterson 2010: 225). Furthermore, they are the only Nordic countries with an official curriculum for Christian education, and they share a relative high percentage of confirmation. They are both similar and different enough to make a good comparison.

Research on confirmation

Research on confirmation has predominantly focused on the ritual perspectives of confirmation (Høeg 2010; Salomonsen and Jensen 2005; Salomonsen 2007), how confirmation work is experienced by the user group, i.e. the confirmands and parents, and
how church employees reflect on confirmation work (Krupka 2010; Schweitzer et al. 2010). Ritual studies of confirmation certainly capture some of the intersection of religious practice within civil society. Salomonsen (2007: 169) argues that the rite of the family celebration, as a unique Scandinavian tradition, is one of the reasons why confirmation has such a strong position in Norway today. One could argue that any research on confirmation is an inquiry of religion in the public sphere due its widespread cultural acceptance in the Nordic countries (Christensen et al. 2010; Krupka and Reite 2010). The first contributions to curriculum research in Christian education in a Norwegian context were Ulstrup Engelsen’s (1998) extensive report. It is an analysis of epistemology and didactics of the various national plans for congregations. The latest contributions is Holmqvist’s (2012) analysis of different views of learning in religious education curricula and Fuglseth, Schmidt and Haakedal’s (2012) analysis of local plans. These are all studies of Norwegian curricula. A comparative analysis of Nordic plans was conducted by Innanen (2010). The study shows how curricula are used by the leaders and professions in congregations. These are all valuable studies, yet a comparison of modes of learning in two official documents for religious education and the consequences for the conception of religion has not been conducted.

Learning and religion: Theoretical aspects

Learning is an elusive, complex and multi-disciplined concept, belonging to the family of frequently used but fuzzy words like religion, culture and politics. Several authors (Greeno 1998; Säljö 2006), however, argue that one can identify a standard account of learning. On this account, learning is an individual and cognitive process. Knowledge is a given substance, epistemic, and is integrated into representative, individual cognitive structures. This account corresponds to the first of Sfard’s famous two metaphors of learning: learning as acquisition (Sfard 1998: 4). The school is the explicit or implicit paradigmatic location and model of learning as acquisition.

Sfard’s second metaphor is learning as participation. The work place, organisations or leisure activities are paradigmatic locations and models for this understanding of learning. Learning is taking place in action and inter-action. This means that learning is extended from the brain to the whole body and from the individual to the collective. Cognition is not seen as primary, but as integrated into action and social practices. Knowledge is understood as practical, as ways of doing more than a thing. Knowledge is therefore situated to the particular social practices and distributed between the different participators (Lave and Wenger 1991).
Our aim is not to discuss the pros and cons of learning theories as such but to use aspects of these theories as sensitising tools in order to analyse the explicit and implicit concepts of learning in the confirmation curricula in Finland and Norway. In order to do that, we will establish three analytical concepts—subject, tools and activities—based on the two learning metaphors above. Learning as acquisition emphasises how the individual subject acquires knowledge either through activities or as a passive reception (Sfard 1998: 6). Yet, learning as participation emphasises how the knowledge is situated in collective activities in which the subject has to participate. Tools can be understood as something to be used by the individual (acquisition) or as mediating tools intrinsic to the collective activities (participation). These concepts are theoretically generated but are loose enough to help trace and construct the different modes of learning in the curricula texts.

Using the first concept, subject, we ask for the learning subject in the curricula. Is it individual or collective, cognitive or acting? The second concept, tools, helps us ask for the artefacts that constitute religious learning in the texts. Are those educational or religious tools, conceptual or material? Using the third concept, activities, we analyse practices that are models or places for learning. Which actions and collective activities are described and prescribed as locations for learning?

Religion is a concept as elusive as learning, and the debate on the concept of religion is enormous. Here, we relate mainly to two rather recent contributions, the article ‘Five Concepts of Religion’ (Woodhead 2011), and anthology Religion on the Edge (Bender et al. 2013). We chose these studies because they provide concise descriptions of various concepts of religion. Equally important, their discussions on religion resonate with our findings of religious learning. While the former contribution analyses how religion is understood in the social sciences, the latter criticises the understanding of religion in the social sciences and offers theoretical and empirical arguments of how the understanding of religion can be fruitfully expanded. Bender et al. (2013) argue that the concept of religion in the social sciences, and religious studies, has been limited by extensively using the United States as a case and context, by being captured by Christo centrism, by not paying sufficient attention to religion outside of congregations, by trying to be scientifically impartial, by not providing critical research and by seeing religion as a good. Woodhead (2011) argues that the understanding of religion in the social sciences can be understood in five conceptual categories: (1) religion as culture

