From Dialogue to Trialogue:
A Sociocultural Learning Perspective on Classroom Interaction

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Abstract
Dialogues in multireligious public schools do not run smoothly by simply gathering a plural group of learners in the same classroom. Classroom studies show that many conversations go on in circles around provocative statements from a few students creating a debate to make the lesson pass quickly to avoid the teacher from teaching. The discussion in this article will be based in a sociocultural perspective on learning and addressing the teacher's responsibility to facilitate the dialogue whether the degree of diversity she faces in Religious Education (RE) is high or low. Her task is to achieve a development of the dialogue from a repetitive exercise towards a learning experience. Dialogue is usually understood as an encounter between two persons exchanging views, in an oral dia-logue. The trialogue is defined by an intentional extension of the dialogue by introducing a mediating tool between the two persons, a third 'voice'. The third voice might be a material artefact or a practical task. The mediating tool is a cultural entrenched tool which makes the dialogue more informed and creates a common ground for negotiation. The teacher is the one that sets up the rules for the dialogue in the classroom, creates a safe space, and chooses what educational material to give attention. There is a need to discuss some age specific strategies on how to facilitate this informed dialogue or trialogue during compulsory education in the ages of 6-15.

Keywords: dialogical education, informed dialogue/ trialogue, multi-religious-classrooms, RE-teaching, empirical educational practice, sociocultural learning theories, learning artefacts

Introduction

Studies from Religious Education (RE) classrooms show that repetitive dialogue or dialogue restricted by prejudices from media or everyday conversations are echoed inside schools (Buchardt 2007; Knauth 2009; Osbeck & Lied 2012). The students bring in stereotypic views on themes like Islamic terror, belief in fate or anti-Semitic statements to the classroom, and the teacher shows lack of competence on how to handle these behaviour patterns. In secular settings like in most of Europe, dialogue on religion can be difficult both for teachers and pupils due to a lack of understanding of religious phenomena. As teacher educator in RE classrooms at all stages in compulsory education during more than two decades, I may confirm these studies. Even though the general picture is that most RE-lessons are met by interest and involvement of the students, the problem on how to avoid repetitive and negative behaviour in RE-classrooms is well known among teachers, and this discussion has therefore the teacher in focus. The teacher is responsible for the interaction in her classroom and has need for strategies to facilitate a more fruitful interaction. Theories on dialogue or discourse limit the focus on the verbal interaction between the students and here the scope will be widened by the use of sociocultural theory on learning. The mediating tools, the situation, the interaction in the classroom and the negotiation will be brought into the discussion.

The research question in this study is: How can a dialogue develop into a trialogue informed by socio-cultural learning theory?

Research status is that dialogical models for RE discussed in the research literature focus on organisation of religious education in either separate or multireligious groups (Alberts 2007; Lied 2009; Skeie 2006; Sterkens 2001; Weisse 1999; 2008) or schools (Zonne 2006). Principle discussions on curriculum, subject models, on the presentation of religions and worldviews, and empirical descriptive studies have been done (ter Avest, Jozsa, Knauth, Rosón & Skeie 2009; Ipgrave 2003; Iversen 2012; Jackson 2004; 2009; 2003; Lied 2004; von der Lippe 2010; O'Grady 2009; Skeie 2008; Skeie & Weisse 2008). These studies mainly focused on lower secondary education. The dialogue concept in the classroom has been discussed in relation to dialogue between adult representatives of religious communities or traditions (Leganger-Krogstad 2003). School is a place for cooperation and diapractice. In discussions on dialogue in RE, the idea of interreligious dialogue among

grown-up repre-senttatives, has too often been put up as an ideal. This is an ideal that is all too sophisticated. Learners in the classroom ought *not* to be treated as repre-sentatives of different religious stands, as their ability to articulate their view is limited especially among the youngest. Rather few have been interested in doing empirical studies on primary education (Ipgrave 2002; Lied 2004), and there is limited interest in discussing how the teacher profession could act to enhance a fruitful dialogue (Bell 2008; Ipgrave 2007; Lied 1996). Dialogue is mostly considered a two-way communication, and the perspectives of sociocultural learning theory has not informed the discussion.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

Traditionally learning is considered being a cognitive process of an individual kind. Learning results are considered individual achievements processed by the human brain. Anna Sfard says that the dominating metaphor for this understanding of learning is *the acquisition metaphor* when the brain is considered a storehouse for bits and pieces of knowledge' (Sfard 1998). According this view knowledge exists out there for the brain to acquire, store and process like a computer filing, linking and configuring the pieces to logic structures (1998:5).

