

Master Thesis

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RLE in Vest-Telemark Primary Schools

An Analysis of 10th Graders Perception
and Experience in Reference
to Tolerance and Solidarity



Telemark University College

Faculty of Arts and Sciences

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Dedicated to Everyone Who Desires Peaceful Co-existence

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Abstract

RLE in Norwegian primary schools stems from several educational reforms. Based on cultural/social theories, and qualitative data (precisely interviews), this thesis attempts to provide insight into the way the subject-RLE is arranged for 10th graders at three separate schools in Vest-Telemark. It also analyses the views and/or experience of 10th graders concerning RLE, as it relates to tolerance and solidarity. The result of the study shows that RLE is relevant for teaching. Daily lesson is arranged quite differently at the schools. Pupils are exercising tolerance and solidarity as they acquire historical knowledge of major world religions, cultures and/or philosophies of life, on the platform of neutrality and critical thinking. This act therefore offers a hope for an improved future of tolerance, mutual respect and solidarity in Norway, as a nation of cultural diversity.

Summary

This thesis is based on the teaching and learning of religion, philosophy and ethics (RLE) in Vest-Telemark primary schools. Previous knowledge of religion in Norwegian schools was fundamentally absorbed in Christianity and humanistic traditions. Currently, RLE is taught in Norwegian schools as a result of cultural/religious diversity.

The thesis therefore intends to examine the practical arrangement of RLE-lessons and how it is taught to 10th graders at three primary schools in Vest-Telemark. It also aims to analyze the views and/or experience of 10th graders regarding RLE, as it relates to tolerance and solidarity. For the sake of anonymity, the primary schools in which the research was carried out are called School-A, B and C.

Through non-participant observation and separate interviews with three RLE-teachers and principals and twenty-one 10th graders, the study shows that the daily teaching plans or activities of RLE stems from the overall curriculum, but lessons are slightly arranged differently at each of the schools that participated in the research. Furthermore, the 10th graders who were interviewed in these schools perceive RLE as relevant subject because it provides them opportunity to learn about other religions and cultures, and assists them to respect and tolerate others.

In the sphere of diversity, bully is also drastically reduced at the Vest-Telemark schools that participated in the research, and 10th graders are creating friendships on the basis of defining common grounds or similarities, even as they attempt to respect others.

Finally, through the subject RLE, the 10th graders in Vest-Telemark School-A, B and C are influenced to exhibit tolerance by learning historical facts of world religions; avoiding conversion and spiritual practice(s) of religions; and enforcing room for objectivity/neutrality and critical thinking. RLE therefore offers a better future for tolerance, respect and solidarity in Norway, as a nation of cultural/religious diversity.

Bø, 1 September 2014
Romeo Adolphus Brown

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Topic

This thesis is entitled: *RLE in Vest-Telemark Primary Schools: An Analysis of 10th Graders Perception and Experience in Reference to Tolerance and Solidarity.*¹

RLE is the abbreviation for the current religious and/or philosophical subject taught at Norwegian primary schools. In the backdrop of the Norwegian language, RLE stands for *Religion, Livssyn og Etikk*; which of course, can be translated into English as *Religion, Philosophy of life and Ethics*.

Prior to the teaching of RLE in Norwegian primary schools, knowledge of Christianity, engrossed in the Holy Bible was the original form of religious education in Norwegian primary schools, but later the religious subject was known as KRL (*Kristendom, religion og livssyn*); translated in English as Christianity, Religion and Philosophy of life.

The history of the transformation from *Kristendom, religion og livssyn (KRL)* to *Religion, Livssyn og Etikk (RLE)* will be discussed later in the background section of this thesis. However, through the following pages of this thesis, wherever either of these distinct disciplines is mentioned, I prefer to use the abbreviations KRL and/or RLE for the purpose of simplicity. You may also find a definitive clarification for the terms *tolerance* and *solidarity*, in the theoretical section of thesis.

1.2 Research Goal

The subject-KRL had major focused on Christianity, despite its connection to other religions and worldviews. This gave the impression that the subject lacked neutrality because it created a larger space for imparting more Christian knowledge than other religions, in a society of diversity. As a result, KRL was redesigned to form the subject-RLE.

The subject-RLE attempts to provide pupils equal access to the knowledge of the world's major religions on the basis of objectivity/neutrality, non-spirituality, non-conversion and critical thinking.

¹ The term Primary Schools, as being used in this thesis, refers to Norwegian schools beginning with grade 1 – 10. To some extent, primary schools in Norway encompasses grade 1 – 7. From grade 8 – 10 is middle school, but I prefer to use the term “*primary schools*” to represents both concepts. Nevertheless, the focus group in this work is 10th graders.

The goal of this thesis, therefore, is to identify ways the subject-RLE is practically organized and taught to 10th graders at three separate primary schools in Vest-Telemark; and to analyze the pupils' views and/or experience of the subject-RLE in reference to tolerance and solidarity in a multicultural domain. I am basically concern with how the subject-RLE is being organized for teaching; and how do 10th graders at the three distinct primary schools in Vest-Telemark perceive the teaching of the subject in reference to generating tolerance and solidarity.

The overall rationale for this goal stems from the fact that our contemporary world is constantly emerging into a global village, but prevalent with varied social conflicts, such as religious clashes in some societies and/or bully in schools. These social conflicts are undeniably created by human self-centeredness and voracity to exhibit power or control other human species. The constant development and existence of such appalling human action poses serious threat to the demand for global liberty, peaceful co-existence and tolerance.

Many contemporary societies perceive religion as one of the major factors that is being responsible for numerous human atrocities. This notion apparently reveals some elements of truth in view of the fact that some methods of expressing religious ideas and values do pose as catalyst for intolerance, marginalization, bully, anxiety and distrust against a segment of humanity, and the very term "religion".

However, within a common human quest for peaceful co-existence, and solidarity, many nations are constantly being implored to design social policy that promotes the understanding and practice of human rights, liberty and tolerance within the confines of national and/or international laws.

Norway is being viewed as one of the western nations, which encourages the need for human rights, tolerance and solidarity. However, the primary schools in the country are being established as the arena for developing pupils' minds toward achieving a better community. In these primary schools, the subject-RLE is being designed to educate pupils in Norway about different cultures, religions and/or worldviews, and also reassure them of the need to cultivate tolerance and respect for human rights.

In view of this, I have endeavored to pose a few questions which I anticipate to respond to, even as I consider a brief historical background regarding the development and introduction of the subject-RLE, including a few social theories that present children/youth as social actors in shaping their respective lives, the lives of others, or their respective surroundings.

1.3 The Research Questions

The ultimate questions I have postulated and attempted to answer are two-folds:

- a) How is the subject RLE practically arranged and taught to 10th graders at three distinct primary schools in Vest-Telemark?
- b) How do pupils perceive and experience the subject RLE in reference to tolerance and solidarity?

I intend to answer the above-mentioned questions with a strong sense of objectivity and/or neutrality, in order to avoid unnecessary lambasting from religious communities who may think that I have purpose to discriminate against a particular religion, ethics or worldview. Thus, if the argument in this thesis appears to be broad, then it stems from the reason I have just stated.

1.4 Personal background and Motivation

I am an African-Norwegian, and a Christian who have gained interest in studying Norwegian culture at the university/college, particular in regards to understanding the Norwegian society and its response to religion in multicultural context. I have had the desire to also discover how the nation promotes and exercise peace and tranquility amongst its citizens, and to identify how Norwegian youth experience and response to matters of religious concerns in the backdrop of tolerance and solidarity.

In Norway, I have not only, observed general calm in the way people attempt to express their faith, believes or views, but also I have noticed a passive reaction or concern for religion especially among young people. Notwithstanding, many of these young people do ascribe to certain kind of faith, be it Christianity, Islam, Buddhist, humanistic, etc.

What interests me most is the strategy and degree of tranquility the nation demands and attempts to exhibit in a cultural of diversity. Here the school stands as significant strategic factor in the development of young people; demanding objectivity, creativity, productivity and goodwill, through subjects such as mathematics, science, history, RLE etc.

However, in the framework of RLE which replaces the basic Christian education in Norwegian schools, I have been motivated to find out how the subject is practically arranged, and how pupils perceive and experience the subject in reference to tolerance and solidarity. Could there be a way, in which 10th grade pupils strive to strategize in making friends, tolerating others and creating peace or harmony in a society of diversity?

As a Christian, I have always been influenced by the biblical verse that encourages tolerance, solidarity and peace: “...*be at peace with each other*”. “*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*”.² The parable of the Weeds and Wheat’s in Gospel of Matthews 13: 24 – 30 has also inspired me in the context of tolerance, harmonious co-existence and solidarity.

Recently, I have also come across a verse of peace in the Muslim’s Holy Quran, which states: “*The worshippers of the All-Merciful are they who tread gently upon the earth, and when the ignorant address them, they reply “Peace!”*”.³ Undeniably, the aforesaid sacred verses of the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran [including other holy scriptures] do create grounds for tolerance and solidarity in a culture or society of diversity.

In pursuit for tolerance and solidarity in society of diversity, the subject-RLE in Norwegian primary schools aims at drawing pupils’ attention to other religions, including their own. Furthermore, it attempts to assist pupils in exhibiting objective thinking, respect and healthy dialogue with people of different ideas, beliefs, philosophies of life and cultures.

1.5 Previous Research

A few research and book publications about RLE highlight that the subject-RLE is being designed to create room for pupils’ critical thinking in relation to social and/or religious phenomena. Here, the subject-RLE interplays between religions, philosophy and ethics with the aim of projecting the significance of tolerance and solidarity in multicultural society.

Although I have not found any research work in RLE that discusses or document Vest-Telemark 10th graders’ perception and experience of RLE, in relation to tolerance and solidarity, yet a great number of documents and publications reveal efforts that have been

² Mark 9:50 cf. Romans 12:18

³ Sure 25:63.

made in constructing Norway and a few western countries as harmonious and modern-cultured society.

I have considered a few pieces of information from some of the publications as relevant for providing insight into discussing the concept of the child/childhood and their connection to subject-RLE. Generally, these publications, which are sociological in production, portray children/youth as being conscious of their own culture including that which they are about to enter. In addition, they depict children/youth as having the ability to serve as actors within specific cultures, reshaping their own lives, their environment; including the lives of others.⁴

In connection to the development of the child within western cultures, several school reforms have been introduced, especially since the end of Second World War. The reforms often aim to curtail some subjects and/or introduce new subjects within the schools' curriculum, with the aim of producing pupils as productive citizens.⁵

The subject-RLE forms part of major reforms that have been infused within the Norwegian Schools' curriculum, in which Christian knowledge is being taught, at the same level, alongside other religions, including humanistic heritage and traditions with special emphasis on respect for human dignity, nature of intellectual freedom, love, forgivingness, equality and solidarity⁶.

Helje K. Sødal argues that religious education in Norway has two basic aspects: the existential and the cultural.⁷ In Sødal's perspective, religion and worldviews deal with existential questions and the individual's choice of faith; but these are simultaneously intertwined with cultural factors. Thus, teaching religion and worldviews in school is essential because it is generally based on how life can be understood and interpreted in individuals' life situations, and matters that are rooted in specific culture or traditions.

⁴ Danbolt & Enerstvedt 1995: 19

⁵ Hanken & Johansen 1998:195 – 196

⁶ See St. meld.nr. 14 (1995-96): Om kristendomskunnskap med religion og livssynsorientering; St.meld.nr. 15(1995-96): om fag – og timefordelingen I den 10årige grunnskole; St.meld.nr.32(2000-2001): Evaluering av faget Kristendomskunnskap med regions -og livssynsorientering,

⁷ Helje K. Sødal in Sødal, et al (2009)

Winje and Bente, suggest that Norwegian pupils basically start textual reading and/or narrative presentation of the subject-RLE in grade 5.⁸ This reading, narrative and writing competences of the pupils do not only afford them the opportunity to gain their experience and understanding, but also assist them to express their knowledge and views of religious, philosophical or ethical issues.⁹ Here, RLE sets the basis for the pupils to relate to and understand other religious views, including their own religious stories. And through cultural narration pupils may justify their identity; and by doing so religion may be portrayed not only as belief, but also as a form of cultural heritage.¹⁰

It is generally accepted by many historical, social and/or cultural scholars, that the national culture of Norway is tightly intertwined with Christian and humanistic concepts. But in recent times, the nation is increasingly emerging as multicultural society.¹¹

In the context of the school, Hovdelien argues that the concepts of multiculturalism and secularism should provide the basis for assessing the demands of public school principals, in relation to the school's basic values, religious and ethical teachings. He however emphasized that dissemination of values must always be done in that specific local school context, and that the pupils' diverse cultural background should be considered.¹²

1.6 The Research Field

The research field is limited to Vest-Telemark. It specifically involves three public primary schools in the district of Vest-Telemark. Due to anonymity, these schools have been allocated with letters A, B and C in accordance with the order of preliminary contacts. Nevertheless, a brief description of the area Vest-Telemark is being emphasized in the background section of this thesis.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six sections (1.0 – 6.0).