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Metaphors of learning</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
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<tr>
<td>Acquisition</td>
<td>Identifiable entity and content. Independent of context</td>
<td>Individual, cognitive process. One-way, from teacher to pupil</td>
<td>School, ‘to learn outside of context’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Practical. Situated as part of the context and practice</td>
<td>Collective, embodied. Two way process, both teacher and pupil part of the learning process</td>
<td>Organizations, leisure activities, learning is integrated contextual</td>
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emphasising belief and meaning, (2) religion as identity, (3) religion as relationship, (4) religion as practice and (5) religion as power. In this article, we use these different theoretical perspectives as sensitising devices. We do not analyse conceptualisations in research, but we use these perspectives in order to analyse how religion is understood in key texts for religious practice.

Methodological choices

The methodological choices in this article are related to curriculum analysis, Finland and Norway as comparative cases and a thematic analytical strategy. Curricula can be understood as «the modernist enterprise par excellence» (Green 2010: 452). Curricula are then seen as political texts and as instrumental for the implementation of political reforms and scientific knowledge production. A postmodern critique led to the analysis of curricula as multi-voiced texts and discourses (Pinar 1995). However, along with Da Silva (1999) and Green (2010), we understand curricula as both poetics and politics, as textual productions of reality and as sites for power. This means that curricula are not seen as neutral means or carriers of some external reality or knowledge. Curricula in religious education are not only reproducing, for instance, educational or theological knowledge, they are simultaneously sites of, and contributors to, knowledge production (Da Silva 1999: 28–29). This means that curricula are understood as performative, mediating artefacts (Da Silva 1999; Osberg and Biesta 2008; Wertsch 1998); they are meaning-loaded, symbolic and material tools used to act with and to create emerging reality. Curricula are not sources of educational practice as such, but one key tool in educational processes.

We chose a thematic analytical strategy combined with theoretically generated sensitising concepts, subjects, tools and activities (Bryman 2012: 580). Within each of these conceptual categories, we looked for thematic variety, relationships and contradictions. Both texts were coded in Atlas.ti software with deductive (theory-generated) and inductive (data-generated) codes. The codes were then used in a search for patterns and modes of learning. The text was read both digitally and in the published forms. The software helped to manage the vast text material. We developed codes based on the analytical concepts but we also developed codes from the material. For example, wonder and experiences was some of the codes that emerged from the Norwegian text, whereas the theological foundations and a cognitive focus were evident in the Finnish text. The analysis was a constant dialog between the theoretical concepts and the themes generated from the material.

A final point which relates to the validity of the findings, the first author presented the preliminary findings of the analysis in both Finland and Norway. The findings were discussed on two occasions in Finland in front of researchers and practitioners of confirmation. In both cases the feedback was supportive of the findings but they also addressed the gap between the curriculum and the actual confirmation practice. The first author was also informed that a new curriculum was under development in Finland. In Norway, the response affirmed the findings. We are also grateful for the ques-
tions and suggestions we received from the anonymous reviewer and editor which improved our analysis.

Context: Nordic curricula for confirmation

Although the participation rate is declining, the majority of young people in Finland (88 %), and Norway (67 %) choose to participate in the practice of confirmation (Schweitzer et al. 2010: 141, 65). Confirmation is a nexus of concerns. As a traditional practice and ritual, part of civil society and a private and public practice, it is an economic event and a key part of the educational program of churches. Confirmation gathers a significant number of youth, who are more or less familiar with religious activities and resources. These features make the practice of confirmation an interesting case for an inquiry into religion in modern society. Religion has to be negotiated in the nexus and between the different concerns.

Both curricula are developed as national plans with the aim of providing frames and resources for local congregational plans (FC 2002: 5; NC 2010: 4). The Norwegian curriculum was developed from three previous curricula: two confirmation curricula (1978 and 1998) and the Plan for Baptismal Instruction (1991). Changes in the formal link between the Church of Norway and the parliament brought about the religious education reform in 2003. The state’s funding of religious education for all religious communities followed this reform. The reform has undertaken a new segment of education within Church of Norway, including a new curriculum in 2010. Confirmation is no longer understood as a separate activity but as part of a comprehensive Christian education. The aim of the curriculum is to provide Christian education for all baptised from the ages of 0–18. Approximately 65 percent of Norway’s 15-year-olds are confirmed.