In contrast, sociocultural theory learning is considered a social process totally dependent on tools and interaction (Wertsch 1991; Cole 1996). Human understanding depends on the tools in use as mediating artefacts. The tools mediate the reality and help us interpret and construct an understanding. Language is the dominant tool. Language is a cultural tool and shaped in social interaction. The Soviet psychologist and semiotician Lev Semenovič Vygotsky (1896-1934) has heavily influenced this sociocultural learning theory. When a child is adopting language from its parents, it interacts with culture. In the beginning the speech act is only imitating a pattern of sounds, later on the sounds and their meaning are combined (Vygotsky 1981). Actions or play in the life of a child are often instructed by the child's inner speech. Cultural tools permit humans 'by the aid of extrinsic stimuli, to control their behaviour from outside' (1981: 40). In the monologue children make use of cultural tools to keep the order of the play or instruct themselves. Vygotsky here differs from Jean Piaget's image of the 'egocentric inner speech':

> Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane and then on the psychological. First it appears between people as in interpsychological <u>category</u> and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true to voluntary attention, logic memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition (Vygotsky 1981: 163).

The cultural signs and tools a child makes use of do not only affect the content of thinking, but the structure and system of thinking: 'The system of signs restructures the whole psychological process and enables the child to master her environment' (Vygotsky 1978: 35).

As language is culturally entrenched, it differs according to family, dialect, language family and context. The grammar is in itself culturally loaded. Whether the language has position forms for speaking to elderly people or not, depends on social culture. Some languages have many verbal forms that explain actions in relation to time. Other languages lack such verbal forms and need to use other grammar forms to explain the difference between long-lasting and incident actions or simultaneous actions. Word richness for special situations or natural phenomena is culturally dependent. The language decides how the child structures her experiences. Vygotsky states it this way: 'The social dimension of consciousness is primary in time and in fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary' (Vygotsky 1978).

Learning in this way is genuinely social and happens through the use of cultural and mediating tools. The cooperation between the learner, the teacher and the tool is a typical learning situation according to Vygotsky, and forms a triangle. Artefacts are not only material things but are culturally entrenched, which means they are suitable to open up for negotiation and meaning. The meaning is not given once and for all, but is open for interpretation and negotiation. Some tools are even intelligent devices and nearly self-instructive, like digital reading tablets which children can operate before they even can talk.

An understanding of Vygotsky's *zones of proximal development* is that the teacher's job is to stay ahead of the learner and *scaffold* the learner to be able to enhance the next step in the learning process, first in cooperation with the helper, secondly without the helper (1978:86-90). The scaffold is

temporal. The scaffold is often the artefact the teacher brings into the process to visualise or concretize the issue at stake. In a classroom situation it functions similarly. When two students enter a dialogue in the classroom the teacher's job is the same, she is responsible for choosing the tool to enhance a trialogical situation to help them move to the next step in the learning process.

Situated and Context-related

Sfard says that the traditional second metaphor for learning is *participation,* which means that learning is considered a move from apprentice to participant in a community by the help of the expert (1985: 7). The problem with this metaphor is that learning is often considered an automatic effect of the participation or the doing. When a practical task is to be learned participation, repetition and training might function, but in most cases verbalisation through explanations alongside practice is necessary for the newcomer. Sfard's article is on 'the dangers of choosing just one [metaphor for learning]'.

Sociocultural learning theory represents a third view where learning is understood as *knowledge creation*, which means that new knowledge is created in every learning situation. Life is so complex, that every new situation asks for new knowledge. Learning is therefore genuinely situated. Transformation of knowledge into new situations is demanding. The problem solving in one situation is not easily transferred to others. The tools in use, the context and situation often decide the student's capability to make learning trajectories. A learning trajectory refers to the use of knowledge in one situation or context being transferred to another. It is a long knowledge trajectory from the professor's desk at his or her office dealing with complicated mathematical problems with his or her books and computer to buying paint in the decorating shop. It might happen that the professor asks the steward in the shop to work out how many litres of paint is needed to remake the living room. Not using the regular professorial tools means that the professor acts as a regular costumer in the shop, not like an expert. Learning is considered genuinely situated, which means that the learning situation needs to be as authentic and related to the learner's everyday life as possible. The students need solid life competences to be able to make use of them in complex new situations through knowledge creation.