In section 1.0, I have presented the topic, the research goals and questions, and have briefly discussed my personal motivations for carrying out the task. I have also provided a concise

⁸ Gier Winje and Bente Aamotsbakken in Dagrund and Aamotsbakken (2010:126)

⁹ Camilla Stabel Jørgensen in Dagrund og Aamotsbakken (2010:142).

¹⁰ Breidid and Nicolaisen (2011:45 -53) & Sky (2007: 29-30).

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² Hovdelien (2011: 52)

account of previous study that have been done in the framework of RLE, and have described the research field in respect to anonymity.

Section 2.0 presents the background associated with the problem addressed in this study. First, it briefly describes the Telemark/Vest-Telemark area. Then it implores a local historical view of previous religious lifestyle of Vest-Telemark during the 19th century, and how such lifestyle influences secularization; and then moves on to discuss the general basis for teaching RLE in Norwegian primary schools, from an overall historical and educational outlook.

Section 3.0 puts forward reviews of literatures and research theories I deemed relevant to associate with the problem addressed in this study. Here, I highlighted the new (contemporary) cultural study discipline as an arena for religious, philosophical and ethical debates. I also briefly discuss the concept of culture, its incorporation and distinction from religion; and how religion, philosophy and ethics correlate. Upon that, I considered a few theories regarding the development of the child in social constructivist perspective.

Section 4.0 describes the methodology and procedures used for data collection and analysis. This section also highlights the case for anonymity.

Section 5.0 contains the practical aspects of the thesis. It includes analysis of data and presentation of results. This is to say in other words, that this section deals with the question of how RLE is practically organized at three distinct schools (A, B and C) in Vest-Telemark, and how 10th graders in schools A, B and C perceive the subject-RLE in reference to tolerance and solidarity.

Section 6.0 offers a conclusion and concise outline of the research findings.

2.0 Background

2.1 Vest-Telemark in Telemark

Telemark is one of the counties in Norway that I consider the cradle of Norwegian culture, nature, history and heritage. The Skiing, the Henrik Ibsen phenomena and the spirit of nationalism through the Norwegian heavy water sabotage, find their roots in Telemark. Here religion and religious life are also included in the local cultural history.¹³

In the upper-western part of Telemark County, there situates a traditional district called Vest-Telemark. This district consists of six municipalities, including Vinje, Tokke, Seljord, Kviteseid, Fyresdal and Nissedal.¹⁴ Each of these municipalities contains several primary schools that are managed by their respective local authorities.

According to local historians, religious life in Telemark has been mingled with struggles and conflict, during the 19th century.¹⁵ Within the Vest-Telemark rural district there were theological conflicts driven by national church theology and politics. Such conflicts were commonly observed within the local churches, but had significant influence on the life of the local community.¹⁶

There were animosities between priests and their congregations, which led to split and downward growth within the churches in Seljord and Vinje, during the 19th century. The result of the conflict within the local churches disappointed a lot of people whose attitude became more influenced by secular culture.

However, by the 1880s, a question about children's development and the type of literature children/youth should read arose. This question was based on a letter from Bishop Mathias Sigward in Christiania, to the Dean in Lårdal, B. Wettergrem, regarding the fear for children's involvement with alcoholism, misappropriate life styles, etc. It became difficult to address the content of the letter from Bishop Mathias Sigward. As a result, secularism increased and curtailed moral life styles that were based on strict religious principles.¹⁷

¹³ See, Telemark Historie - *Tidsskrift for Telemark Historielag* nr. 20

¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telemark>

¹⁵ See, Telemark Historie - *Tidsskrift for Telemark Historielag* nr. 20, s 10 - 18

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ Telemark Historie - *Tidsskrift for Telemark Historielag* nr. 20, s 10 – 11

Conversely, in the face of the local religious status quo in Telemark during the 19th century, religion as a whole in Norway was relatively homogeneous even up to the 20th century. Christianity was the most dominated religion in Norwegian societies; and doctrines were specifically based on Lutheran reform which was introduced in the country around 1537.¹⁸

2.2 The Basis for RLE in Norwegian Schools

Currently, Norway is an arena of cultural/religious diversity, as a result of constant immigration. The nation comprises immigrants from diverse countries. These immigrants might have left their distinct homelands as a consequence of ethnic, political or religious conflicts, and have entered the country without leaving essential aspects of their cultures or traditions behind.

It is neither uncertain, nor debatable that many Norwegian who have also travelled around the world have returned into the country with different cultural experiences and beliefs. These Norwegians and their immigrant counterparts may thus possess special cultural and/or religious values that are perhaps beneficial to the progress of the nation. Such benefits can be understood in terms of increasing knowledge and understanding about different ethnicities, and their cultural traditions, so as to create grounds for sharing cultural values, mutual respect, tolerance and peaceful co-existence.

Although, cultural diversity may have some significant benefits, yet the Norwegian authorities have embarked on initiating scheme to constantly curb intolerance, fanaticism or any negative attitude that rises against the development of a society that embeds different cultures and religions. One of the actions taken by the authorities to reduce negativity – such as religious intolerance, social discrimination, bully, etc., deals with religious education like RLE in primary schools – a matter this thesis particularly reckons with.

The Norwegian primary schools are progressively becoming multicultural as an outcome of numerous immigrant-children/youths who have enrolled as pupils. The schools have also become legitimate arenas for acquainting pupils with distinct cultures and moral values.¹⁹ Since cultural and moral values are often linked with religion, the impartation of religious knowledge to pupils of dissimilar cultural and religious upbringing is also attracting

¹⁸ St.meld.nr.32 (2000-2001); Løvlie, et. al (2012)

¹⁹ Hovdelien (2011)

thoughtful challenges along the way.²⁰ And some of these challenges may draw attention to the following questions:

- 1) Is it possible for a country that opens its door to immigrants, deviate from its national history, cultural and/or religious heritage?
- 2) As a means to promote a pluralistic society, how should the school provide knowledge regardless of diverse beliefs to avoid pupils' withdrawal from class?
- 3) How does each pupil receive knowledge of his own religion along with others, without sensing biasness and ignition of strife or resentment from the teacher?
- 4) What are the opinions and experience of pupils regarding religion in relation to tolerance and social integration/solidarity, in a society of diversity?

As easy as these questions may be read, it is probable that finding practical answers could be difficult. Notwithstanding, to provide some level of understanding in the Norwegian context, it has been decided that education in Norwegian primary schools should include religion, philosophy and ethics; in line with other subjects like mathematics, physical education, social science, nature, etc. The impartation of such knowledge should be based on the central values and traditions of Christian and humanistic heritage that incorporates respect for human dignity, intellectual freedom, equality, friendship and solidarity.

Furthermore, transfer of knowledge should not only include values based on human rights that appear in other religion and beliefs systems, but it should also provide insight into cultural diversity and respect for the individual beliefs and meanings, so “as to promote democracy, education and scientific way of thinking”.²¹

Thus, in the frame of religious diversity, democracy, the Norwegian cultural traditions and legislations, the subject-RLE was introduced in all school, after several school reforms.

2.2.1 Historical Dimension

Prior to Christianity in Norway, religious ideas were based on the Norse's mythology and practices.²² This form of religion emerged in the country around the Old Stone Age; and it became predominant during the Bronze Age. The Norse's mythology and practices was quite ethnical, unsystematic and influential. Although, there are very little details about the life of

²⁰ In the period of written this thesis, the government led by Erna Solberg, which took over from Jens Stoltenberg on 16. October 2013, reveal plans to change religious education subject from RLE to KRLE

²¹ See Lovdata: opplæringslova § 1-1 Formålet med opplæringa; lovdata: § 2-3 Innhold og vurdering i grunnskoleopplæringa; Lovdata: § 2-4 Undervisninga i faget religion, livssyn og etikk

²² See Brit Solli in Amundsen, ed. (2005)

the religious devotees during the periods of the Old Stone and Bronze Ages, yet some historians linked their religious lives to myth and paganism, with special emphasis on their love for nature, landscape and existential issues.²³ Contrarily, the Norse's mythology and practices were quite different from monotheistic religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Religious historians perceived Judaism, Islam and Christianity, as universal religions.

Christianity was introduced in Norway around 1000 AD. However, throughout the Medieval Ages, conversion to Christianity in the country was marked by compulsion and/or brutality.²⁴ The biblical message of love, tolerance, separation from evil and salvation by faith was imposed with cruelty or violence rather than peace or serenity. This approach was influenced and characterized by the lifestyles of the Vikings (800 – 1060), who probably misunderstood or had very little knowledge about the principles for evangelizing the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ. As a result, they mandated themselves to execute God's judgment, instead of allowing God Himself.

Nevertheless, Christianity spread throughout the country during the Middle-Ages, and the basis for doctrine was rooted in Catholicism; and a form of segregation between the cultured-elite and the lower class surfaced until the reformation in 1517, when Martin Luther published his Ninety-Five Theses.²⁵ From this period, education especially for children was strictly based on Christian-biblical principles.

Around the 18th century, the emergence of pure reasoning or enlightenment coupled with industrialization in western societies provided a platform for discussing the development of economic potency, democracy and the position of the child in society. In Norway for example, the church directed the affairs of the children's education in Luther's philosophy through the so-called Latin school system. And later the path toward scientific thinking became expedient.²⁶

²³ See Arne Bugge Amundsen, red. (2005) *Norges Religions Historie*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, cf. Carl FR. Wisløff (1966): *Norsk Kirkehistorie*, Oslo: Lutherstiftelsen

²⁴ Schumacher in Amundsen (2005: 65)

²⁵ See Carl FR. Wisløff (1966): *Norsk Kirkehistorie*, Oslo: Lutherstiftelsen

²⁶ NOU 1995:9 *Identitet og dialog*. See also Olav Hovedelien (2003): *Fra kristen trosopplæring til pluralistisk religionsundervisning*, norsk pedagogisk: tidsskrift 5/6.

The issue of child-rearing and school-reform emerged approximately 1739, when the Christian VI [1699 – 1746] issued the decree for the formation of schools in the country; and church officials and the people at local level mobilized to build a public school for children around ages 7 -12.²⁷ Instructions in these schools were based on pure Christian doctrines, in which the child's confirmation was not only an important phase for graduation, but also a legitimate transition from childhood to adult life.²⁸

Confirmation was a point in the Norwegian Christian journey at which one affirms his/her intention to live a life of discipleship and piety. Without confirmation, it was difficult for a normal adult to exercise or use his/her judicial or social rights regarding marriage; ownership of property, passport, and etc.²⁹ Confirmation was thus a requisite for achieving a full social status.

During the 19th century, further questions about the schools' education programs and child development arose.³⁰ Thus, by 1827 writing and mathematics became compulsory subjects. But these subjects were taught in the context of Christian principles. The school was still perceived as a property of the church. Teachers or principals represented the priest in schools. They were to exhibit moral discipline to pupils, ensure pupils respect for God and for society's moral values.³¹

In the 1860s there were debates in Norway about making slight changes within the education system. The result of this debate began the emergence of liberal/secular schools in the country. The schools for children, especially, became separated from the church, and partly owned by the municipalities.³² From here, reforms pertaining to child-rearing, teaching and learning were then understood as being politically motivated.³³ The need for economic growth became connected to knowledge, skills and expertise.

Thus by 1884, the left-wing political party, in the country proposed a school for all pupils irrespective of religion or creed. The major goal for this proposal was to separate completely,

²⁷ See, «Et fag for en hver smak? En evaluering av KRL-faget», rapport 3/2000, p.7 Diaforsk. See also Einar Ness (1989): Det var en gang, Kristiansand: Universitetsforlaget

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See, «Et fag for en hver smak? En evaluering av KRL-faget», rapport 3/2000, p.8 Diaforsk.

³⁰ See Arne Bugge Amundsen: Faderen, sønnen – og ånden. I Espen Schaaning (red.) (2002): Straff i det norske samfunnet, Oslo & Et fag for en hver smak? En evaluering av KRL-faget», rapport 3/2000, p.9 Diaforsk

³¹ See Arne Bugge Amundsen: Faderen, sønnen – og ånden. I Espen Schaaning (red.) (2002):321

³² Einar Ness (1989:22) cf. Dale, et al (2011)

³³ See Dale, et. al, (2011 54): Gjennomføring av utdanningsreformer i kunnskapssamfunnet, Latvia: Cappelen Damm

the church's authorities from the school and to promote diversity. So by 1889, the school was largely detached from the church; and it therefore became a full property of the municipality.³⁴ By this time, Christian education still remained significant, but the schools became independent institutions in relation to the church, whilst the concept for generalizing religious education for all pupils gradually developed.