The context of Finland is somewhat different. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has a higher degree of autonomy, as it was formally separated from the state in 1919 and is entitled to collect taxes and appoint its own bishops (Käariäinen et al. 2009: 11). Yet, the church has a status of a folk church and provides services such as weddings and funerals. In 2001, the first curriculum for confirmation training was published. The Finnish word for confirmation is rippikoulu which directly translates into ‘confession-schools’, i.e. confirmation as a school you attend for confession and learning the catechism. In everyday discourse, one would talk about going to ‘rippikoulu’ and not to confirmation, which would be the usual term in Norway (Innanen 2010: 51; Schweitzer et al. 2010: 140).

The texts we have used for the analysis are the official curriculum documents. From Norway we have used the official Norwegian curriculum, *Gud gir – vi deler: Plan for trosopplæring* (2010) and the official English translation, *God Gives – We Share: Plan for Christian Education* (2010). From Finland we have used the official Swedish text, *livet-tron-bönen: Plan för konfirmandarbetet* (2002) together with the official English version: *life-faith-prayer: Confirmation Training Plan* (2002). We have not used the Finnish text and this can present a problem regarding different use of words. However,
Swedish is one of the official languages in Finland. All the quotes and references in this article are from the English versions for both Norway and Finland.

The analysis clearly reveals differences regarding the notion of learning and the activities of confirmation. Concerning these differences, it is important to contextualize the two curricula. The Finnish document (2001) and the Norwegian document (2010) are developed nearly ten years apart. Arguably, the Norwegian text has incorporated some of the changes within religious education. The context of religious education in Norway has changed with the religious education reform. Consequently, Norway has one curriculum which incorporates the age groups from 0–18, placing confirmation as one section of a larger religious educational program. In Finland however, confirmation is still regarded as one distinct phase. Another difference between the two countries is the organization of confirmation. In Norway, confirmation consists of teaching sessions at church with an additionally weekend or one week long camp. In Finland, camps are to a higher degree part of the confirmation training. However, the material for this article is the texts for confirmation not the practice. The analysis is structured in two main parts: the Finnish plan and the Norwegian plan. This is followed by a comparison of the texts. Finally, we summarise the findings and different modes of learning.

Finnish confirmation training plan

Subject

A separate chapter (2.2) in the curriculum explicitly explains the educational principles for the confirmation program: «Learning only occurs when the student has processed the subject matter and organized it in his or her memory» (FC 2002: 11). Here, learning is understood as an individual endeavour and as cognition. Knowledge is formulated as «subject matter», that is, as a substance to be transported from «outside» to «inside». Learning is an active process of the individual mind where the subject matter is cognitively processed and stored in the memory.

This account of learning, using the concepts of processing, subject matter and memory, has a cognitive and constructivist character. In constructivist developmental psychology, Piaget has been one of the classic theorists (see Säljö 2001). The key idea is that the human mind organises experiences into established cognitive schemes, parallel to reorganising the system of schemes. A consequence is that learning should be understood as processes of reconstructions, where new experiences are framed and constituted by existing, cognitive schemes. The Finnish curriculum understands cognition as follows:

In the process of learning a person analyzes new material with regard to previously accumulated information. Thus, it is important in confirmation training to build upon the foundation of knowledge that the confirmand has previously acquired concerning Christian faith (FC 2002: 12).

This quote is typical in emphasising the individual confirmand; it is the individual who carries a certain amount of previous accumulated knowledge. Each individual confir-
mand enters confirmation training with varying degrees of religious knowledge. It is the task of the confirmation work to chart the extent of this individual knowledge (FC 2002: 12). Still, the learning processes also require active participation by the individual or the group. The subject matter needs to be processed, and it is important to distinguish essential features in order to help the learner in this process (FC 2002: 12).

The Finnish curriculum seeks to incorporate the cultural challenges of the confirmand. The text explicates how the everyday life of the confirmand is often marked by a search for a new identity and a growth towards adulthood (FC 2002: 13–14). In doing so, the Finnish curriculum recognizes confirmand’s life world issues outside the congregation. In the same paragraphs however, the confirmand’s psychological development is presented in regard to religious learning.

When a child’s thinking is still somewhat confined to the concrete, a teenager is usually capable of conceptualizing. This development also contributes to religious thinking. A teenager has the ability to understand the metaphors, parables and symbolics of the Bible, and thus gain a deeper understanding of Christian faith. (FC 2002: 14).

The focus is on the confirmand’s ability to facilitate religious thinking. According to the Finnish document, the teenager has reached the developmental stage for abstract thinking. The curriculum underscores how religious thinking is important for religious learning and consequently the teaching needs to connect to religious thinking.