Aspects of the Dialogue Concept

The different aspects of the dialogue concept as it has been understood in relation to RE in Norway is investigated (Leganger-Krogstad, 2003). I found a continuum between an action side and a verbal side of dialogue, and made a distinction between co-operation or diapractice (Rasmussen 1998), the necessary dialogue in everyday life at school (Leirvik 2001), exchange of ideas in informal settings, dialogue from an honest interest to understand the other, dialogue as a working method (Nicolaisen 2001), philosophical dialogue and spiritual dialogue. Dialogical education can be sketched out in a diagram where different aspects of the dialogue concept are differentiated from an action side towards a verbal side as illustrated in the diagram below.

In this diagram the most demanding type of dialogue on the verbal side is called spiritual dialogue (Leirvik 2001), and this is of a sort you cannot plan for in education. The spiritual dialogue is the personal encounter between individuals of different beliefs and religion that results in a long lasting change. Spiritual dialogue can of course take place in a classroom; it holds, however, the ideal from the interreligious dialogue among representatives on a religious community level or on political level (Eidsvåg, Lindholm & Sveen 2004; Leirvik 2011). Philosophical dialogue as it is developed in Norway is mainly a way of training a logic rational way of thinking and can make use of philosophical theory from the history of philosophy[1].

When going back to this diagram with sociocultural learning theory in mind, none of the aspects can be related to the acquisition metaphor for learning. The dialogue aspects placed towards the action side, diapractice and necessary dialogue come close to the notion of participation according to Sfard. The cooperation and the dialogue in everyday school life need to be scaffolded and informed by the teacher's metalanguage to be developed into a trialogue. Dialogical education, that makes use of dialogue as a working method, will be understood as a trialogue if a third voice is present and serves

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[1] This dialogue is mainly part of RE in Norway, in Denmark however philosophical dialogue is an aspect of all school subjects. Philosophical dialogue follows different strategies for facilitation which raises other principle questions than those discussed in this article.

as a common ground. Dialogue in a sociocultural learning perspective will be further discussed in relation to classroom observations.

DIALOGICAL EDUCATION
Aspects of the dialogue concept

Action side

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- Diapractice – co-operation
- Necessary dialogue
    - o everyday conversation to get to understand one another
    - o informal personal exchange of ideas
- Dialogue as a working method in KRL (Religious Education)
- Structured dialogue – (in the role as pupil)
    - o empathic work with other religions and beliefs
    - o representing other views
    - o comparison
    - o face-to-face communication
- Philosophical dialogue
- Spiritual dialogue – the personal encounter that results in change

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Verbal side

(Leganger-Krogstad 2003: 183)

Research Design

The research question stems from the classroom practice, and is based on an abductive, hermeneutical discussion. The intention is to contribute to

didactical theory for teacher education on facilitation of the trialogue (the informed dialogue) at different stages in education. The discussion will make use of existing classroom studies of Torstein Knaut, Christina Osbeck and Sidsel Lied. These will be supplemented by experiences from Norwegian classrooms from my own research. The observations from classroom practice will be analysed in the light of sociocultural learning theory and the outline of the different aspects of the dialogue concept. A classroom relevant explorative outline of strategies will be presented.

A Dialogical Contextual Approach

There is focus on context and situation in sociocultural learning theory. In discussions with educators in religion from South Africa, I have experienced that there, despite all obvious differences, are some common understanding based on similar historical and cultural developments between South Africa and Norway: Indigenous religions were overruled by Christian colonial powers and hid away from official attention until policies changed in relation to a modern type of multireligious situation through immigration of workers representing the different major religions. Both countries make use of education in general, and multireligious education in particular, as a common place for dialogue to promote tolerance and develop competences for active citizenship (Chidester, Stonier & Tobler 1999). Religion in school is considered being influential in school life in general and not as merely one of all the school subjects. It is treated as a key factor to understand cultural and religious diversity. From the 1990s schools became more and more multireligious in both countries (Roux 2000). In 1997 the compulsory multireligious school subject was implemented in Norway, and Outcomes-Based Education was introduced in South Africa. Both changes demand multireligious teaching with an emphasis on teaching *about* religions (Roux 2000). Competence-based curriculum was in Norway introduced in 2005 with attention on the learning process and learning skills in a curriculum without detailed specification of the content. This gives teachers good leeway for contextual adaptation of the curriculum. In South Africa Curriculum 2005 and the National Curriculum Statement promote Outcomes-Based Education in a more systematic way.