2.2.1.1 Initiation of KRL

In 1997, KRL was designed as an ordinary subject to be taught in primary schools.³⁵ This was one of the major reform projects in the Norwegian religious education system since 1860s. Notwithstanding, this education reforms lingers to maintain Norwegian Christian and humanistic heritage, as it gradually receives other forms of religious, philosophical views that promote respect for human rights and dignity.³⁶

The teaching of KRL, especially in primary school, was to be performed in accordance to the general teaching plan and the school's basic principles.³⁷ Knowledge of Christianity alongside diverse religions and philosophies were the basic tenets of KRL. And it was a goal that presentation of the subject encompasses openness; provide insight into other religions, promote interfaith dialog, understanding, respect and tolerance.³⁸

At on hand, pupils who study KRL were to discover their own religious identity, reflect and preserve national and local traditions, even as they acquire better interpretation of life, and reasons to promote tolerance and solidarity.³⁹ On the other hand, teaching in KRL-subject was not to be done in the form of evangelism, preaching, spiritual transformation, or training in a particular faith, but rather a presentation of historical knowledge and analysis of different religions.

The subject-KRL was thought to be relevant for all pupils in Norway. It aimed to discourage segregation, create room for mutual friendliness, tolerance and solidarity in multicultural dimension.⁴⁰ However in KRL, emphasis on the knowledge of Christianity predominantly

³⁴ Dale, et al, (2011:55)

³⁵ Gravem (2004:1)

³⁶ Olav Hovedelien (2003): Fra kristen trosopplæring til pluralistisk religionsundervisning, norsk pedagogisk: tidsskrift 5/6.

³⁷ Teaching plan 97. See Graven 2004: 66)

³⁸ St. meld.nr 32 (2000 -2001)

³⁹ NOU 1995:9 Identitet og dialog

⁴⁰ St. meld. nr 32 (2000 -2001): 47

over took discussions or knowledge of other religious/cultural matters, even though all religious topics were to be presented and/or discussed at the same pace. For this reason, parents (with child/children) had the rights to withdraw their child/children from participating in KRL class if they perceived biasness or religious practices or teachings that were inconsistent to their child/children personal values or religious beliefs.⁴¹ But withdrawal was to be done in reference to general teaching goals for the subject-KRL, including aspect of Norwegian laws on religious education and religious freedom, and international conventions on human rights.⁴²

In the purview of diversity, the problem of withdrawal from KRL class exposed a dilemma in relation to developing a common cultural identity. On one hand, the majority culture and religious heritages, to a greater degree were on the spotlight. And on the other hand, there were need to equally consider the teachings of other culture/religions, and to ensure that impartation of religious knowledge did not influence pupils in the direction of converting to other faith rather than their own, so that the goal for tolerance and respecting individual's beliefs or religious identities could be protected.⁴³

Moreover, several reforms debates have created the capacity to increase neutrality/objectivity within religious education. This increased neutral/objective capacity for religious education does not undermine respect for the sovereignty of the Norwegian state. It also does not emasculate international conventions on human rights, but promote common religious or cultural values that have the propensity to establish tolerance, respect and solidarity.⁴⁴ Thus in the framework of the debates for neutral/objective approach to religious education, the subject-KRL was changed to RLE.

2.2.1.2 RLE: Room for openness and neutrality

The subject-RLE was officially introduced in Norwegian school around 2008/2009.⁴⁵ The major plan for this reform was to ensure that the content of religious subject correspond to international human rights regulations. With this, the contents of the subject were not to

⁴¹ § 2-4 of Norwegian religious education law in Graven (2004: 91).

⁴² St. meld.nr 32 (2000 -2001):49

⁴³ Rapport 3/2000:46 – 47.

⁴⁴See, Hovdelien (2004:212 – 217); and also consider: Romans 13:1-7 in the Holy Bible in reference to the sovereignty of the state.

⁴⁵ Andreassen (2012)

define or contribute to the qualitative dissimilarities between the different religious topics, but to create more room for open-dialog, objectivity and critique.

With the inception of the subject- RLE, the focus on K-Christianity, in KRL was disregarded to create a broad base religious education, and to certify the upsurge need for human rights, objectivity, critique and pluralism; in which the inclusion and practice of general ethics would connect to all faiths. In this frame, the teaching of religion, philosophy and ethics, would then demand more room for openness, neutrality/objectivity and critique.

It is interesting to note that many of the ideas that featured in RLE were already in KRL.⁴⁶ Notwithstanding the difference is seen in the change of the letter K, and inclusion of more objectivity, openness, critique and promotion of pluralism.

The subject-RLE thus provides the opportunity for pupils to obligatory study other religions in school, at the same level with Christianity, but with the application of the guiding rule of objectivity, openness, reflection and critique.⁴⁷ This implies that teachers should constantly adjust themselves to the general teaching plans, and exhibit great care in the choice of teaching methods and activities as they disseminate knowledge about different religions, life philosophies and ethics to pupils.⁴⁸

2.2.2 Educational Dimension

The teaching plans for RLE is incorporated within the most recent curriculum for public schools in Norway known as kunnskapsløftet; which was approved by the Norwegian parliament in 2006.

Kunnskapsløftet is commonly referred to as KL06 or K06. KL06 has its roots or foundation in three previous projects. 1) Mønsterplan for grunnskole 74 (M74), approved by parliament

⁴⁶ See Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet, 2006

⁴⁷ Although learning is obligatory, Schools must show respect for pupils and parents regarding their religious and philosophical convictions and secure the right to equal education. However, in any case of offense, pupils shall by written notification from the parents get exemptions in accordance to schools regulations (see Education Act , § 2-3)

⁴⁸ Religion, livssyn og etikk (RLE) - Informasjon om endringene, <http://www.udir.no/Lareplaner/Finn-lareplan/endringer/Informasjon-om-ny-lareplan-i-religion-livssyn-og-etikk-RLE/> retrieved 20.11 2013 cf. Rundskriv F-10-08: Informasjon om endringer i opplæringsloven, <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/dok/rundskriv/2008/rundskriv-f-10-08-informasjon-om-endring.html?id=520814>

in 1974. 2) Mønsterplan for grunnskole 87 endorsed in 1987 by parliament and 3) Reform 1997 (L97) adopted in 1997.⁴⁹

These previous schemes contained religious educational goals that familiarized pupils with Norwegian cultural heritage, including its preservation and improvement. The former schemes also explored values and attitude formation through Christian and humanistic principles, and inspired pupils' personal growth through knowledge of the Holy Bible as a source of faith and moral life, and identified Christianity as Norwegian cultural heritage. And in the backdrop of diversity, the schemes acquainted pupils with other religions and ethical opinions.

Within KL06, RLE then provides the platform for pupils to learn the history, culture and traditions of major world religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. These five religions form the major list of religion in RLE because they are considered as the longest lasting religions of the world. Nevertheless, other existing religion and ethical matters are considered in the teaching plan.⁵⁰

The philosophical and ethical aspects of the subject attract attention to logic and reflections. In this area, the questions about lifestyles, moral values and ethical issue are frequently raised, while the relation between religion, philosophy and ethics strife to exit.

In regards to lifestyles, moral values and ethical matters, the subject-RLE craves the indulgences of pluralism, objectivity and critical analyses. And religious and ethical matter in view of critique and objectivity can be discussed in the domain of new culture studies.

⁴⁹ See Religion, livssyn og etikk (RLE) - Informasjon om endringene, <http://www.udir.no/Lareplaner/Finn-lareplan/endringer/Informasjon-om-ny-lareplan-i-religion-livssyn-og-etikk-RLE/> retrieved 20.11 2013 cf. Rundskriv F-10-08: Informasjon om endringer i opplæringsloven; Mønsterplan for grunnskolen (M87): Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet og H. Aschehoug & Co. (W. Nygaard) 1987, 3. opplag 1991 and Læreplanverket for den 10-årige grunnskolen (L 97): Det kongelige kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartement, 1996

⁵⁰ Andreassen (2012:85)

3.0 Theoretical Framework

3.1 New Cultural Studies: The basis for religious, philosophical and ethical debate

New cultural Studies denote an interdisciplinary field which involve diverse socio-cultural methods, approaches and academic views.⁵¹ According to Anne Scott Sørensen and other scholars, one of the basic tenets of cultural studies focuses on the attempt to clarify the concept of culture through a complex and reflexive project; as it relates to other disciplines that involves social or cultural phenomena.⁵²

Cultural studies interdisciplinary nature has the tendency to combine distinct theories, methods and intellectual discourses, as a means to investigate cultural relations and phenomena in various social arenas. The fundament aim of culture studies is not only to generate shared meaning through the language in which it is used, but also to discover how man socially constructs the world by and for himself in a meaningful way.⁵³

New cultural studies as a discipline have also become the arena for discussing religious, philosophical and ethical matters of society. Apparently new culture studies have provided a new concepts of culture, which tend to “*remould metaphysics, theology, science, law, trades and professions; and in it earnest creation, adjust to or destroy the old*”.⁵⁴

3.1.1 The meaning of Culture

The term *culture* has come a long way in meaning. It has changed in definitions and forms over time. It has progressed from agricultural and spiritual perceptions, which can be reviewed within the idea of cultivating the soil/earth, the human soul/spirit and honouring of the gods, to associate with the concept of civilization.⁵⁵

In western societies, when the term *culture* associates with the word *civilization* it signifies developmental process of the material, immaterial and instrumental aspect of individual lives in terms of national development and division of labour, engineering and technology, the arts

⁵¹ Sørensen et al 2008; Baker 2012

⁵² Sørensen et al 2008

⁵³ Barker 2012:5-7

⁵⁴ Emerson, “Human Culture: Introductory, 1937 in Hauge & Horstbøll 1988: 24

⁵⁵ Klausen, Arne Martin (1999:20): *Kultur. Mønster og Kaos*. 3. Udgave: Ad Notam – Gyldendal. Cf. Hans Fink in Hauge, Hans & Horstbøll, Henrik (red.) (1988): *Kulturbegrebets kulturhistorie*, Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag

and aesthetics, trade and commerce, hierarchy and colonialism, reasoning and education, politics and organized religion, etc.

This association of the concept of culture with civilization has thus created an expansion in the meaning of culture. The expansion of cultural meaning encompasses our “whole way of life” - ideas, codes, arts, values, behaviour, norms, symbols, structure, language, science, religion and etc., which is being transferred from generations to generations with often few changes.⁵⁶

Within the expanded definition of culture, attention can be drawn to the development of the individual in regards to moral and intellectual disposition, and to the function of social processes in relation to politics, religion, philosophy and ethics. This awareness of culture has the tendency to frequently produce interrogations for change or continuity of our lifestyles, social processes, interrelations and/or human dynamics. The investigations for change or continuity of human socialization and development often involve politics, religion, philosophy and ethics.

3.1.2 Correlation: Religion, Philosophy and Ethics

In the context of the subject-RLE, I deem it necessary to establish the meaning of religion and how it correlates with philosophy and ethics so as to provide an in-depth understanding of what the subject entails theoretically.

The French sociologist and social scholar Èmile Durkheim (1858 – 1917) was probably the first to describe religion as a social factor. According to him religion is:

A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, set apart and forbidden-beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them.⁵⁷

Identifying religion as a “*unified systems of beliefs and practices*”, Durkheim portrays religion in modern terms, as social issue that resonates with definite experience, through collective consciousness. His definition recognizes no definite supreme/supernatural spirit being.

⁵⁶ See Han Fink in Hauge, Hans & Horstbøll, Henrik (1988:16) *Kulturbegrepets kulturhistorie*, Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag

⁵⁷ Durkheim 1912/1995:44

Nevertheless, he perceives *beliefs and rites*, and *sacred and profane* as common elements that constitutes the universal concept of religion.

In Durkheim's opinion, the sacred can be material, immaterial or instrumental. It also has the tendency to relate to profane things – things that are kept away from the sacred. For him, the relation between beliefs and practices, sacred and profane is common and observable in all religion, and for this reason he suggests that no religion is false, and “*what is true of religious individualism is true of religious universalism*”.⁵⁸ This view of religion can be observed as the idea behind combining and teaching all religions at equal levels in schools.