The Finnish curriculum also highlights the collective group aspect, but the primacy is on the individual confirmand’s cognitive processes. The group aspect is important for creating a motivating factor the individual confirmand, and it is seen as the context for individual learning. The teacher needs to pay special attention to group processes in order to create a positive and open-minded atmosphere (FC 2002: 15). Group dynamics are, however, instrumental in individual comprehension. The overall educational goals for the confirmand are to organise and evaluate what he or she has learned, relate this knowledge to an overall comprehension of life and discover the personal significance of faith (FC 2002: 27).

Facilitating learning is understood as a one way directional process where the confirmand is at the receiving end. The curriculum does not open for the active confirmand or the confirmand as a resource for changing the church’s practice or tradition. Knowledge about the confirmand’s world is recognised as valuable, not as a resource but as a context to which religious knowledge can be related and connected: «The substance of faith of the church offers the confirmand new perspective[s] in relation to his or her own values and choices» (FC 2002: 24). In sum, the focus in the Finnish curriculum is the individual. The collective is important, not as a learning subject, but as a context for individual learning. The learning individual is understood as a primarily rational and thinking subject.
Tools
The Finnish curriculum suggests both religious and pedagogical tools as the means for religious learning. They vary in character from material and action-oriented to abstract and conceptual.

The writing of a journal and the activity of repetition are suggested as fruitful pedagogical tools. Religious tools are the Bible, the text of the Catechism, the hymnal, prayer, worship and music. They are all described as tools belonging to the congregational life of the church: «Among the basic skills of confirmation training are, for example, the ability to use the Bible, the Catechism and the hymnal, and to compose oneself and participate in worship and prayer» (FC 2002: 23). These are material (Bible, hymnal) and action-oriented (worship, prayer) tools. It is, furthermore, striking that the curriculum does not describe how these tools may be used. Worship, prayer and use of Bible are more the result of using tools than objects the confirmands may use to maneuver in life.

The religious tools are ambivalent. On the one hand, they are described as something that may be used in order to create something; on the other hand, they are presented as frozen and given entities that are the goal of the educational activity. The conceptual tool of Catechism is, however, primary, not just as a text but as a structure for the confirmation program: «The three principal parts of the Catechism—the Ten Commandments, the creed, and the Lord’s Prayer—create the structural foundation for confirmation training» (FC 2002: 9). Throughout the document, the three parts of Catechism—The Ten Commandments, the creed and the Lord’s Prayer—signify an overall logic for the confirmation work as life, faith and prayer. Catechism is presented as both the title and the content for confirmation training. Furthermore, the Catechism provides the structure of the content of teaching. The fundamental components in religion and religious education are life, faith and prayer. The life of the confirmands, the content of the Christian faith and prayer are like three pillars holding up the work of the church, or three baskets from which participants may pick material as they construct the overall schemes for teaching and learning (FC 2002: 19). The Catechism is therefore a primary and constitutive tool in confirmation education.

Activities
The following analysis aims at identifying the paradigmatic learning places and models in the Finnish curriculum. In other words, where religious learning is assumed to take place is connected to the text’s view of learning.

The Finnish document displays few activities. The word activity (Swedish version) is used only five times. The activity for confirmation is a school activity. But the document emphasizes an active participation in this confirmation school. Subsequently, the word participation has a higher frequency, about 36 times (Swedish version). The
Finnish curriculum encourages the confirmands to participate in the learning activities. The text highlights that the confirmands should be included in the discussion of the goals for confirmation: «The greater the role of the confirmands is in setting the goals and developing the activities of the group, the better their commitment and motivations will be during confirmation training» (FC 2002: 16). In this quote, the text presents a contrasting view regarding learning as a purely individual and cognitive endeavour. Furthermore, the curriculum opens for both the confirmand and their parents as partners in developing the goals for confirmation because confirmation is a school for life. This is an example of how curriculums are multi voiced. However, the text reminds the reader that although it is important to include the youth and their families, confirmation is a school of the congregation where the prospects of faith in the church are emphasized (FC 2002: 16).

The concept of school is used to describe aspects of confirmation education. Confirmation education is conceived as «a school for life», where the needs and expectations for the youth and their families have to be met (FC 2002: 16). Confirmation is a school of the congregation: «However, it is also important to draw attention to the fact that confirmation training is a school of the congregation where the prospects of faith in the church are emphasized» (FC 2002: 16).

The text positions the confirmand both as an outsider who needs support to be included in the regular congregational activities and at the same time includes the confirmand as an equal discussion partner regarding the goals for learning. The passages concerning confirmation as school of life and school of the congregation reveals a tension in where the base for religious learning should be. However, the main learning direction according to text is on the confirmand taking part in the activities of the congregation: «In this way confirmation training and the Confirmation ceremony guide young people into the fellowship of the congregation and into participating in its activities» (FC 2002: 8).