Pupils live in a given time and space, in context and this need to be reflected in educational approaches. Educational approaches have been

analysed in relation to time and space (the context around the child) and have been divided into four categories: *existentialist*, *social ethical*, *text-oriented theological* and *phenomenological* (Leganger-Krogstad 2013). In this outlining of approaches a *contextual approach* is a combination of the text-oriented and the phenomenological approaches. This investigation has relevance for teachers whether they favour one category or use them in combination.

A sociocultural view of learning understands learning processes as genuinely situated and argues in favour of learning strategies that give attention to contextual factors (Leganger-Krogstad 2011). In Norway the overall number of pupils in private schools is only 2.7 % in 2011/12 – state-driven neighbourhood schools dominate. The schools therefore mirror the local community and are especially suited for citizenship education. A division of labour between different institutions in society (Schmidt 2011) is a precondition for the establishing of multireligious RE in schools: nurture *in* religion is a task for families and religious communities, and education *about* and *of* religions is a task for schools. In Norway educational policies are obliged to follow up European decisions on education (Council of Europe 2004; 2008; Keast 2007). Contextual understanding is described as an important part of educational theory also in South Africa, and in teacher education in both countries there is an awareness of the need to help teacher students to achieve a high competence in religious studies to be well prepared to handle the contextual adaptation of the curriculum in RE (Ferguson & Roux 2004; Roux & Ferguson 2003).

Classroom Studies

Osbeck and Lied provide vivid perspectives into two classrooms in their study on 'Hegemonic speech genres in RE' (Osbeck & Lied 2012). They relate to the Bakhtinian concept of speech genre, and 'positions, positioning and discursive practice and their institutional framing are highlighted too' (Osbeck & Lied 2012: 155). Their focus is on discursive practice in the classroom looking for patterns that may provide guidance to conversations inside the RE classroom. In the Swedish 9th Grade classroom they found teacher Karin trying to establish a respectful attitude towards religions by addressing the theme 'the respect religions deserve'. Her aim was to change the attitude from the previous lesson where a movie on circumcision was

shown, and the pupils found it amusing when they looked at pictures of Jews praying at the Wailing Wall (Osbeck & Lied 2012: 164). In fact, however, she contributed through her attitude to disrespectful speech genres:

> The negotiation about genre continued when Karin brought in a box of Jewish artefacts .… Gradually the mocking genre gained ground through the efforts of some pupils to find everyday life similarities to the Jewish artefacts. The paschal plate became a taco plate, a griddle with rings for making small pancakes, or a specially designed coffee tray. The Tora scrolls were first termed rolling-pins, but later, when one of the pupils noticed the Swedish language similarities between Tora scroll and 'toa' (toilet paper) roll, the Tora scroll was termed 'toa scroll'.…
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> [One of the pupils in the beginning of the examination picked up a picture of a Tora scroll and seemed to want to show that she knew what it was.]
> Pupil: Tora scrolls.
> Karin: Yes. Not toa scrolls!
> Do you remember what the cupboard is called?
> Pupil: The Ark??
> Karin: Good! Something more on toa- ... (Osbeck & Lied 2012:164-165).

By bringing in education material artefacts as in this instance, from the Jewish tradition, is to display them and demonstrate them for the learners so they can experience them. This way it is meant to serve as a common ground for learning in a social setting. In this classroom, however, these artefacts did not elicit the desired effect. The speech genre of disrespect for religion dominates in a way which overlooks the few pupils who want to contribute towards a learning dialogue. In the research interview conducted Karin reveals a disrespectful attitude towards religion as a phenomenon (Osbeck & Lied 2012: 163-164), and this attitude is mirrored in the classroom. The teacher does not facilitate a safe space for dialogue in this classroom, interesting conversations are silenced by her own opinion, and the mediating tools chosen are not given enough scaffolding through information to become a third voice. She nurtures the idea of religion being strange and exotic, not

part of everyday life. When looking at holy artefacts like the paschal plate the students are asked to find similar items in their life. This way their function in a Jewish religious context is somehow emptied. She also empties the different artefacts by not placing them in context. The artefacts cannot become a third voice in the classroom when the culture these artefacts are embedded in is *not* brought into play.