Durkheim also propounds that the primary function of religion acts on the moral/ethical life of the society. In other words, religion has the tendency to make human beings act better, help themselves live better and to assist in producing moral behaviours that maintain tolerance and solidarity upon which a society is formed.⁵⁹

Generally, the modern idea of religion is perceived as the sacred, spiritual, divine, or profane commiserating with the ultimate affairs of human – life, culture, fate, death and/or afterlife. It is organized and constituted of rules, regulations and ritual, which may be expressions of the supernatural on the human psyche, craving human fellowship, belief, experience and moral conduct.⁶⁰

Comparing religion to culture, as “*a whole way of life*”, one would deduce in a way, that religion and culture have a common relation in that both entities involve social factors or elements that bring people together for cooperative achievement, which may be good or bad.

On the contrary, culture often attempt to define or demarcate social elements within the community, based on the consensus of the society in relation to food, technology, arts, rituals, education, and etc. Whilst, religion attempts to provide guidance, develop personal morality, and interpret how members of the society play their role in reference to natural and supernatural phenomena, which often occur within local cultures, and attempt to connect to

⁵⁸ Durkheim (1912/1995:424 – 427)

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ See Rudi Kessel (2011), S. Hjelde & O. Krogseth in Brunvoll et al (2009:13 – 16), Gaarder, et.al (1997:13), Durkheim (1995)] .

with universal happenings.⁶¹ It is within the backdrop of these ideas, that correlation between religion, philosophy and ethics is exposed in society.

Religion correlates with philosophy and ethics and vice versa, in that each concept has strong effect on the human consciousness in relation to defining or describing phenomena that involve human life, activities and surroundings, and the way we interpret our conducts and relate to our world.

Erik Brøntveit and Knut Duesund are among scholars who have tried to elucidate the correlation between religion, philosophy and ethics. They propose that religion, philosophy and ethics are not opposing concepts. According to them:

Religion often provides answer, and believers are obliged to accept the answer [by faith] without always understanding; while philosophers try to find/discover answers or possible solutions through reasoning.⁶²

Brøntveit and Duesund also suggest that ethics, in connection with religion and philosophy, focuses on matter of right and wrong within human culture, especially as it describes the meaning people assign to philosophical and religious issues; and as it determines the bases for moral choices and highlight collective values.⁶³

The unique connection between religion, philosophy and ethics is based on the premise that triggers the answer they derive. That is to say, when religion generates faith, philosophy provides reasoning, while ethics determines the basis for moral choices and describes the meaning ascribed to philosophical or religious answers in view of considering collective values. In this frame, the act of tolerance becomes relevant for the creation of solidarity in a society of diversity.

⁶¹ See Hans Bringeland in Brunvoll, Bringeland et. al (2009). Also see Henriksen (2011) and <http://www.cultureandreligion.com/>, retrieved 8 November

⁶² Brøntveit & Duesund (2002/2010:17) cf. Hygen, Johan B. (1978) & http://www.vuletic.com/hume/ph/ph_ethics.html#sthash.wNSL5cOl.dpuf, retrieved 29. 11. 2013.

⁶³ Brøntveit & Duesund (2002/2010: 193)

3.2 Illuminating concepts of tolerance, solidarity and social integration

The word *tolerance* originates from a Latin word “*tolerare*” which means “*to bear or endure*”. It also links with the idea of “*nourishing, sustaining and preserving*”.⁶⁴ But beyond this, tolerance implies willingness to accept emotions, experiences, expressions, habits, feelings or beliefs that are different from one’s own. It also signifies the ability to experience, agree with or endure something harmful or unpleasant.⁶⁵

A term that is closely synonymous to the word *tolerance* is known as *toleration*. Toleration denotes the act of practicing or tolerating something; acceptance, or permissiveness.

Interestingly, the word *toleration* has often been used in religious and political discourses, whereas *tolerance* was basically used in the medical spheres.⁶⁶ All the same, the modern use of the word tolerance has superseded the old-fashioned use of toleration by absorbing not just the idea of endurance, etc., but also signifying the ability to allow an opinion, etc. in spite of one’s own beliefs. Nevertheless, on the academic scene, the term *toleration* may be identified as a religious/political project, whilst tolerance is acknowledged as virtue.

The British historian Henry Kamen describes toleration as:

Concession of liberty to those who dissent in religion (...) part of the process in history that led to gradual development of the principles of human freedom.⁶⁷

Kamen’s definition reveals that human-freedom or practice of free-will is the basic goal for tolerance/toleration. Many western scholars agree that the problem of religious intolerance in the West, during the medieval periods, and even into the renaissance, was based on heresy mainly within religious groups including Christianity – Catholics and Protestants; Greco Roman polytheism, Judaism and Islam.⁶⁸ There appeared to be mutual conflicts in reference to making one’s views heard and effective.

⁶⁴ Zagorin (2003:5)

⁶⁵ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tolerance>

⁶⁶ Kamen 1967, Zagorin (2003), Grell and Scribner (1996)

⁶⁷ Kamen (1967:7)

⁶⁸ Kamen 1967, Zagorin (2003), Grell and Scribner (1996)

In spite of this, the idea of toleration was established so that distinct religious groups would co-exist, even though they disapprove each other's views. This concept promoted an ideological split between church and state.

The state was then identified as peacekeeper in religious matters, by not favouring a particular sect. Laws were created to promote religious freedom and equality. Religious bodies/institutions and citizens had the right to operate and co-exist in tolerance, while the state withheld the power to curb infringement of the law, and set the pace for economic growth in society through mutual trade.

The achievement of toleration in western cultures is basically attributed to John Locke and Pierre Bayle.⁶⁹ During the periods of enlightenment, both men tried to establish a form of equality and impartiality in religious and political matters. The reasons, on one hand was to eradicate the notion of forceful conviction and to impress the virtue of tolerance and liberty in human lives, and on the other hand cultivate the idea of religious pluralism, social integration and solidarity in a culture/society of diversity.⁷⁰

Solidarity and social integration can be considered as complementary concepts. Solidarity is viewed as a social or philosophical agreement of interest between two or more people, groups or institutions. Whereas social integration denotes the merger of both mainstreams and ethnic minorities into amicable social network irrespective of religious or cultural backgrounds.⁷¹

According to Émile Durkheim (1858 – 1917), solidarity has two sides – mechanical and organic.⁷² Mechanical solidarity focuses on similarity in simple, traditional or small scale societies – where people of homogenous nature do essentially the same thing, or express the same feeling toward the same object. In such society, people are held together by shared belief and practices and/or ethics and rituals; with more or less awareness of distinctive collective consciousness – they feel like they are part of a common sense.⁷³ Here the individuals' interaction with his surroundings becomes part of a collective consciousness – by

⁶⁹ Zagorin (2003)

⁷⁰ According to Zagorin, the only country where genuine toleration of religious denominations outside state church existed during the seventeenth century was in the Dutch Republic (Zagorin 2003: 241).

⁷¹ See Thomas Hylland Eriksen in Thomas Hylland Eriksen, red., (2001: 22 – 30)

⁷² Mechanical and organic solidarity are revealed by Émile Durkheim (1858 -1917), my understanding of the concept derives from Dag Østerberg (1997:30)

⁷³ Østerberg (1997:30 – 35)

which they as human beings do not identify themselves as simple animals, but are aware of one another as social beings.

However, in an industrial-complex and populated society, organic solidarity exposes human differences that lead to mutual dependency or interdependency as a result of division of labor and/or mutual reliance on individuals' specialized skill that creates the means for social cohesion, and social space for individual freedom.

Organic solidarity tends to counter act and/or replace mechanic solidarity in that it portrays each human being and their skills as an important unit of the whole society, in comparison to living organism, where parts of the body work together for the good of the whole.⁷⁴ Here, social/cultural organizations or institutions, religious bodies, schools etc. become necessary interdependent components for providing solution to the problem of imbalance and disharmony that affects the whole society⁷⁵

In the situation where people of different backgrounds, groups or institutions provide each other the possibility to merge so as to receive equal opportunities, acquire similar education, adopt common language, compete for the same jobs, create friendship, gain more closeness and feeling for each other and obtain the same challenge(s), to participate in national activities within the confines of state laws and the value of the society, social integration then emerges and intertwines with concept of solidarity.⁷⁶

Considering the intertwined concepts – solidarity and social integration, it is easy to deduce that solidarity sets the philosophical basis and rationality for the practical formation of social integration. And the achievability of both concepts encompasses the culture of tolerance, which schools are attempting to inculcate in the modern child, who is perceived as hope for the future in reference to his/her active and responsible involvement in society.

3.3 Childhood Development Theories

I have observed that study of *the child* or *development of childhood* can be explored within two major epochs - traditional and modern periods. Within these periods, child/childhood has

⁷⁴ Østerberg (1997:30 – 35)

⁷⁵ *ibid*

⁷⁶ Thomas Hylland Eriksen in Thomas Hylland Eriksen, red., (2001: 25 -26)

been discussed in various contexts – religious, psychological, historical, sociological, philosophical and etc. However, I intend to limit the discussions of the child or childhood development within the sociological and/or religious context, even as it connects to traditional and modern periods.

In Western societies, the traditional concept of the child can be traced back to the medieval periods through the work of the French Scholar Philippe Aries.⁷⁷ Aries portrayed children as adults lacking parental care, receiving physical disciplines as methods of retributions, and integrated with adults through education, work and family.

Through the traditional periods, school life was unstructured by age-groups, lesson plan and space. And the doctrine of Christianity was the major source for knowledge.

In Norway for example, as pietism became the fundamental goal for the transfer of knowledge, confirmation then was the determining factor for transfer to adult life, and children were physically punished for wrong deeds even up to the 1800s.⁷⁸ In spite of this, the traditional periods observed parents as having affection and expectations for their children.⁷⁹

In modern context, the child is perceived as a person between birth and puberty; and childhood is the period of time a person is considered a child, with the opportunity to identify him or herself as such without perplexity.⁸⁰

The 1989 convention of the UN⁸¹ on the right of the child, defines a “*child*” as any person under the age of eighteen. In other areas, the UN convention suggests that childhood is the period for school, play and growth; a time for encouragement, care and protection from adults or parents; a period that presupposes freedom from violence, fear, abuse and exploitation.⁸²

⁷⁷ Philippe Aries (1962/1969) Centuries of childhood

⁷⁸ Andreassen (2012:57), see also Amundsen in Schaaning (red) (2002) & Dale (1990: 15,18)

⁷⁹ See Pollock (1983)

⁸⁰ This definition is derived from <http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-definition/child>, and childhood. Retrieved 09.10.2013, see also Schrupf (2007)

⁸¹ United Nations

⁸² http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/433_468.htm cf.

<http://www.unicef.org/sowc05/english/childhooddefined.html> &

http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Implementation_Handbook_for_the_Convention_on_the_Rights_of_the_Child_Part_1_of_3.pdf

The UN convention's description of child/childhood can be observed in two folded dimensions: On one side, it sets limit between adult and child, placing the child at the center of learning. And on the other side, it portrays child/childhood as constituting natural, physiological, biological or social needs and changes within time and space. Therefore the child should acquire freedom in developing his/her abilities so as to become productive citizens, and promote the concepts of intellectualism, aestheticism and social virtues.

Within social arenas, Sagberg and Steinsholt describe the child as:

Person with independent status, with his/her own needs and rights. In short, Children are considered as social actors who (not unlike us adults), actively enter and affect the world through their actions, thus helping also to create their individual lives during historically constructed conditions of change.⁸³

In Sagberg and Steinsholt description, the child is portrayed not only as social construction and social actor, but also he/she is considered as a rational being, shaping his/her life, identity and surroundings through historical and cultural constructed conditions.

In this perspective, the social adjustment of the child does not necessarily link to physical or biological growth, but within specific social relations or cultural settings in which the child displays the tendency to be constructed and/or re-constructed.⁸⁴ Through this venture, child/childhood cannot be perceived as existing in absolute define form, because the child is placed in a social world that is constructed by human beings, a social world in which the child rationally interacts – displaying his/her role in relation to societal conditions and demands.⁸⁵ This form of child/childhood development is uniquely linked to the concept of social constructivism and/or social constructionism.

Social constructivism and social constructionism are contemporary interrelated social theories. Social constructivism emphasizes the notion that there is no absolute method in the social science, and thus the construction of the society is determined by social-cognitive interactions between individuals and groups.⁸⁶

⁸³ Sagberg & Steinsholt in Sagberg & Steinsholt (2003:11)

⁸⁴ Jenks (1997) cf. Prout and James (1990)

⁸⁵ See Amundsen in Sagberg & Steinsholt (2003:47 – 52)

⁸⁶ Hellesnes (2001)

In other words, groups and individuals with collective consciousness construct knowledge, create shared-regulations, cultures and meanings. While social constructionism on the other hand, emphasizes and reveals the methods that are applied to an object and belief about the object that is being created through social interaction.⁸⁷

So bearing in mind the concepts of social constructivism and social constructionism in reference to the development of the child, it can be emphasized also that the children possess cognitive abilities capable of signifying reality, generating reality and as well stands to be constructed and/or reconstructed differently by reality, at different intervals within cultures and sub-cultures. This scheme is achievable in the view of studying the child as a child; his/her social relations independent of adult's perspective and concerns, using applicable methods that defines social processes and meaning generated from the reality.⁸⁸

3.3.1 Children thinking process

There are presumptions that every child or adolescent is uniquely different. These presumptions need no further argument.