The curriculum emphasises that the basic practices of worship in the congregation should be considered a natural foundation for the organisation of worship life in confirmation training, so that the confirmand will also familiarise himself or herself with the common Sunday services of the home congregation (FC 2002: 31).

The Norwegian curriculum

In the following paragraphs, we analyse the Norwegian curriculum. The Norwegian text is characterised with a more narrative approach than a traditional plan. In contrast to the Finnish text, which has a very structured presentation of theological and pedagogical principles, the Norwegian one presents a bricolage of various elements.

Subject

Chapter 1 and 2 outlines the basic philosophy of the curriculum. Narratives from Christian educational practices are juxtaposed with philosophical and theological statements. The text presents the foundation and characteristics of Christian education in a
form that resembles slogans or headings: «The foundation of Christian education can be described from the title, WE SHARE: WE SHARE faith and wonder, WE SHARE Christian traditions and values, WE SHARE experiences and fellowship, WE SHARE hope and love» (NC 2010: 7).

The subject for religious education is not the individual child or youth, but a we. The pronoun «we» is used 111 times in the document. The subject in the Norwegian text is collective, and it is a relational, interactive, and moral we. We is, however, used in a variety of meanings, for instance, the worldwide community of the Christian church, a small group of the local congregation, the number of members of the Church of Norway, children and youth (NC 2010: 7). With a collective notion, the subject is abstract in character, and the different uses make it somewhat difficult to understand who and what the learning subjects are in the text. Since the subject is not the isolated child or youth, traditional dichotomies, such as pupil and teacher, are dissolved (NC 2010: 7).

The subject is not primarily a «thinking I», but an «acting and interacting we». The collective subject needs to be engage in an activity of exploration in order to learn:

When we join together in exploring the sources of our faith and the ways in which it has been expressed, we are at the same time both recipients of the church’s help and care and participants and co-workers in its ministry (NC 2010: 8).

The emphasis on the acting and the interacting «we», results in an emphasis on activities. The interacting «we» are identified in and with activities to the degree that activities themselves become the subjects of religious learning. The activity itself erases the roles as recipients, participants and co-workers. According to the text, the hierarchy of newcomers opposed to old-timers, teachers opposed to pupils and adult opposed to children is levelled out through their common activity.

Two more points can be made. Firstly, the learning subject is not only on the receiving end of religious learning and knowledge, the learning we is a participating and co-constructing subject. Secondly, the activities are described as «exploring faith». The collective learner is an exploring and searching one, and it is searching for «faith». Faith seems to be the essence of religion. Faith in the Norwegian curriculum is different from the Finnish belief. Beliefs concern the cognitive content of religion, that is, convictions about, for instance, the transcendent, the world, time and the human character. Faith concerns the performative and existential aspects of religion but not its substance.

In sum, the Norwegian curriculum uses a collective notion of subject or learner. The collective ‘we’ is an acting and interacting learner who emphasises action prior to cognition and the collective prior to the individual in learning. However, the learning «we» is elusive and abstract, and it tends to be identified with the religious activities themselves.
Tools

As in the Finnish case, the main learning tools in the Norwegian curriculum are abstract concepts. Conceptual tools are described as constitutive for the learning processes. They are vital for change, or change is taking place through them. Yet, where the Finnish plan presents dogmatic stringency through the concept of catechism, the Norwegian text relates processes of learning to the concept of experience in various ways.

In the section with a cluster of narratives (pages 6–10), experience is emphasised as a key tool for the learner to connect religious stories to understanding of religious practice (NC 2010: 6). Experience is advocated by the text as a key that opens up new insight. Several of the narratives in the section present children exploring the church, the communion or liturgy. The texts assume that through the children’s own, unguided exploration, religious learning is taking place. These narratives are presented as a model for Christian education (NC 2010: 38). Learning happens in the immediate, unmediated experience between the learner and the religious phenomenon, with no or minimal inference of adults, pastors or catechists. As stated in the plan: «we learn by experience and by participating without restrictions» (NC 2010: 7).

The emphasis on experience pulls learning in a somewhat different direction than the account of the ‘interactive learning we’. Learning by experience puts the individual in front as the learning, experiencing subject in an implicit way. The collective activities have a role as a secondary context for individual experience (Jarvis 2008). On the one hand, learning processes are framed as abstract and de-contextualised as existential encounters between the learner and religious phenomena. Learning is understood as a somewhat mysterious event, beyond educational planning and control. On the other hand, the abstract concept of experience gets a mediational role and function between the learning individual and religious phenomena. Through the recognition and facilitating of experience learning may happen: «New experiences open up new insights into the abundance that Christian baptism contains» (NC 2010: 5).