Thorsten Knauth refers to a 9th Grade classroom study in a German grammar school and the theme is 'God and the tsunami'. The purpose was to address the question of theodicy. The study is part of the REDCo project. In the previous lesson they addressed the issue of the Wailing Wall and gave examples of injustice and suffering (Knauth 2009: 117). The question put to the pupils at the start of the lesson is: Why does god let injustice happen? And the teacher adds: 'I want to see if it is possible to approach the question not only from outside. I want to see if it is possible that you can speak about yourself'. During the next 8 minutes nine pupils contribute and the teacher restricts himself to ask for clarifications or comments on the underlying theodicy question. The teacher turns quickly to the more argumentative part of the lesson, the question on theodicy written on the black board (Knauth 2009: 118). He starts the second part by reminding the pupils of the difference between closed questions as in maths and open questions in RE. Some pupils bring different perspectives from Christianity and the existence of God and others bring in perspectives deriving from Buddhism and Hinduism. The teacher monitors the discussion without repeating the pupils. Sometimes he clarifies the different opinions by rephrasing them concisely and provocatively to make more students participate. In this way he confirms the students' opinions.

From a sociocultural perspective of learning the preparation exercise with the Wailing Wall functions as a material tool among the pupils and creates a common space for dialogue. The part of the lesson, however, where the pupils share personal experiences about suffering is closed very suddenly by the teacher without any feedback to those who have shared openly and honestly. This tells the students that the cultural rules in the room are educative, and that this part was meant only as an introduction, a warming up. Nine pupils had the courage to tell about personal experiences of suffering. Why the teacher did not know how to continue the lesson from this point and therefore closed the session quickly, can be explained by sociocultural theory. These experiences, even if they are put into the middle of the classroom, do

not create a common ground as they are not think enough for their peers to enter into and take part in. Personal experiences that are mediated through short references without thick descriptions or narratives do not function and cannot function as a third voice.

The fact that these students share personal things is a sign of an established safe space facilitated by the teacher. He does this by insisting upon RE being occupied by open questions and by not judging the answers as right or wrong. When students, like Erdem, in his study show disrespectful behaviour, the teacher is patient and addresses his opinions by asking for more arguments (Knauth 2009: 119-120). Knauth notes though in his summary from the study that the teacher has a tendency to avoid conflicts (Knauth 2009: 131).

Empirical descriptive classroom studies like those referred to, have primarily focused on lower secondary education (ter Avest *et al.* 2009; Iversen, 2012; von der Lippe 2010). Thus there is a need to look more closely at primary education where some descriptive studies are done (Ipgrave 2002; Lied 2004). Even less is done about the didactical challenges during the facilitation of the dialogue (Ipgrave 2007; McKenna, Ipgrave & Jackson 2008). The task here is to discuss how sociocultural learning theory can inform dialogical education in RE, as it has informed education in other school subjects (Kozulin 2003; Haenen, Schrijnemakers & Stufkens 2003). When proposing different age specific learning strategies, it is necessary to underline the considerable overlap between the age groups.

Primary Education, Ages 6 - 9
Individual Adaptation or Change of Curriculum

Diapractice dominates in the youngest age group. They play, eat, read, listen to stories, retell stories, draw, write, dance, make drama, make music and sing, play ball, have physical education, take a shower, visit places, and go hiking together (Keast & Leganger-Krogstad 2007). In a common classroom pupils from different families, homes and backgrounds have different values, habits and preferences and through the necessary dialogue they come to know one another (Leirvik 2001). It is though the teacher's responsibility to facilitate dialogue that is really informed dialogue. Cultural and religious differences can be treated as purely individual differences based on the view that all

pupils are different. Individual differentiation or adaptation is a way of fading away differences without explaining them (Leganger-Krogstad 2011).

Research on minority cultures and religion in a Sami/Norwegian environment in Northern Norway taught me that the pupils of Sami background were made invisible in the classroom until their traditions were *included* in the curriculum. Material and values from a minority group are given official status when they are included in the curriculum for all pupils, especially as these views are not presented in the textbooks. An episode from my fieldwork can serve as explanation: In a break between lessons an 8 year old girl came up to her teacher to whisper to her some news: 'I am excited; I had a new baby brother yesterday'. The teacher congratulated her and asked: 'Will you not tell all the class this good news?' 'No', the girl replied: 'they will just tease me and ask me when my family will stop having all these babies'. The teacher could fulfil her wish and make it a private matter or she could take the experience further and bring the religious and cultural background for this view on children in play in the classroom. She could teach about the revival movement in the Sami Christian tradition according to which many families in the local community lived (Leganger-Krogstad 2011: 201-216). Many children at school belong to this religious tradition and they are easy to recognise in the community due to strict rules related to gender differences in clothing, their big cars with many seats, their prayer house and Sunday habits. To let the pupils stay uninformed make the prejudices flourish and it does not help for dialogue to develop. It should not be demanded from the 8 year old girl to explain the reasons behind her family's choice of worldview though. She is not able to voice it and it should not be demanded from her. It could be raised as a curriculum question based in contextual understanding and contextual knowledge. Dialogue in this local community can be developed into a trialogue, by including mediating tools from the Sami Christian tradition. The experience many teachers have is that the youngest pupils have a high or low degree of first-hand experiences of pluralism, and the pluralism they live with is the one to address through necessary dialogue. The ability to tackle it will be of importance later in life.