According to social psychologists Oddbjørn Evenshaug and Dag Hallen, the differences in children can be spotted immediately at birth, and their differences especially in maturity and learning are motivated by genetic and environmental factors.⁸⁹ This means that children are born with the natural and mental capacity to acquire learning, build-up moral capability by the aid of the society, and develop their own meaning of life situations as they mature.

Evenshaug and Hallen's idea is rooted in Jean Piaget theory of cognitive development which highlights the progression of children's thinking process in relation to their environment. Piaget's theory of child development has also been advanced by several scholars.⁹⁰ The theory of cognitive development does not only attempt to provide understanding of the child thinking and learning process from early childhood to adulthood, but also it sets the basis for

⁸⁷ See <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0001879104000065>, retrieved 19.03.2014

⁸⁸ (Aasebø & Melhuus (2005); Prout and James (1990:8).

⁸⁹ Evenshaug, Oddbjørn & Hallen, Dag (1993:30): Barnets Utvikling – Fra Spedbarn til tenåring, Ad Notam Gyldendal cf. Lina A. Pollock (1983:96 -97): Forgotten Children, Parent-Child from 1500 to 1900.

⁹⁰ Eli Gottlieb (2006): Development of Religious Thinking, Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association, 101:2, 242 – 260, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00344080600640095> retrieved 15.10.2013

discussing the modern child's action or relation to others and his/her environment in reference to moral or religious context.⁹¹

According to Sturla Sagberg children are best prepared for religious education when their thinking becomes abstract – that is thinking outside of the box.⁹² Here the child's personality development becomes essential even as he/she faces the challenge to incorporate new life experiences. However, the motivation to maintain specific beliefs and/or exhibit certain behaviours comes in the light for potential change, especially when the child or adolescent begins to tell or narrate his own stories or experiences.⁹³

Kari T. Gamst argues that understanding the child's communicative competence and memory ability cannot be done by ignoring aspects of the child's cognitive abilities in reference to the society or culture the child is growing and/or has grown in.⁹⁴

In Gamst's opinion, children or adolescents' cognitive process interplay with social phenomena, characterized by social constructivist view. Their cognitive process also incorporates memory, understanding oneself and others subjects through sensory perception, concentration, language, conceptual perception, imagination including the ability to reason and evaluate. In other words, the child's approach to language, thought and communicative action are viewed in the light of his/her participation in social constructive activities or social circular cognitive system.⁹⁵

In reference to abstract thinking, Gamst maintains the argument that children's ability to communicate, memorize, and recall is in proximity to language development and assumptions of cognitive maturity. Hence to identify children's thinking process, it is imperative to consider the variances that emerge at each age-range.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Ivar Frønes (2007)

⁹² See Sagberg & Steinsholt in Sagberg & Steinsholt (2003). The main goal of this findings was to impose restrictions on what was taught to young children – to limit young children's exposure to biblical materials – to encourage children's logical thinking of events regarding the past, present and future – and as children thinking matures or improves, they would not perceive religion as something childish or irrelevant (Gottlieb 2006:245).

⁹³ See Kneezel & Emmons in Roehlkepartain, King et al (2006)

⁹⁴ Gamst (2011:46 -47)

⁹⁵ ibid

⁹⁶ Gamst (2011:47)

3.3.2 Age range from 7 – 12

Children in age-ranging from 7 – 12 begin to think abstractly; they are critical, probable and conscious of their identity.⁹⁷ They have good communication ability, and can master strategies that engage them into dialog.⁹⁸

In age range 7 – 12, children's access to written language increases their thought process, and develops their cognitive skills. Here they have the ability to reason dialectically, through discussion and reflections during social interaction; and have general knowledge of their surroundings, vocabulary and further development. They are conscious of what they know and do not know, as they move onto their teen years.⁹⁹

3.3.3 Teenagers

Undeniably, teen years are challenging periods. These are the periods young people are prepared to increase their capacity for abstract thoughts. They attach importance to reflective moral ideas and rationality. They set focus on the meaning of life and exhibit the ability to formulate future goals.

Teenage range from 13 – 17 are not legitimate adults. Thus, they have the tendency to struggle with the transformation from childhood to adulthood with some exhibition of reliable and/or unpredictable behaviours as they relate or respond to their surroundings or interact with other individuals in society.¹⁰⁰ This phenomenon exposes the teenager as a real person who also bears inherited personality and social realities. It also creates the avenue for clearer understanding of teenager in relation to their culture or society, and generates scopes for identifying pedagogical instruments that would spur their transition from childhood into productive adulthood.

However, as a means of attempting to understand the teenager's individuality, his/her experience and perception about life in general, it is imperative to apply good communication process, flexibility and adaptability in light of his/her own culture; even as it connects to religious pedagogic in multicultural dimensions.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Evenshaug & Hallen 1993:55 – 56

⁹⁸ Gamst 2011:53

⁹⁹ ibid

¹⁰⁰ Evenshaug & Hallen (1993)

¹⁰¹ Gamst (2011)

In the previous chapter I presented a background that briefly describes religious life in Telemark and re-counted the basis of RLE in Norwegian schools. In this chapter, I have endeavoured to discuss a few theoretical perspectives that highlight culture studies as an arena for debating religious, philosophical and ethical issues; and have clarified the modern concepts of culture including tolerance, solidarity and social integration. As a final point, I have highlighted theoretical argument that portrays children/youth as social actors, possessing the ability to think and express themselves in the development of their individual life, including their surroundings.

In the pages that follow, I intend to discuss the methods that I have used in order to provide answer to the questions pertaining to the organisation of the subject-RLE in Vest-Telemark Primary Schools, and analyse pupils' perception of the subject-RLE in relation to tolerance and solidarity.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Preliminary Frame

Èmile Durkheim (1858 – 1917) argued that reality is independent of the observer; and human ability to acquire knowledge begins with human sociability.¹⁰² But, there are complexities and significant rapid changes of social phenomena in today's modern world. The frequency of social change coupled with its challenges, has given rise to diverse and relevant scientific approaches in investigating any specified phenomenon.

One of the major temptations researchers often face in investigating cultural or social activities stems from the challenge to completely detach themselves from the information, culture and people they investigate simply because they are part and parcel of the events and the society they explore.¹⁰³

According to Mark J. Smith, the researchers' difficulty to be completely detached from cultural or social phenomena they investigate may portray the notion that all scientific knowledge is universal.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, there are two fundamental directions that may determine variations. The first path demands the establishment of social scientific knowledge on the basis of the cultural and institutional lives of a given community. And the second path pursues knowledge based on historical examination of shared tradition of knowledge production.¹⁰⁵ These directions may also signify the point that, if one identifies the cultural or social beliefs upon which the subject-RLE has developed, it becomes possible also to analyse the current perception of the pupils in reference to the anticipated social/cultural phenomena.

In reference to the researcher's detachment and ascertaining of knowledge of social phenomenon, Smith propounds three categories of approach-relations between experience and scientific study, based on the idea of the Austrian social scientist Alfred Schultz (1899 -1959). These related approaches are named as: 1) The person on the street 2) the Cartographer and 3) the stranger.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Durkheim (1912/1995)

¹⁰³ Smith (1998)

¹⁰⁴ Smith (1998: 15 - 20)

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*

¹⁰⁶ Smith (1998: 20)

According to Smith, the person on the street implies one who is simply at home in a particular place, operating through tacit knowledge, getting by without the need for much deep reflection, while the cartographer is an expert mapping urban environments and maintaining a degree of detachment from the object and yet unable to comprehend what it is like to live in such a place – a problem which may be treated as a metaphor of much of social practices. But the Stranger is a person passing through, who needs to establish an “*adequate grasp of existing social relationships in order to get by*”.¹⁰⁷

Comparing the stranger with the person on the street and the cartographer, Smith reasoned that the stranger is not unreflective like the person on the street or trapped as a cartographer within the “*narrow vantage point of an academic specialization*”.¹⁰⁸ He however suggests that methods and understanding of social phenomena in the purview of the stranger’s approach should be perceived as effective. This is because the researcher who possesses the stranger’s mind is being detached from the attitude of person on the street and the cartographer.

Notwithstanding, the one with the stranger’s mind needs to be cautious of not falling into the trap of imposing his own views or categories upon the research object without regards for the experience of those involved. Instead he ought to verify and reconcile between detached positions and the experience of everyday life.¹⁰⁹

In view of Smith’s advocacy regarding the stranger-approach, I have considered myself a stranger, and have cultivated the mind to investigate the organisation of the subject-RLE in three primary schools in Vest-Telemark.¹¹⁰ I have also determined to identify and analyse the views/experiences of 10th graders in these schools. With this in mind, I have resolved to apply a qualitative method for data inquiry and/or collections.

4.2 Qualitative method

Qualitative research method is mainly about exploring issues with the aim of gaining understanding of the phenomena. It is an all-encompassing field investigation that implores unstructured data collection methods, such as observation, documents/literary review or

¹⁰⁷ Smith (1998: 20)

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*

¹¹⁰ Certainly, the author of this thesis originates from Africa. Thus, as total stranger, I was also very aware that on the field of research in Norway, I would be highly viewed with eye of scepticism.

interview.¹¹¹ It primarily involves few numbers of respondents/informants or samples with the aim of discovering the reason for behaviours, phenomena, attitudes or motivations.

Within the context of applying qualitative methods, I do not intend to generalize the findings on the population at large, but endeavour to increase familiarity with the situation; finding out how pupils cope with their circumstances and generate meanings.¹¹²

4.2.1. Literary review

Prior to work on the research field, I assessed relevant literary sources. I read previous research materials, journals and books related to KRL and RLE.

In relation to the Subject-RLE with emphasis on tolerance and solidarity, I did not find any study referring directly to 10th graders' perception and experience of RLE in Vest Telemark. Nevertheless, I tried as much as possible to get hold of materials that provide in-depth understanding about the transition from KRL to RLE in Norwegian primary schools.

Within the domain of contemporary culture studies, I have gathered pieces of interesting information that sets the basis for religious, philosophical and ethical debates. I read through material that aided me to elucidate the concept of culture and the correlation between religion, philosophy and ethics. I also read materials that highlighted the concepts of tolerance, solidarity/social integration and adopted theories of childhood development that portray the child as social actor. These literary materials have immensely formulated the theoretical sections of this thesis, which you have already read through.

4.2.2. Samples Selection

To begin with, an official information letter regarding my research project in RLE was delivered to six of the several primary schools in West-Telemark. The letter highlighted the research topic; the research question; the goal for the research; the procedure or method for data collection; the date for research and the significance of anonymity. The letter also requested for the voluntary involvement of participants.

¹¹¹ Jacobsen (2005); Fangen (2004); Kvale & Brinkmann (2009)

¹¹² See Grenness (2001:190) regarding the aim for qualitative research. Compare also with <http://lynn-library.libguides.com/researchmethods8>, retrieved 06.03.2014

Of the six schools that received letters from me, one school did not respond at all. Two schools refused to participate. Nevertheless, three schools opted to participate on the basis that anonymity is ensured. These schools were therefore earmarked as schools A, B and C for the purpose of ensuring anonymity, and in accordance to the sequence (time and date) of their agreement to participate in the research.

Like other primary schools in Vest-Telemark, schools A, B and C were multinationals oriented. That is to say, in addition to Norwegian pupils, there were pupils from Africa, Asia, South America, the Middle East, USA, and other parts of Europe.

However, on the onset, without inquiry, it was difficult to tell if a pupil was a Christian, Buddhist, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, etc., at the three separate campuses; except for a few girls who were allowed to dress to school with hijabs, especially in schools A and C. In fact, according to the principal of school -A, the pupils with Muslim backgrounds, within the overall population of his school accounts for 10%.

The principals of schools B and C could not tell me which percentage of the pupils at their separate schools was Muslim, Christian, Jew, or not. Nevertheless, the three distinct principals of schools A, B and C confirmed that every pupil at their respective schools acquired same knowledge in all subjects, irrespective cultural background, gender, race, ethnicity or religion.

During the period of my research, each principal tried to assist in providing the total number of pupils at their respective schools. At School-A the total population was 165 pupils; School-B had 170 pupils, while School-C comprised 102. As a result, the three schools had a sum total of 437 pupils.

In reference to gender difference, School-C had 50 boys and 51 girls. When I inquired from Schools A and B, I realized that each of the principals was not prepared to account for the numbers of boys and girls at their respective school. They stated that they did not have the time to go into that.