«Wondering» is emphasised as a specific form of experiences in the curricula. The text uses «wondering» as part of the changing processes of religious learning. The curriculum argues that wondering should take place in religious education because of its ability to develop spiritual growth (NC 2010: 20). Wondering is emphasised as the tool that opens a deeper understanding of mysteries: «This was the three-year-olds’ wondering around the crib. God came, unprotected and unassuming and became one of us. That day, the children showed the way deeper into the mystery of Christmas» (NC 2010: 8). The children share the experiences of standing around the Christmas crib, and this experience of wondering opens up for new insight that enables them to show other religious participants the way into «the mystery of Christmas». The children become the teachers, and the adults become students. Religious knowledge is not an aspect that should be transmitted from one generation to the other or from teacher to student; it constitutes existential experiences that each individual can share with the collective of «we share». Epistemic authority is related to authentic experiences, not to scholarly competence, and personal authority is distributed between the participants, independent of formal role.
Although experience is used and understood as an overall and primary tool, other more secondary tools interact with and qualify experience. Examples are the Bible, sacraments and creeds, word of faith and symbols (NC 2010: 9). Baptism is a recurring tool described as both the concrete act of baptism and as an abstract concept, as «something to live in». «Christian education should equip children and young people to live in their baptism» (NC 2010: 5).

The main learning tool in the Norwegian curriculum is experience. Experience also takes the shape of wondering. Other tools are also used, but these are of secondary order, establishing encounters between the learner and religious phenomena, that is, situations where experience may open up for learning. A somewhat different account of learning appears than the interactive we. It can be read partly in the light of theories of experiential learning (Jarvis 2009; Kolb 1984) and partly in the light of the romantic and naturalistic educational tradition with emphasis on inductive and unguided learning (see Säljö 2001: 63).

**Activity**

Confirmation activities are presented as one stage in a lifelong process of Christian education (NC 2010: 5): «Systematic and comprehensive Christian education is a continuous process in which previous knowledge and experience is related to new and deeper knowledge and experience» (NC 2010: 14). As mentioned, the curriculum concerns ages 0–18, and it prescribes a structured continuum of 315 hours of educational activities. The continuum is divided in three stages in the curriculum, ages 0–5, 6–12 and 13–18 (confirmation training is given an own chapter.) Some of the activities that are suggested are baptism club for six-year-olds, celebration of first day at school, sleeping over in church, camps, responsibility for tasks, exploration walks, live-at-home camps, clubs and special interest groups for music, singing, dance, drama, outdoor activities, sport and digital media (NC 2010: 21).

The Norwegian curriculum puts a great emphasis on activities. The word activity or activities are used 125 times in the English version of the document. A basic idea is that there should be a continuum of activities covering all age groups: «When planning, one can begin with existing activities, then the ‘holes’ can be plugged until there are activities for the whole age-span 0–18 years» (NC 2010: 37). This means that activities become vital in themselves. The curriculum emphasises the structure and comprehensiveness of the activities more than their purpose.

So far, it is clear that the paradigmatic place for learning in the Norwegian text is neither school, nor work. Instead, confirmation is understood as equivalent to and, in a certain sense, as leisure activities. Children learn in football clubs, in music bands, in youth clubs, and they learn in the same way in confirmation activities. In some parts of the text, confirmation is more like football, that is, the confirmand is participating in order to learn a particular activity. In other parts, confirmation seems more like a youth club. There are numerous activities, and the confirmands are assumed to learn in and from the activities. Still, there is no clear purpose or direction of the activities. In football, most players practice in order to become a better team and win games. In a music
band, the participants usually practice in order to play better music and to perform. The activities have a direction and a purpose, and this purpose is embedded in and directs the practices. Most of the conformation activities as they are described in the Norwegian curriculum do not have this clear purpose and direction in extending meetings and practices. The purpose is, on one hand, to have a good time here and now and, on the other, to be involved in activities that can facilitate spiritual experiences.

How do these activities qualify as religious and congregational activities? The activities have no explicit religious purpose. The curriculum, however, uses abstract concepts that qualify them as religious. The concepts are referred to as «elements in the content of Christian education». Examples of concepts are: the faith and tradition in the church, interpreting life, mastering the art of living, Christian faith and practice together and the love of God in Jesus Christ (NC 2010: 13–14). The Norwegian curriculum uses a much more abstract theological language compared to the Finnish text. The following quote illustrates this: «The heart of faith, the love of God in Jesus Christ, must influence all activities, while various aspects of the contents of Christian education are expounded systematically in different activities and contexts» (NC 2010: 14). The activity is a part of religious education, not because it has a religious purpose of some kind, but because it «must» be characterised by «heart of faith» and «the love of God in Jesus Christ». There is little or no reflection on how the activities educationally can facilitate the mentioned abstract theological qualities. There seems to be a schism between activities on one hand and an abstract theological language on the other. The theological language points towards individual and existential spiritual «faith» experiences.