Habits more than Words

The youngest pupils know their own religion more through habits, celebrations, daily routines and practices than through words and thoughts.

When the youngest pupils state something about their own background or views at school, they most often repeat what they have learnt or heard at home. If they then, in the classroom setting, are overheard or rejected by other pupils, they may feel offended on behalf of their whole family.

In education it is often taken-for-granted that children and young people can make use of experiences achieved at home, in the religious community or in other settings. The term learning trajectory is coined to make educators more conscious of the time and space for learning. For instance a child could have learnt a skill at home or be well acquainted with a religious habit, but be unaware of it or unable to explain it at school due to the fact that habits are related to bodily learning. It might be a tacit habit the child acquired, but to be able to explain it in words, and give the context and the historic background of a habit is something completely different.

Context: Lifeworld

Situated learning in RE at this level means to bring education close to the lifeworld of the child. The dialogue is helped by giving attention to the pupil's own lifeworld and experiences. Themes from name traditions and birth rites can be used as entries to let the pupils investigate their own family traditions and bring photos, material and stories from them to the classroom (cf. examples in Haanes & Leganger-Krogstad 2007). Other relevant subjects can be the weekly rhythm at home, celebrations through the year, greetings, and religious artefacts in use in the family; further: proverbs, important stories, holy books, and special meals. All these things will relate the individual pupil to their family background and the pupils can voice the meaning context for all these artefacts either themselves or the parents can send some written material to school, or even better visit school and tell all the pupils the story behind the habit, convention or artefact.

The RE curriculum[2] on this level of RE introduces the different religions through tools like narratives or pictures or artefacts from their home arena, like a prayer rug, holy items, candles, cloths or food from celebrations. The pupils should retrieve competence to recognise and be able to make use of aesthetic expressions within the different religions. Narratives are open for

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[2] The RE curriculum is available in English translation: http://www.udir.no/Stottemeny/English/Curriculum-in-English/Curricula-in-English/

interpretations. Lied has found that when pupils engage narratives from unfamiliar religious traditions, they mostly notice the features in the story that they recognise from their own tradition (Lied 2004; 2009). Children at this age can be asked to investigate their own understanding of the narrative further by being asked: *Who do you want to be in the story? Why do you think x- and y- persons in the story acted like they did? What do you think they thought before they acted ... and after? What would have happened if (...)? What would you have done if you were the x-person?* Such questions can be further investigated within the story without asking the pupils to look at it from the outside and ask for the interpretive, religious or moral meaning of the story. In these ways the pupils will make use of their fantasy and their real experiences without having to reveal themselves directly. The teacher should though be aware that if a certain issue comes forward repeatedly in these conversations. The teacher can scaffold a safe atmosphere and make the pupils voice their thoughts without being judged. The learning is a social act where the pupils are asked to consider the same questions and relate to the same tools. They learn to pay attention to one another. In a dominantly secular school it can be necessary that the RE teacher helps the youngest pupils to articulate religious worldviews to make them relevant.

Primary Education, Ages 10 - 13
Exemplary Teaching and System Thinking
Typical for this age group is that they are interested in factual knowledge and see the need to organise information they hold into systems and structures. How scaffolding can be used systematically to establish a more advanced and exact language among 12 year old pupils is presented didactically in relation to the *history* subject, and good procedures are described (Haenen *et al.* 2003).

This age is the period for providing the pupils with the logic and factual information and knowledge they need for developing a competence to understand what religions and worldviews are about. To make it interesting they have to recognise the key knowledge presented in class in the local community and society, through TV, newspapers, videos, films, computer games, and in social media. They have a certain need to understand their own background, but wants at the same time to expand from this. This age group are occupied by distinguishing between facts and fiction, a theme often

brought up in RE. What are historical facts and what are parts of the belief in the belief systems? They need to be challenged by different views on knowledge: positivistic scientific knowledge and religious transcendent knowledge. Why do humans around the world seem to need different types of knowledge? Dialogical education at this stage can start with conversations to activate all the information the pupils hold and help them structure it. In this way it is made into a learning trajectory from vague information acquired outside school to the more systemic presentation at school. These learning trajectories need to be repeated in both directions to help the pupils develop a competence to recognise religious, worldview and ethical issues in the world also outside school and to be able to apply their knowledge.