However, in regards to the population of 10th graders, and with the help of each RLE-teacher, at schools A B and C, I learned that 10th graders in School-A were 19 pupils; at School-B 25

pupils, and at School-C 18 pupils. The sum total of 10th graders in schools A B and C were 62 pupils.

At this juncture, since I was more concerned with the overall population of the 10th graders, the organization and teaching of RLE, including the pupils' perception of the subject in reference to tolerance and solidarity, I decided to give less attention to gender difference; and thus opted to consider that only when working with the samples that I will acquire later from the schools.

Nevertheless, with the sum total of sixty-two 10th graders at schools A B and C, about 33.88% of this population became my respondents, while the teachers and principals served as my informants.

According to Dag I. Jacobsen the term *respondent* and *informant* are two distinct concepts which are often used interchangeably. On one hand a respondent is a person “*with direct knowledge of the phenomenon*”; a person who “*participates in an event or receives special service by being member of a particular group*”. And on the other hand, an informant is a person who “*does not represent the group that is being investigated*”, but have good knowledge of the phenomena.¹¹³

Thus to reiterate, in the context of Jacobsen's clarification of the terms *respondent* and *informant*, I considered the 10th graders in primary schools A, B and C, in West-Telemark, as my respondent. And my informants were basically 10th grade RLE-teachers and the principals of the three separate schools.

However, when the period for the practical aspect of my research at schools A, B and C drew nearer, authorities especially at schools C increased their scepticism about my research plan. They were not very sure what I wanted to do with the result of my research. For this reason, I revisited all three schools respectively to reemphasize my commitment to the project as stipulated in the information letter that was distributed, and to reinforce my request for the opportunity, to interview at least seven 10th grade pupils, including the principal and the RLE-teacher, at each school.

¹¹³ Jacobsen (2005:171)

To clarify the point concerning the main goal of this research, which I have already stated in the introductory section of this thesis, it is to identify ways RLE is practically arranged and taught to 10th graders at Vest-Telemark primary schools, and to analyze the views/experience of the pupils regarding the subject, as it relates to tolerance and solidarity. And the result of this research would only add value to my knowledge of cultural/religious pedagogy. And in keeping with this, the RLE-teacher, principal and pupils at each of the three schools were neither under compulsion, nor pressure to negotiate with me in conducting any form of interview.

Nevertheless, as I continue to elaborate and unfold the goal for the research, both the principals and RLE teachers in schools A, B and C consented to participate and hoped that their 10th graders participate willingly.

In order to get the pupils involve willingly, a similar letter of information (that was sent to schools, attached with a consent sheet) was distributed to parents/guardians of 10th graders, through the schools, to allow their child/children who wish to participate in the research to do so. But no consent-sheet was returned to me.

Thus, in cooperation with the RLE-teachers and the schools' principals, I relied on the legitimacy of the pupils' right (at age 15) to decide or express their own views in matters of interest or concern.

Furthermore, studies have shown that at the age 15, young people are more conscious of themselves; having the ability to express their opinions and aspirations about matter that particularly relate to them.¹¹⁴ The schools' authorities also understood this concept, and encouraged the 10th graders in their respective schools to voluntarily and render their personal approval for the interview.

During RLE class sections in schools A, B and C; and with the permission of the teachers, I re-informed the pupils about the research project, and therefore asked them to volunteer and show up for interview if they did wished. In each school – A, B and C, I also re-emphasized that at least 7 pupils (including boys and girls) were needed for interview.

In view of my commitment and clarification of the aim of my research, and with the assistance of the teachers, pupils were thus selected willingly by raising their hands to

¹¹⁴ See Evenshaug & Hallen (1993) cf. Tetzchner (2001): Utviklingspsykologi – barn – og ungdomsalderen, utg.1 Oppl.1, Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag

participate in the interview. They were neither picked randomly, nor through a snowball process.

In every 10th grade classroom, as I stood in front of the pupils, beside the RLE-teacher, the RLE teacher would ask if the pupils are willing to be interviewed. Many of the pupils were reluctant to participate. But remarkably, 7 pupils in each school: A, B and C raised their hands voluntarily to be interviewed. Thus the total number of volunteered respondents was 21. According to Jacobsen, in a qualitative research, a sample of at least 20 persons is more than enough.¹¹⁵ However, the number of volunteered respondents accounts for 33.88% of sum total (sixty-two) 10th graders at schools A, B and C.

4.2.3. Interview

I conducted interviews with twenty-one 10th graders in schools A, B and C. These twenty-one 10th graders account for 100% of my samples.

In regards to gender difference of my research population, school A = 5 girls + 2 boys. School B = 1 girl + 6 boys and School and C = 4 girls + 3 boys. There were a total of 10 girls and 11 boys who were interviewed. In addition to this, I interviewed 3 respective RLE teachers and 3 principals of the three separate schools. Averagely each interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes, and it was conducted in Norwegian language (Bokmål).

The goal for the interview with pupils was to ascertain their views and/or experience regarding the relevance of the subject-RLE particularly in reference to tolerance and solidarity in a society of diversity. To know how pupils of different backgrounds perceive the subject-RLE and how they socially integrate and interact in their various schools was a matter of key interest to me.

In reference to the principals, the interview was concerned with grasping their general knowledge of the relevance and development of the subject-RLE, and the current social atmosphere at their respective schools. With the teachers, the interview focused on the organization of the daily teaching plan of the subject-RLE. The teachers' familiarity with the subject and their pupils, including the challenge they encounter in teaching the subject were also a matter that I was concerned with.

¹¹⁵ Jacobsen (2005:171)

4.2.4 Non-participant observation

In addition to interviews, I undertook a non-participatory observation (or direct observation). This observation was carryout during RLE class section in the three schools – A, B and C. The goal of the observation was mainly to discover pupils' interaction with their teachers during class section, and to determine how the subject is been presented in the three distinct schools.

During observations, I sat in the 10th grade-RLE class at each school for the whole teaching period (about 45 minutes), with the permission of the RLE-teacher. I did not participate in any discussion; neither did I ask a question during class room section. I was only concerned with observing how pupils responded to the teacher's teaching methods or questions in regards to the topic being discussed, and how the teacher codified the pupils' response in reference to pupils view or actions.

Both non-participant observation and interviews with 10th grade pupils were conducted only during RLE classes. The schools gracefully granted me two days (or two appointments) to conduct interviews and observation. And I was permitted to carry out this task only during RLE-sections because the time for teaching RLE was not enough as compared to other subjects. Thus, I had to be cautious not to disrupt the daily teaching plan or activity for so long. For this reason, I really did not have longer personal contacts with the pupils, at each school.

Nevertheless, the responses from interviews with the pupils, teachers and principals, and the insight I gathered from the observation were noted. The relevant results from these interviews and observations will be discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

4.3 Note taking

During the research interview and observation, I considered taking some notes and voice recordings with cautions. I briefly noted in my notepad expressions and observations which were relevant for my research. But, before I jotted a few notes and/or took recordings, I made sure that my informants and respondents were comfortable with the process. By this I clarified to them that the notes or recordings I was taking were restricted only to my project, and it had nothing to do with them personally.

In note taking, I used a digital recording device and notepad. During interviews, I had an interview guide prepared for each group of respondents/informants: pupils, teachers and principals. I did not consider other forms of recording, such as video, photographing, etc. as a way to enhance my commitment to anonymity.

Obviously, my informants and/or respondents were aware about all methods of taking notes during the interview and observation. To some extent, the principal of school-C even reviewed the pupils' interviewed guide before I could interview them.

4.4 Anonymity

The case for anonymity regarding this thesis arose when I registered my research project with the Norwegian Social Science Data Service, commonly known as NSD.¹¹⁶

NSD is responsible for individual protection rights. Upon evaluation of my project, NSD recommended that I proceed with serious caution to individuals' right for participation, withdrawal and/or anonymity. I accepted, respected and put into effect the evaluation results and mandate of NSD. Therefore all personal and sensitive information, even the name of schools is being anonymized. However, applicable data or field realities acquired orally, have being transcribed and analyzed in a valid and reliable manner.

Anonymity is a valid or legitimate approach to any sensitive research or issues in Norway. In my opinion, it basically involves withholding or covering-up personal identity, especially in relation to complex matters that may lead to inappropriate public judgment of individual's, or group's opinions or actions, while the process of inquiry by genuine or reasonable authority, expert or consultant is ongoing and/or completed.

In view of the fact that the subject-RLE contains religious, philosophical and ethical issues which may appear sensitive to some individuals, I deemed it necessary to adopt the principle of anonymity with cautions in presenting the views of my respondents and informants.

To intensify the position of anonymity, I did not ask for the names of my respondents and informants when recoding their voices during interview. Instead, I wrote their names on a

¹¹⁶ In Norwegian, NSD stands for Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste - <http://www.nsd.uib.no/>

separate paper, assigning them with specific codes. In this case, having their names was important to me in the situation where I may need to follow-up or request additional information about some important issues. Apart from that the informants' or respondents' names were not relevant, except for their personal views.

I have also withheld the names of the schools and areas in Vest-Telemark in which I undertook observation and/or interviews with pupils, teachers and principals, as a means of strengthening anonymity. Apart from the field identity actually revealed as Vest-Telemark primary schools, comments of my respondents/informants, and the numbers representing the three schools' populations, including those of the 10th graders, all personal data in reference to my informants and respondents have been treated confidentially. Thus, in any area of this thesis where a name of an individual or school or additional clue to a school may be mentioned, such name or clue should therefore be considered anonymous or pseudo.

4.5 Transcribing/Analyzing Field Data

Transcribing data is an essential process in research. It deals basically with preparing or transforming interview materials for analysis.¹¹⁷ It focuses on rewriting. That is transforming oral speech into written text or vice versa.

To reiterate, each interview with informants or respondents was done in Norwegian language. The reason was to create room for simple communication and to generate understanding, between the respondents/informants and me who deem it expedient to communicate in Norwegian. Nevertheless, every data that was collected through interviews represents the informants and/or respondents own views and/or experience of the reality in reference to the subject-RLE, and its connection to tolerance and solidarity.

Furthermore, I have carefully and precisely transcribed and translated the recorded interviews into English. Therefore information quoted from any anonymous respondent or informant is otherwise translated into English. And all translations and/or transcriptions have been done in accordance to my interest in relevant data/material, and in cognizance of the reliability and validity of my project. Any other form of personal data regarding my informants/respondent is being obliterated at the completion of this thesis.

¹¹⁷ Kvale & Brinkmann (2009)

In the next chapter, I intend to discuss the organization of RLE at schools A, B and C, and analyze the views of the pupils regarding the subject RLE, in relation to tolerance and solidarity. I also intend to consider the analyses of the pupils' views in the backdrop of a few social theories.

5.0 Practical Perspectives

5.1 Multinational Scene: Schools A, B and C

During my research at the primary schools A, B and C, in Vest-Telemark, I discovered that each school was multinational oriented. That is, in addition to Norwegian pupils, I came across pupils from nations in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and other parts of Europe. This multinational scene indicates that Vest-Telemark schools are not only opened to children/youth with immigrant backgrounds, but also the schools have created room for diversity. Every pupil studied the same subject irrespective of ethnic cultural/religious background. And the schools stand as arenas to assist pupils to think rationally and to develop moral behaviours that would expose them as democratic individuals in society.¹¹⁸

Through separate interviews with the principals, teachers and pupils, I deduced that each interviewee, at least in a smallest way, connected himself /herself to some form of belief system or religion. Even though about 98% of those I interviewed did not claim to be religiously active, yet they distinctly maintained that they possess some kind of philosophy of life.

In the wake of divergent views of life and distinct cultural dispositions, schools A, B and C are embracing the challenge to promote tolerance and solidarity; to form common identity irrespective of beliefs and or cultural backgrounds. The schools A, B and C are opened to the pupils' culture and values, while they assist the pupils to develop their own lives with cautions.

According to the Norwegian official reports (commonly known in Norwegian as NOU) 1995:9, with focus on identity and dialogue, schools in the country ought to be opened to children/youth cultures and values, with the aim of assisting them to develop their own lives with special care, even as they relate to others and/or their environments.¹¹⁹ The report further suggests that schools should incorporate elements of similarities in different cultures, and ascertain the willingness of the pupils to embrace other cultural perspectives, as they respectively relate to their own cultural views. In the backdrop of the NOU, one can say that the subject-RLE finds an essential position in Norwegian schools.

5.2 Organization of the subject-RLE at School-A, B and C

Certainly, the subject-RLE exists in Norwegian schools on the basis of educational reforms that have drastically reduced major focus on Christian education, and embraced teaching of major world religions, ethics and philosophy of life at equal levels.