Curricula are multi-voiced, and two exceptions to the interpretation above should be mentioned. First, the Norwegian text does argue for content in terms of the Bible, creed, the Lord’s Prayer and the sacraments (NC 2010: 9). Secondly, the appendix, Tools for Making a Local Plan, presents themes for activities and key Bible passages according to age groups. In both of these cases, the religious character is less abstract than in the rest of the text, and it resembles parts of the Finnish curriculum.

Leisure activities are the paradigmatic mode of activity in the Norwegian curriculum. The activities themselves have great significance; the ideal is a continuum of activities to all age groups from ages 0–18. The purpose of the activities is not made explicit, and abstract theological ‘content’ is used to qualify the activities as religious.

Findings: A summary

The Finnish plan follows a structured form. Theological and pedagogical principles are made explicit and serve as foundations for a coherent, logic pattern for confirmation education and learning. Lutheran catechism, as the tool, identifies the subject matter that needs to be cognitively processed by the individual confirmand, as the subject. Learning is assumed to take place at a decontextual ‘school’, and the educational rationale of school constitutes processes of learning. At the same time the Finnish text address the confirmands’ lives and seeks to include their perspectives into confirma-
tion training. In so doing, the text presents a contrasting voice that emphasizes participation in confirmation as school of life; still the primacy for confirmation is arguably a school of the congregation.

The Norwegian curriculum stands in contrast with the Finnish plan, with a more ambiguous structure, abstract argumentation and narrative approach. The subject of learning is collective interaction and participation in various activities. The main learning tool is experience, in situations where learners have encounters with religious phenomena. Learning is here seen as experiential, existential, unguided, individual and mysterious. The place and model for learning is the leisure activity. Learning is partly taking place in participation, and the activities are partly understood as external contexts that provide opportunities for individual, experiential learning. These findings are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of three conceptual areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Norwegian</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Finnish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collective and interactive</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Individual and cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>Catechism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wondering</td>
<td></td>
<td>Frozen religious tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious abstract and material artefacts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Detailed pedagogical tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure activities</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>School activity, both school of life and school of the congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place to participate and context for individual, experiential learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Place to be socialised for the congregation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the final part of the article, we discuss the findings in three steps. Firstly, we reformulate the findings into different modes of religious learning. Secondly, we discuss how religion is shaped and done in these different modes. Thirdly, we discuss how the different conceptions of religion can be understood as negotiated in a border practice such as confirmation.

Modes of religious learning

The mode of learning in the Finnish curriculum shares many characteristics with Sfard’s (1998) ‘acquisition’ metaphor. Religious knowledge is understood as an entity or commodity that needs to be transmitted to and acquired by the individual confirmand. The confirmand then processes the knowledge into some kind of cognitive structure and is able to transfer this new knowledge to novel and different situations. We call this learning mode the logic of belief. A key characteristic of this mode is that religious knowledge is assumed to change the confirmands, but the confirmands are not changing the religious knowledge. Religious knowledge is decontextualised, codified and systematised in key texts. Learning is a differentiated activity and religious knowledge is differentiated from religious actions and from other knowledge spheres.
The Norwegian curriculum has a quite different approach to learning and knowledge. As the analysis shows, the text is complex, and different modes of learning are in play. We identify two modes. The first is Sfard’s participation mode; we call it the logic of participation. Religious learning is understood as doing more than cognition, and learning is understood as taking place between confirmands, not within each individual. Religion is an enacted rather than a decontextual codified system. Religion is not a thing – it is done. This means that in the logic of participation activities are not done in order for the confirmands to learn religion; the activities are religion. Simultaneously, a second, partly contradictory mode is in play in the Norwegian text. We call this the logic of faith. In this mode, the activities are transformed to sites where confirmands may be existentially wondering and may experience faith. This also changes religion, but in another direction than the logic of participation.

