

Nordidactica – Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education

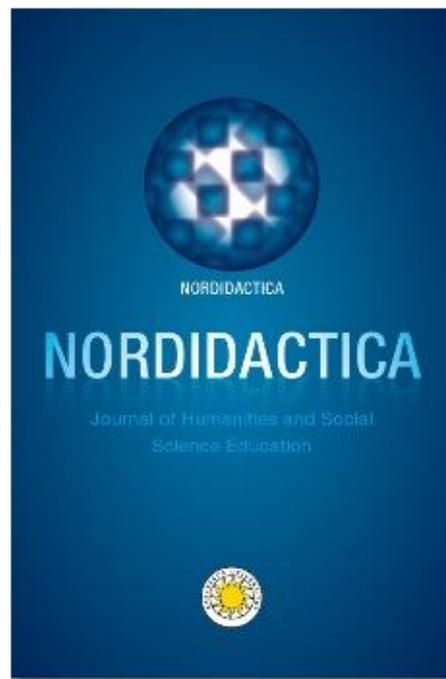
Book review: Classroom Studies on Religious Education – A Variety of Approaches.  
A review of Mette Buchardt 2014 *Pedagogized Muslimness. Religion and Culture as Identity Politics in the Classroom*

Elisabet Haakedal

Nordidactica 2015:2

ISSN 2000-9879

The online version of this paper can be found at: [www.kau.se/nordidactica](http://www.kau.se/nordidactica)



**Nordidactica**  
**- Journal of Humanities and Social**  
**Science Education**

**2015:2**

## Book review

### **Classroom Studies on Religious Education – A Variety of Approaches**

A review of Mette Buchardt. 2014. *Pedagogized Muslimness. Religion and Culture as Identity Politics in the Classroom*. Waxmann.

In 2014 Mette Buchardt's Phd thesis from 2008 was published in English as the 27th volume in the Waxmann series called *Religious Diversity and Education in Europe*. The Danish title of the thesis is *Identitetspolitik i klasserummet. 'Religion' og 'kultur' som viden og social klassifikation. Studier i et praktiseret skolefag*. (See Geir Skeie's excellent review in the Norwegian journal, *Prismet*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2009, pp. 47-53, where he compares Buchardt's thesis with two other Nordic Phd theses from the same year.) Both Buchardt's titles give precise information on the overall theme and content of her thesis. I will give an overview based on the English text and add a few comments related to the wide field(s) of research on religion and education. The single quotation marks used below primarily repeat the way Buchardt uses such signs, quite in line with her theoretical and methodological position.

The thesis is divided into four parts. The first is called *Studying the curriculum of 'religion' as social practice*. It introduces the overall problem formulation, which might be summarized as a critical interest in how knowledge is created and established in the classrooms of religion and world view education. Then the detailed research questions and design of the study follow, presenting the chosen social scientific basis of 'critical curriculum studies', and situating the thesis within the subfields of curriculum sociology and history (with Lundgren, Goodson and Bernstein as the most significant names). Buchardt outlines her conceptual framework inspired by education policy scholars (primarily Bernstein and Popkewits) whose theoretical approaches she backs up and combines with methodological sociological insights from Bourdieu and Foucault, supplemented by Fairclough's sociolinguist discourse analysis. *Conceptual architecture: recontextualizing and the pedagogic field of practice studied as discursive regularity and social economy* is Buchardt's precise title for her impressive theoretical basis.

The first part also displays the process of linking the operationalization of the theoretically based analytic strategy with the empirical foundation of the study, the data material. We get to know two primary schools, 'the B-school' and 'the C-school', including three classes, i.e. three groups of pupils representing different degrees of diversity regarding social and cultural background. An extensive mixed-methods approach regarding the gathering of empirical data material includes educational social anthropological field work and thus prepares for the 'micro-analyses' which the second and the third part of the thesis consist of.

Part two presents analyses based on material from the B-school which is the socio-economically weaker school (with 60 % of ‘bilingual pupils’). Buchardt has titled this part *Differentiated ‘Muslim’ class structure*. By way of her variety of methods, she analyses a teacher’s description of the pupils, gives a representation of ‘the official classroom text’ and maps the pupils’ strategies for positioning themselves relative to co-pupils and teacher. She utilizes survey based socio-economic data about the pupils’ parents and applies the concept of (school) ‘capital’ in order to present a differentiated class structure as a backdrop for in-depth analyses of the pupils’ classroom dialogues. Through discourse analyses of communication between teacher and pupils, we get to know various more or less actor-oriented understandings of ‘the Muslim pupil’.