The curriculum structures each of the religions in: *idea of God, view on humanity, creed and ethics.* The challenge for the teacher is to choose the suitable mediating tools in education to enable the pupils to recognise this structure through exemplary teaching, to deepen the knowledge on fewer central issues that helps this structural thinking. Dialogical education at this stage is to facilitate the structural and informed dialogue without losing sight of the individual child's need to develop in relation to their own beliefs. What type of knowledge helps the pupils to investigate other religions and worldviews? What is crucial knowledge in RE that helps these children to live in a multireligious school and society?

Reading of an Art Piece or a Symbol

According to the curriculum this part of focuses on investigating and using art pieces or symbols related to the different religions and world views. Reading of art as a mediating tool helps the students to articulate themselves in a setting where all answers are equally valid, and they learn to listen to their classmates. As they gather around the art piece or the symbol the teacher asks them to first simply tell what they observe without any form of interpretation, and each one of the pupils voice an observation. If there is more to add after the first turn, all the pupils have a new turn of articulating an observation, like what motif they see, material, colour, shape, size, centre, periphery, focal point, and technique. It is important that all the pupils have a say, and that no observation is neglected or rejected. After the observations the interpretations follow in similar turns or rounds. Some recognise colours or symbols in use; some recognise the story behind object; some have seen

similar motifs before, and by analogy they can contribute to a wider range of interpretations. Thereafter the teacher can bring forward more background information about the artist, the art period of the studied object, on the material or the pattern in use, on the symbolic use of colours or about the traditional use or context of the art work. Another way can be to show the pupils the same theme or story depicted in another piece of art for comparison, or to bring forward another art work from the same artist. Or it can be the same symbol made differently or the same God depicted in another fashion. These methods have the aim to allow all pupils to voice their opinions and to facilitate a trialogue between the pupils and the piece of art. They participate in knowledge creation

Lower Secondary Education – Ages 14 - 16
Identity Issues

In lower secondary education teaching is more demanding due to the fact that the class most often will vary in interest, knowledge, intellectual capacity, pre-understanding of the intention with RE at school and openness to religion. This of course affects the capacity for discussions and eagerness to enter into dialogue about personal issues in a classroom setting. In this age group the overall question is: Who am I? They struggle to find their own identity. One day they behave like adults and the next day like immature children; one day they imitate and copy one another and the next day they show their individuality. They strive to be both different and an accepted part of the group. Their greatest fear is *not* to be included in the group. So difference is to be demonstrated at a low range of issues, especially when it comes to appearance, clothing, hair style and lifestyle. To a large degree they hide that their heavy thoughts about life, meaning of life, ethical issues, family matters, economy, heritage, relations, friendship, gender, love and sex. How then to facilitate dialogical education? Certain accepted issues are being repeatedly raised in the classroom, such as Islam and terrorism, Islam and clothing, religion and intolerance, religion and universalism, religion and ethical ideals and the lack of moral standards in everyday life. All these issues can be characterised as quite neutral and therefore possible to discuss on a certain distance from personal life. When the pupils live in rather small communities where everybody know your family background, religious stands and lifestyle, then it is even more difficult to have an open dialogue in

the classroom. The discussions might become too personal and private. This age group need to be able to discuss and have dialogues at a certain distance. Thus, the need for the trialogue is more obvious. The teacher needs to put forward common bases for the dialogue through some engaging teaching material, or the pupils can find it themselves on the internet – according to certain source critical instructions. They can make digital presentations making use of their rather developed technical and visual competence to enter religious and ethical issues in a fruitful way. They can make use of digital discussions, also with pupils in classrooms far away.

Since the group discipline is so strong, it can be necessary *not* to ask the pupils to voice their personal opinions directly, but to use more subtle methods like being given a certain stand- or viewpoint to defend in open class. They can individually be asked to present in the classroom a belief system they have none or little pre-understanding of. Preparation for this can be via group discussion. The task can be: 'Discuss the following matter: *What is a human being?* Half the class can be asked to defend the viewpoint: A human being is nothing more than an animal. The other team of the class can be asked to defend the opposite: A human being is a lot more than an animal'. The teams are then given enough time to prepare their different arguments. When the discussion begins the teams can be positioned on opposite sides of the room. A ball is circulating within a team or between the teams, as a sign of who can talk. The person who holds the ball, is the one to talk. When she/ he has stated an argument, she/ he throws the ball within her/ his team to someone else. The team has to throw the ball to the opposite team when there is a pause in the argumentation, and so the ball is moved between the teams until all arguments have been exhausted.