¹¹⁸ See Hanken & Johansen (1998) cf. Bjørkvold (1989)

¹¹⁹ See NOU 1995:9 , Identitet og dialog

As a result of this scheme, there is no implication for spiritual development or formation of faith in a particular religion, but rather reinforcing pupils' awareness of the culture or society they live in. One of the major reasons for this venture is to increase pupils' creativity, objectivity and help them develop the act of tolerance, respect and solidarity in pluralistic society.

At schools A, B and C in Vest-Telemark, I inquired about the daily organization and presentation of RLE-lessons. I was interested in knowing how the subject is practically arranged and taught to pupils in grade 10. The RLE teacher in schools A, B and C responded quite differently:

The RLE-teacher in school-A said:

... Simply teaching in front of the chalk board ... using film, computers, media materials, textbooks, pupils work in different groups and discussions ... I try to use variety of methods and tools. We use Kunnskapløftet 2006 [knowledge promotion 2006], which came as a new teaching plan, which we must work by, and in addition should be supported with the text books ... then I schedule creative plans for the different school days or weeks.¹²⁰

According to the teacher in School-B, there is:

A little difference, but there are combinations ... I introduce the topic ... pupils do assignment in accordance to the topic, there can be individual assignment or group work ... we use other helping tools such as other books, ... the bible if we work with Christianity, films, internet materials, etc. which deals with the topic. So, there are little varieties, but first and foremost we often use the chalkboard for teaching.¹²¹

For the teacher of school C, she said:

We actually use different teaching methods. We work with different topics in different ways ... we watch films and discuss it, use some other discussion material, including what the pupils themselves have planned to discuss. I use common things like chalkboard, PowerPoint display, pictures, conversation, written text, textbooks, drama all possible ways to teach the pupils.¹²²

The information from the RLE teachers in schools A, B and C reveals that within the context of the current curriculum, teachers do apply different teaching materials, methods and use their own creativity to teach RLE-lesson. The major teaching tools, I observed as being commonly used by the RLE-teachers at schools A, B and C, included chalkboard, textbooks

¹²⁰ Teacher, School A

¹²¹ Teacher, School B

¹²² Teacher, School C

and film. Those that were slightly different were for example, drama in school C, the bible in school B and media material in school A. These teaching tools, amongst others, are meant to stimulate pupils' learning process. While the textbooks inspired pupils' reading ability, other material like the chalkboard, visual aids, home assignments, etc. are being provided as well to support the learning process. Besides the teaching tools, each teacher used his/her ingenuity to include other activities, like group work, home assignments, PowerPoint presentations, etc., so as to make learning easier.

Since different teaching activities and methods were employed at each teacher's own discretion, in reference to the pupils' learning need, RLE-lesson at Schools A, B and C were not similar on daily basis.

Each school dealt with different topics on daily basis. Nevertheless, lessons were presented within the context of the general curriculum. The difference in daily lesson did not apply to change in the content of the prescribed text-books. But the RLE-teachers presented their lessons in accordance with the content of the textbooks, and in cognizance with the pupils' learning needs and the overall educational plan. According to the general teaching plan:

The foremost goal of education is development. Education shall meet children, young people and adults on their own terms [or premises] and at the same time bring them into the limit where they can learn something new by opening minds and test their abilities.¹²³

Teaching children/youth at their own premise is one of the significant ways to help them learn and understand the lesson, know themselves and their environment better. This way of teaching also helps the pupils to cultivate the willingness to participate in the learning process.

Pupils' inclination to participate in RLE-class activities and/or learning processes fundamentally comes from the teacher's creativity, and ability to encourage and provide opportunity for the pupils to receive RLE-lessons at their own premise. It probably does not have anything to do with having a guest in their mix.

As a stranger, I was allowed to observe the learning processes at the schools. I observed how subject-RLE was practically presented by the teachers, and how the pupils responded to the teaching.

¹²³ <http://www.udir.no/Lareplaner/Kunnskapsloftet/Generell-del-av-lareplanen/Det-skapande-mennesket/>
retrieved 30.04.2014

At School-A, I observed 10th grade pupils working in smaller groups as part of the plan for receiving instruction in RLE for that week. The teacher had given the pupils a topic from the text book: “*Jesus in Music*”. He divided the class into four groups. The task of each group was to read the textbook critically and objectively, and discover how religious music had influenced modern secular musicians.

The goal of the task was to show that modern musicians, who have influenced the world with their music, do have their roots in religious music.¹²⁴ The task also seems to portray that the spiritual essence or meaning of religious music has been diffused and/or secularized to create ground for objectivity and integration of people of other faith.

Before the task begun, pupils were encouraged to work objectively and take responsibility for the answer(s) they produce. Since the textbook was the major source of the pupils’ information or answer, as they worked in group, reading and dialoging became an imperative way to find answers to the problem given to them by the teacher.

According to Atle Skaftun, reading comprehension in all subjects, including RLE, may be perceived as dialogical activity, especially when text are presumes as expressions.¹²⁵

Dialoging may provide participants the opportunity to be opened to each other, and respect each other views, and assist to achieve comprehension of the problem.¹²⁶

Thus, by reading and relying on the textbook, while applying act of rationalism, pupils were able to discover answers to their task. The interaction between individuals within the groups, and their text books reinforced each pupil’s comprehension of the task and ability to work together.

At School-B, the 10th graders acquiring knowledge in RLE worked quite differently. During RLE-class section, each pupil did a PowerPoint presentation of his/her RLE-assignment. The assignment was based on the topic “alternative movements” (known as *Alternativrørsle* in Norwegian). Alternative movements deal with different new age religious organizations.

The purpose for the assignment in RLE at School-B was to acquaint pupils with different “alternative religions”. Each pupil was to make a brief report on an alternative religion assigned to him/her. In the presentation, they were to highlight the name of assigned religion,

¹²⁴For example, Elvis Presley was influenced by Christian music”.

¹²⁵ Skaftun in Skjelbred & Aamotsbakken (2010:11)

¹²⁶ See Geir Winje in Sødal (red) et.al (2009)

present a brief historical fact about the religion, considering its ideologies and the key founder(s) of the religion. The pupils were also allowed to personally focus only on the historical significance relating to their individual work.

By reflecting, only on the historical dimension of the task, pupils will then refrain from the spiritual or evangelistic aspect of that particular alternative religion, while gaining general knowledge and understanding of its existence and function. This signifies also that RLE-lessons and presentation in any form should be on a platform where pupils would learn about the history and traditions of world religions with objectivity.

Some of the names for alternative religious that the 10th graders at School-B worked with included: Wicca, Kabala, yoga, natural medicine, church of scientology, astrology, and so on.¹²⁷ Every pupil was assigned a topic. And each PowerPoint presentation of a topic generally reveals that the tendency to belief in something is embedded in the human nature, even if one seems that what he/she believes has nothing to do with religion at all.

The pupils' presentation also reveals that religion is of great importance in many people lives, and it represents their identity. Indeed, it is through religion that many people learn to understand who they are and why they exist in this world.

According to a religious scholar Jan-Olav Henriksen:

Religion conveys symbolic, emotional and cognitive resources to life in the world, and to see oneself in the light of something other than what we can loosely call secular-everyday experience. ... We are not religious by ourselves. We are religious by virtue of fact that we have the chance to experience the cultural resources that religion offers, which actually acts as a life-interpretive perspective in which we ourselves are included.¹²⁸

The cultural resources that religion offers may include the sacred or profane things which may be the material, immaterial and instrumental or representations of systems, which Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917) seems to highlight in his definition of religion.¹²⁹ Thus, to accept the notion that religion conveys symbolic, emotional and cognitive resources that are cultural, in no doubt portrays religion as an inevitable phenomenon because the concept intertwines religious occurrences with culture phenomena.

¹²⁷ General Information about the mentioned alternative religion can be read in any religious encyclopedia or on Wikipedia /internett

¹²⁸ Henriksen (2011)

¹²⁹ See Durkheim 1912/1995:34

In reference to the organization of RLE and pupils' presentation at School-B, the study of various religious alternative movements exposed the pupils to the complexity of human nature and culture in terms of the need to understand oneself and his surroundings. It also reveals the inevitability of religion as a means of solving human problems that have enigmatic connotations. As a result, religion becomes an integral part of the cultural and/or society in which human lives interact.

At School-C, I observed the 10th graders sitting in their seats and listening to their teacher as she taught. Here, it was the teacher who was basically in action, and not the pupil. The teacher used the textbook, chalkboard and PowerPoint projector as her teaching tools.

The day's lesson was about religion, science and religion critique. And the goal of the lesson was not only to help pupils understand the common roles religion and science have played in society but also to provide understanding about the critical relation between religion and science, so that pupils may understand how important it is to think in different ways. This is to say, as pupils begin to reason critically about why science and religion co-exist, they would not only find reasons to add value to their cultural and religious heritage, but also they would create grounds for tolerance, respect and solidarity in a society of diversity.

In the process of RLE-lesson at School-C, the teacher highlighted the difference between religion and science. She clarified that religion attempts to answer existential questions, while science provides concrete information or deals with physical evidence in explaining the phenomena of our world. Existential questions may focus on matters of what exist, and how humans accept and/or add meaning to things they believe exist.

One of the major religious questions in modern times relates to the existences of God. Does God really exist? David Hume (1711 -1776) was one of the philosophers who neither defined the existence of God, nor ascribed credence to the inexistence of God or spiritual beings.¹³⁰ For Hume, there are difficulties in providing empirical evidence as to whether God exist or not.

Nevertheless, the existence of God, according to Hume, may be compatible to individual experience, but not well suited with universal experience. For this reason, according to him, one ought to believe what he/she experience, especially on the basis of empirical evidence.

¹³⁰ <http://stoa.usp.br/briannaloch/files/2564/16389/The%2BNatural%2BHistory%2Bof%2BReligion%2B-%2BDavid%2BHume.pdf>: The Natural History of Religion by David Hume (1711 – 1776) – online, retrieved cf. Lennox, John C. (2007): God's undertaker – Has Science Buried God? England: Lion Hudson Plc.

Hume idea seems to give credence to the act of experience, reasoning and/or objectivity, as one exercise faith. His idea does create grounds for empirical knowledge, and at the same time it promotes the discovery of the correlations between science and religion and other matters regarding philosophy.

In the purview of clarifying the difference between religion and science, by School-C's RLE teacher, I understood that her daily teaching plan was in line with the overall purpose for presenting the subject-RLE. She neither taught to present science as the only means for understanding our world, neither did she seem to teach that religious alone provides all the answers to human problem. However, on the basis of reasoning, she tried to assist her pupils identify the connection and distinction between science and religion.

Her explanation for the difference between religion and science can be juxtaposed or compared with Erik Brøntveit and Knut Duesund's distinction between religion and philosophy. Brøntveit and Duesund argued that religion is complimentary to philosophy and verse versa. That is to say, religion answers to matters of faith, why philosophy reasons around evidence. In other words, in an attempt to finding solution to human problem, when religion produces faith, and science provides information, philosophy would provide room for reasoning.¹³¹

By the end of RLE-section at School-C, the teacher assembled pupils into smaller groups so that they would reflect on the lesson being taught about religion and science. Here the pupils were asked to present their own thoughts as they discuss in their various groups. They were to focus on the differences and connections between religion and science, and discuss whether one is irrelevant to society, or both are relevant. The pupils had about ten minutes to conduct discussions pertaining to the assignments given to their respective groups.

During the group discussion, I observed no serious argument among the pupils. The pupils appeared to be relaxed with their colleague in the group, as they probed into the differences and connections between religion and science.

Due to lack of time, none of the group fully completed their discussion. And the class time was out. Nevertheless, the teacher told the pupils that they should take the task home, read and write their thoughts, which they might share in the next RLE-class section.

¹³¹ Brøntveit and Duesund (2002/2012:17)

Reading and writing skills of pupils should be regarded as a significant strategy for leaning and expression of knowledge. Camilla S. Jørgensen highlights that through reading RLE, pupils gain experience, and they acquire the ability to express their knowledge or views of religious, philosophical and ethical matters through writing.¹³² By giving the pupils the task to re-read the chapter regarding religion-critique and science in their textbook, and write their views to be presented in class, the RLE-teachers of School-C was not only assisting the pupil to gain knowledge and experience of the subject, but also she was giving them the opportunity to express their experience and/or knowledge they have gained.

This was a similar method that the pupils of School-B undertook, and they thus had the confidence to express what they have learned through reading. It is through reading that pupils often face the challenge to detect their own identity, beliefs or views and present it in forms of narratives.