Part three, called *Subjectivity within the perimeter of ‘Muslim tradition’: Muslim as ‘low class’*, gives the same varied analyses as found in part two, only here the empirical material relates to the C-school (with less than 25 % of ‘bilingual pupils’). Thus Buchardt tracks the construction of ‘Muslimness’ and demonstrates the ‘identity politics’ which is produced in the studied Danish classrooms.

The fourth and final part of the thesis offers a concluding theoretical discussion of the several empirical analyses. Here Buchardt puts forward her overall, tightly integrated theoretical perspective whilst summarizing what she has gleaned from the empirical material. I have chosen to quote the two final subtitles in order to convey (some of) the results of the thesis: *Recapitulation: production of knowledge and production of social classification as interlinked*, and *The school’s production and classification of knowledge and bodies. ‘Muslimness’ and ‘universal Danish Christianity’ pedagogized*. These two formulations may serve to underline Buchardt’s balancing position between structure-orientation and agent-orientation in the academic subfield of critical curriculum studies.

It has been a pleasure to be able to read Buchardt’s thesis from the beginning to the end even though I was already acquainted with its theme and contents through Nordic networking and having read shorter publications by the author. I am impressed by Buchardt’s achievements through her thesis, both with regard to her theoretically solid and unique ‘conceptual architecture’ (approved of by expert colleagues at the Institute of Education to whom I lent the thesis), her construction of empirical data (representing patterns of school practice) from a large amount of material, and her way of linking micro-analyses based on field work in schools and classrooms with analyses of more far-reaching material and methods for interactive interpretations. Her final conclusions appear as confidently argued claims, even with some muted phrases:

*It can be argued, then, that the mutual shaping of knowledge and social classification not only stabilises through institutions, to phrase it with Foucault [...]. Knowledge and social classification are also produced on the school institution’s own terms. At the same time, it becomes clear that the two studied classrooms may be said to color curriculum – the curriculum populated by pupils – in dissimilar ways. (p. 180, final page of body text, original italics, here converted – because the quotation is put in italics)*

Appreciating Buchardt’s critical theoretical and methodological balancing position, I disagree a little with the above mentioned review by Skeie, who e.g. applies phrases

Elisabet Haakedal

like ‘her results [...] may be perceived as quite absolute’ and ‘[an] impression of a determined situation’ (my translation), about the Danish thesis (*Prismet*, p.51). I would like to point to Buchardt’s more modest self-positioning in the field of education. Briefly giving an introductory actor-oriented sketch of a ‘tomboy’ ‘Muslim girl’, Buchardt acknowledges that she herself ‘helplessly belongs’ to the ‘Nordic left intellectual middle class’ (Buchardt’s Waxmann thesis, p. 12) to whom the figure of this girl will appeal.

However, more interesting than the representations of the pupils, are Buchardt’s comments regarding the teachers, who let her observe and interview them. She states that she could have occupied the same position as them in the studied field (p. 14). I am not entirely convinced about this remark. It leads me to some critical reflections on the thesis. I would have liked a more thorough and transparent presentation of the process of selecting the two schools and the three classes/groups of pupils for the Phd project. I am especially curious about Buchardt’s process of selecting and getting to know the teachers who agreed to have their classroom speech and other utterances audiotaped. Some years prior to Buchardt’s observations for the thesis, she had conducted field observations as part of an action research project. And after the thesis, her classroom research has been published in a book with a title including the phrase of ‘action research’ (pp. 17 and 184). I wonder how Buchardt first presented the ‘co-operation’ between researcher and school teachers at the start of the Phd field work and how she won the teachers’ trust.

Finally I wonder whether Buchardt relies on ‘colleagues’ involved in teacher training to communicate (beyond the academic research community) her results and conclusions in *Pedagogized Muslimness*. I have not been comfortable with suggesting that my student teachers at the University of Agder should read Buchardt’s thesis when writing their Bachelor theses in religion and world view didactics. These students are eager to do small projects applying empirical methods and to reflect on their future occupation as teachers handling the relationship between ‘religion’ and ‘education’. This is one reason why I am interested in Buchardt’s thoughts about the methodological relationship between ‘critical curriculum studies’ and more ‘action research oriented’ approaches to the relevant research field. I believe there are adequate forms of ‘practice oriented’ approaches, forms that are not (primarily) prescriptive and will still offer more (self-) critical reflections on intrinsic (or ‘doxic’) normativity than Buchardt’s Phd thesis does.

**Elisabet Haakedal**  
**Professor in Religious Education**  
**Institute of Religion, Philosophy and History**  
**The University of Agder**  
**Norway**