Lived Religion and Religious Education

In the Swedish mandatory non-confessional subject of Religious Education (RE) there is a strong tradition of organizing the teaching based on the five world religions and a section on ethics. Definitions of religion dominating the teaching of RE often have a historical and dogmatic orientation and tend to focus the Man, the book, the faith" (Berglund, 2014). Within the framework of my dissertation project (Kittelmann Flensner, 2015) where I observed 125 RE lessons at three different upper secondary schools, it was clear that the talk about religion was dominated by a secularistic discourse which made it difficult to reach aims of RE concerning ”respect and understanding for different ways of thinking and living” (Skolverket, 2011).

Teachers often tries to relate their teaching to students' previous understanding and experiences. When it comes to religion in the pluralistic and secularized Sweden, I found in my thesis that this is a delicate balancing act for several reasons: Many students lacked experiences of religious practices and of what it possibly could mean to be part of a religious tradition. Many times there was a strong secularist discourse which meant that faith and religion had negative connotations and were associated with being cheated, unenlightened and even unintelligent. This meant that students who saw themselves as part of various religious traditions became silent not to exposing themselves to this type of negative comments, which further enhanced the secularist discourse. In this context, I believe that a "lived religion-approach" (Ammerman, 2014; Cotter & Robertson, 2016; McGuire, 2016) could contribute to nuance and problematize the hegemonic secularist discourse about religion in RE. I will here present re-analysis of the empirical material that formed the basis of my thesis and examine how phenomena that can be described as “lived religion” appeared in the empirical material. Did it occur during the RE-lessons? When? How was articulated it? How did the approach of “lived religion” affect the hegemonic secularistic discourse?

References