The making of religion

How is religion made in the three different learning modes? In the logic of belief mode, religion takes shape as an archetype of modern protestant Christianity. The primary mode of religion is language and texts, a religious core is identified in historical dogmatic authoritative texts, religion is more or less internally coherent lingual system and this system represents a given transcendental reality. The textual system can be cognitively learnt, and it is an individual question whether to adopt the religious language as a representation of one’s own beliefs about a transcendent reality. Furthermore, religion is in principle highly differentiated in the sense that religious texts are not interpreted as more valid in spheres other than the religious. They are beliefs about God and transcendence and about the mysteries and borderlines of immanence, not authoritative texts for politics, economy, health or science. However, internal authority is related to key texts and to professional or personal competence in interpreting these texts. There is a teacher and there are students; there is a more or less given religious content and there is the life world of the confirmands. In the Finnish text, there are few if any traces of authority going from students to teachers and from life world to religious content. Such a making of religion does of course not exclude other characteristics of religion, like actions, interactions, emotions, aesthetics and so on. The point is that texts and language are primary. This account of religion resembles Woodhead’s (2011: 123) category «religion as belief», and definition of religion as «sincerely-held religious, moral and ethical beliefs» or «as beliefs asserted in an ‘authoritative’ sacred text» and «classic formulations of doctrine and practice» (Sullivan 2005, quoted by Woodhead 2011: 123). We would like to emphasise that this mode of religion is based on a textual construction. How religion is made in Finnish confirmation activities is another empirical question.

In the logic of participation mode religion is best understood as practice (Woodhead 2011: 132–134). Religion is not a thing or an encoded textual core, but something that is done, made and enacted. Texts are understood in use as are rituals, interactions, symbols, buildings, music and so on. Religious practices are where religious tools or artefacts are used in different activities. For the Norwegian curriculum, it is vital to
facilitate sites and activities where religion can be done and where participation is possible for confirmands. This means that religious artefacts are not understood as representations of some transcendent reality, but as tools used in order to navigate the world. At the same time, the religious tools and artefacts can expand the world and dissolve the separation between a transcendent and an immanent reality. Authority is distributed between the participants; everybody is simultaneously student and teacher. Practices and participants constitute religious artefacts, and religious artefacts constitute practices and participants. This mode of religion as practice is related to the understanding of religion as everyday life (Ammerman 2013; McGuire 2008). In the Norwegian curriculum, religion as practice is limited to congregational activities. However, religious tools and artefacts are used in a variety of activities and at different sites. In this sense, religion is done (differently) in for instance politics, health and law and in schools, jails and hospitals.

In the logics of faith religion is made into an existential issue. Religion is purified, emptied for content and placed in the unempirical inner depths of the individual. This means that pure religion can only be described in abstract and non-empirical terms. Religion is loosely connected to religious artefacts and tools. This mode of religion is of more general and universal kind, constituted by human wondering about the depths and mysteries of life and related to inner, individual experiences of true existence; that is faith. Authority is located in the individual. This mode of religion is related to «spiritualities of life» (Heelas and Woodhead 2005), even though this concept is constructed as a contrast to religion. It is also related to the understanding of religion as individual experience (Jarvis 2008; Woodhead 2011).

Negotiation

Our final argument is that these modes of religious learning and of religion are conditioned by negotiations. In these curriculum texts, religion is negotiated in the context of a border practice, i.e. confirmation. How is religion negotiated between confirmation as a civic event on one hand and as a key religious educational activity on the other? It is possible to argue that two kinds of negotiations are taking place in the two texts?

In the Finnish curriculum, the negotiation has resulted in a religion that is differentiated and put at a distance. On the one hand, religion is delimited and does not interfere extensively with other spheres in people’s lives. However, this negotiation involves a tension with some parts of the text emphasizes the confirmands lives, but the primacy is on a religion which is confined to the congregation. The confirmands get a decontextual education of religion and the choice of further participation is left open. The Finnish solution is a combination of a strong religious core and decontextual participation.

The Norwegian curriculum negotiates religion differently. Religion is not differentiated in the same way as in the Finnish text; religion is put in a hybrid mix with walking tours, dance and dinners. Religion is not put at a distance – religion is participation. However, the activities are open – they have no explicit religious purpose and
do not involve extensive religious tools and artefacts. Religion, as activity, is for everyone. The same goes for religion as faith. Faith is the existential, human wondering—a common human question. The Norwegian negotiation can therefore be understood as in many ways as the opposite of the Finnish one: extensive participation framed within religion as common and general.

To conclude, the analyses of both curriculum texts show that religion can be done quite differently when constituted by different modes of religious learning. The Finnish plan pertains to an individualistic mode of religious learning. It is the individual confrmand’s mind that needs to process the subject matter of Catechism. Religion becomes a logical and rational belief system. It is opposed by a strong collective mode of religious learning in the Norwegian text, which establishes religion through participation.

Note

1 ‘The Catechism’ in this text refers to the official booklet approved in General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 1999. It is in accordance with Luther’s Small Catechism.

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