Third-person Conversations

Third-person conversations can also be necessary for this age group. Third-person conversations means that one reads a literary text, watch a video or a part of a film that evokes a discussion. The ethical issue or the belief issue can then be discussed through the persons present in the film. Eve thought that …; and then Adam …. The pupils do not need to argue in sentences in the first person, and can more easily hide their personal opinions. They may, of course, use their own experiences in these discussions and dialogues, but the students should not be forced to share personal experience they know are

unpopular or contrary to their classmates'. Through the use of mediating artefacts such as films or texts, a common ground through a third voice is created. Drama and storyline methods (Bell 2008) make use of third-person dialogues. Storylines develop as the teacher brings in more and more information and challenges.

The Role of the Pupil

In lower secondary education, especially in RE, many teachers have found the need to understand that the young students enter *the role of the pupil* as they enter school. This role is connected to school life and especially the classroom, similar to the change of role from mother to teacher as an adult female teacher does every morning by entering school. The role as a pupil has certain demands and certain expectations, and at the same time it has a certain leeway for intellectual experimentation. At school it is allowed to voice other viewpoints than those given through upbringing and those which can be stated at home or in the religious community. Intellectual and critical scrutiny is part of the expected role of a pupil at school. This pupil role gives a kind of of protection toward personal and individual invasion in the classroom. The role as a pupil gives *a zone of non-infringement* after Knud Ejer Løgstrup (Leganger-Krogstad 2011:78).

According to the mandate of education the expectations towards boys and girls at school should be similar. Gender issues are part of the RE discussion in an South African context (Du Preez & Simmonds 2011). Research in Norway show that ethnic minority girls with given expectations on how to behave as Muslim girls at home, experience the classroom organised according to gender equality standards as a place that gives space and room for open expression. The classroom differs from the school yard. These girls report that in the school yard their behaviour is sanctioned by their minority friends in accordance with the rules at home and in the religious community. They are told to behave more according to given gender ideals (Valen 1999). Gender and Human Rights perspectives are part of RE (De Wet, Roux, Simmonds & ter Avest 2012).

Writing

Some teachers use writing as a strategy for a pupil/ teacher dialogue. They

encourage their students to have a personal logbook that passes between the teacher and the individual pupil, a place for personal reflections on questions, issues and challenges met at school. The teacher writes back, giving responses, clarifying things, give new ideas and asking questions for further reflection. Writing can also function as a mediating tool in the full classroom both as preparation for dialogue and as reflective method at the end of a teaching session to make the student think while writing to express their thoughts. The result of this strategy is that especially rather silent girls may more easily voice their opinion in the classroom. Preparation time also raises the demand for clearer argumentation. Students, who are asked for clarification when they spontaneously utter an opinion, learn that they need to be prepared to argue for their viewpoint. The result is more fruitful dialogues in the classroom. The dialogue floats better when higher demand is put on the way the pupils voice their opinion at this lower secondary stage. Teachers who raise their expectations often experience that the pupils enjoy it and work accordingly.

Summary

When dialogue is discussed from a sociocultural perspective on learning, the interaction in the classroom around the dia-logue comes more to the front. The mediating tools and artefacts are not things, but cultural tools open for negotiation in social settings, here classrooms. The teacher's job is to scaffold learning by being ahead of the pupils, and provide for the suitable cultural artefacts to bring them to the next step in their learning. Vygotsky underlines the need to accompany practice with language to make the learning develop. Language is in itself a mediating tool being entrenched within culture, structures and genres. The mediating tool coins a common ground for learning, it represents a third voice. The tools need to be chosen on the basis of didactical considerations to enhance the trialogue, knowledge creation. The learning trajectories between home, society and school need to be nourished without getting too close to personal matters. The use of the term 'the role of the pupil' is coined to respect the *zone of non-infringement.* To create a safe space for dialogue is necessary (Roux 2012). Dialogue in school has many forms. The forms can be presented on a continuum from practice to verbal forms. Different strategies have been investigated to facilitate the dialogue into an informed dialogue at different stages in compulsory

education, ages 6 - 9, ages 10 - 13 and ages 14 - 16. Dialogue is understood mainly as a working method creating interaction within a dialogical contextual approach to RE. Trialogical education is necessary to help pupils to live in multireligious schools and in multireligious societies as citizens.

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