At School-A, B and C, I noticed that the teaching methods and/or the teacher's personal approach to the subject-RLE were applied in cooperation with the pupils. The lessons were adopted in accordance to the pupils' interest and expectations. In the instance were each of the teacher planned to introduce the pupils to a new activity, for example homework, group work or discussion, this question was asked "er det greit?" meaning is it okay, that we go on with this task. The majority agreement to the teacher's question is what I interpret as the interest and willingness to carry out what the teacher require of them

Thus, with regard to the organization of RLE at School-A, B and C, I have observed that the subject is being arranged within the context of the general curriculum – kunnskapløftet 2006. The subject-RLE is interreligious. It contains major world religions such as, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, including alternative religions. The subject is being imparted to pupils' with the overall aim to develop their objectivity or ability to reason in a multicultural society, and to help them cultivate the virtue of tolerance and solidarity

However, the methods and presentation of daily lesson in RLE are slightly different, within School-A, B and C. In the context of the curriculum, teachers applied different methods, used different material at separate times at the premise of the pupils, so as to create smooth learning process. With the use of textbooks and other resource materials at School-A, B and C, I observed pupils learn in fellowship and in cooperation with the teachers.

¹³² Jørgensen in Skjelbred & Aamotsbakken (2010:142)

I have also observed that the major objective for imparting knowledge in RLE was neither to enforce spirituality (absorb customary proceedings of specific religion), nor create room for pupils' conversion to a particular religion. However, the teachers used their creativity to nurture pupils' creativity, objectivity and ability to reflect within the context of study and their surroundings.

5.3 RLE: Is it relevant?

In the background chapter of this thesis, you may have read about the establishment of the subject-RLE in Norwegian schools. The major purpose for establishing the RLE-subject in schools is not only to assist pupils obtain knowledge about religions, cultures and ethical matters that differ from their personal experience or perspective of life, but also the subject is meant to educate pupils to acquire skills of objectivity and critique in existential, abstract and concrete matters. Moreover, through the learning process, pupils are obliged to cultivate cultural and moral values such as respect, tolerance and solidarity, even as they learn on the platform of neutrality.¹³³

5.3.1 Challenge of Neutrality

Teaching and learning the subject-RLE challenge the existence of neutrality. In my personal view, the challenge for neutrality in the milieu of teaching and learning RLE is about detaching from one's own bias. It deals with juxtaposing one's personal belief with others so as to focus on basic similarities, with the aim of defining common grounds that may spur solidarity. This also means that if a person attempts to adopt a neutral position in any matter of controversy, then that person appears not to support anyone in a disagreement or argument.

Although achieving neutrality in everyday life can be difficult. However, when it deals with the teaching and learning of RLE, neutrality needs to be displayed within the confines of the overall educational objectives. Here it is important to consider the fact that RLE is meant not only to provide knowledge about other religions and/or philosophies of life, but also to inspire tolerance respect and solidarity.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the existence and demonstration of neutrality during teaching and learning processes solely rely on the teacher. It is the teacher's responsibility to inspire neutrality during the teaching and learning processes.

¹³³ I have chosen to use the terms neutrality/objectivity interchangeably.

¹³⁴ See Ingunn Moi in Skeie (2010:80 – 83)

In an interview with the principal of School-A, regarding the matter of neutrality, he said:

... I think there are challenges with RLE as maturing subject ...it has a difficult philosophy...but it also depends on the person who controls the subject ... how they interact with the students. ¹³⁵

The principal of School-A perceives the subject-RLE as gradually maturing since its inception. In other words, RLE as a subject has not yet got its grips in the educational system, since it was introduced.

If I may reiterate, the subject-RLE was introduced in the school year of 2008/2009. This means that the 10th graders of the year 2014 started acquiring full knowledge of RLE in grade 5. Thus the impression given by the principal of School-A is that the 10th graders in his school do have difficult experience with the philosophical aspect of RLE because they have not received adequate knowledge of philosophy, from grade one through grade four, when the subject was then called KRL.

Thus, the lack of learning philosophy from grade-one, which has caused the meager understanding of philosophy by the 10th graders in School-A, for the past four years, with very limited teaching periods, might often create dilemmas for the teacher, especially in the class of different nations or ethnicities. In this situation, pupils with previous knowledge only in Christianity or Islam and other religion, who have no concept of philosophy or ethics may create condition for the teacher to reveal his/her bias.

However, *philosophy* as an integral part of the subject-RLE might not be a difficult challenge, if the teacher has the ability to demonstrate neutrality, impart knowledge and to interact well with his/her pupils.

Furthermore, if the teacher tries to understand his/her pupils, and has full grasps of the subject and the learning environment he/she may as well be capable to assist the pupils to develop

¹³⁵ Principal, School-A

and demonstrate the act of neutrality, socialize with each other and think objectively within the society they live.

Skarre T. Aasebø and Catherine E Melhuus, in their book “*rom for barn – rom for kunnskap*” (Space for children – Space for knowledge) argue that children are transformed on the basis of the society or culture they interact with. For them children/youth have cognitive abilities, capable of signifying reality, generating reality and as well stand to be constructed and/or re-constructed differently, at different intervals within cultures and sub-cultures.¹³⁶

Considering the views of Aasebø and Melhuus, children/youth should be perceived as serious actors during teaching and learning processes. They have the tendency to observe, ask any questions, identify their surroundings, take in and reproduce what the teacher has given them, or narrate their own story or meaning regarding the phenomenon that they are part of, etc.

When I asked Aamir, a pupil at School-A, regarding how he received instruction in RLE, he said:

My teacher is very careful when explaining about other religions because he does not want to be blasphemous ... there are many teachers who could be like that ... and be a bit negative towards other religions, but I have received the impression that ... my teacher's teaching environment encourages tolerance.¹³⁷

Interestingly, Aamir has an immigrant background associated with Islam. And he is rendering a personal view about his teacher's method of teaching RLE. For Aamir, his teacher is not only careful when teaching RLE but also he creates the environment for tolerance. Aamir's view regarding how he received instruction in RLE, illustrates him as an observer and actor in his learning process. It also reveals his teacher as competent in reference to the subject and its presentation.

Moreover, in Aamir's view, his teacher does not only have the ability to demonstrate the act of neutrality when teaching RLE, but also he (Aamir) appeared to be satisfied with his teacher's method of teaching. His satisfaction with his teacher's ability to carefully

¹³⁶ See Aasebø & Melhuus (2005)

¹³⁷ Pseudonym-Aamir, School-A

demonstrate neutrality during the teaching of RLE, in multicultural domain, makes the concept of neutrality a necessary requirement for success in promoting tolerance and solidarity.

It is obvious that Aamir's teacher ability to demonstrate neutrality during his teaching stems from the fact that his teacher has good understanding of his pupils' background, the subject and his teaching environment.

In an interview with Aamir's teacher at School-A, he revealed:

We have several pupils with different religions in the class; we have pupils from Islam, Christianity, different philosophies of life ... humanistic beliefs... who are going through the subject. Philosophy ... is the topic that I feel is "all right". It gives me a little glimpse of the different religions that exist, as it blends with several religions. (...) At least I make teaching neutral and slightly objective by focusing on facts, and not go into too many ... emotional discussions. (...) I have a way of registering things, but not as uncomfortable discussions. In a way, I accept others regardless of their religion ... I think it is fine.¹³⁸

The knowledge the teacher has about his pupils' backgrounds and the RLE-subject, with particular reference in philosophy, and the teaching environment challenges his display of neutrality during teaching and learning process. However, according to the teacher, he becomes natural in teaching when he avoids emotional discussions; respect his pupils and concentrates on facts.

It is obvious that pupils may ask questions that may stir up emotional discussions. Some of these questions might relate to the teacher's personal view about controversial, ethical or private matters. With regard to neutrality, I asked the RLE-teacher at School-C about how she would respond when a pupil ask her about her personal views regarding a controversial matter or a particular religious question. She said:

I try not to get in a position so that they would ask me personal questions. But I will try to talk around their questions if they ask. ... I may ask the pupil why you want to know my personal view. Does it have anything to do with the topic ... because in this subject, we do not talk about what I believe or you believe, but we shall talk about what the religions say in the textbook, the views that are opened to us ... however, because I know my pupils well ... if any

¹³⁸ RLE-teacher, School-B

of them asked me directly ... 'what do you mean' it is unnatural not to respond to the pupils questions.¹³⁹

To be neutral in her teaching, the RLE-teacher of School-C exercised caution and courtesy. First, she tries not to reveal her prejudice about any particular religion, while being conscious of the pupils' interest. She endeavors to respond to her pupils in reference to the subject, and on the basis of the knowledge she has about her pupil.

The same question I asked the RLE-teacher at School-C was also posed to the RLE-teacher of School-B. And her response was:

I do not think that we should be so afraid to say what we mean or believe, as long as we can say it in a healthy way...not perceived as trying to push your beliefs or views on others. So I think we should be allowed to say what we mean or belief with respect and tolerance.

The teacher of School-C suggests that one should be allowed to share personal opinions in matters that concerns the pupils, but such opinion should be conveyed with tolerance and respect for others. This means also that in a matter of religion, philosophy and ethics, teachers should try to come out of their private closets and respond to pupils' inquiries or curiosities with care.

Basically, in schools A B and C, the bold reactions of RLE-teachers, not being too private, withholding their personal views, but attempting to respond to pupils' needs, with the mind of demonstrating tolerance, respect, neutrality and solidarity during teaching and learning process may draw attention to the comment of the religious scholar Jan-Olav Henriksen, which states:

Religion is not just something people have in their head, but it is intertwined into the social and cultural context, symbols and actions, and practices and visible expressions. Therefore it would be wrong to perceive it as something private. (...) Religion is about culture, society, fellowship and practices where human lives interact with each other; and thus, to describe religion as a private matter is to reduce it quite dramatically.¹⁴⁰

Dangling on the idea of Henriksen, it is easy to perceive that anyone who has the notion that religion is intertwined with culture and society, symbols and actions, etc. would definitely understand how difficult it is for a whole community of diversity to detach from it. However,

¹³⁹ RLE-teacher, School-C

¹⁴⁰ Henriksen (2011:10)

since there are differences in expression of religious beliefs, symbols and practices, where human lives interact in a given community, it is important for individuals in that community to freely state their minds when they are asked, but to do it with tolerance and respect.

The matter of neutrality at School-A, B and C does not only pose as challenge, but also it reveals RLE as a thought-provoking subject. While the subject focuses on general facts about religions, ethics and/or philosophy of life, it also appeals to the inner consciousness of the teachers and their pupils. Both teachers and pupils individually encounter problems surrounding things that they may or may not have knowledge about, things which they may find difficult to be separated from, and things which may be signaled as important matter for discussion.

Thus, in the framework of the teachers' understanding regarding the overall goal for teaching the subject-RLE, and their recognition of the school as an arena for non-religious evangelism and not favoring a particular religion, they then obtain the role of avoiding emotional discussions, the role of being cautious of the pupils' educational needs, so as to respond to pupils' problems/questions with the act of tolerance and respect.

The teachers' reasonable act of exercising neutrality in this context, does not only create better learning environment, but also it provides the opportunity for the pupils to learn how to inhabit and exhibit the same act of neutrality, socially interact with tolerance and respect, and learn from each other.

5.3.2. Learning about different religions and cultures

At School-A, B and C, I also realized that pupils have strong desires to learn about different religions and cultures. The tendency to obtain knowledge about people, thing, animals, places and phenomena stems from human curiosity. Nevertheless, the degree of knowledge one acquires about anything determines the level of understanding.

All the 10th graders (that is 100%) I interviewed at School-A, B and C in Vest-Telemark asserted that the subject-RLE is important for them because it makes them to know some facts about different religions and cultures. In other words, the subject-RLE is helping pupils to learn about their own cultures and religions, including those that are different from theirs.

According to Joan of School-A:

...it is important to learn about other's religion, culture and stuff like that. It is important to know things about people in a way. Hear... and think about different things. And it is important to know about other children ... I like to learn about other cultures and religions, it is important for society to function.¹⁴¹

Joan was 15 years old at the time I interviewed her. Like most of her colleagues in the 10th grade class, she began learning RLE in Grade 5. For Joan it is not just important to learn about other religions and cultures, but learning about different culture and religions, will assist in making the society to function.

Peter F. Drucker, in his book *A Functioning Society*, argues man in his social and political existence must have a functioning society, just as the need for air is essential for man's existence. Drucker propounds further that a social life cannot function without a successful social life which is based on values, beliefs and concepts of the society.¹⁴²

Joan may not know all the theoretical details regarding a functioning society, but she is fully conscious of the difference between a dysfunctional and functional society. Thus she provides essential reason while it is important to know about different religions and cultures – to make society function better.

It is through knowledge about someone, something or a phenomenon that we learn to shape our thinking, act better and help ourselves and others. It is not necessarily the same knowledge that shapes our thinking, but it is after we learn something new about the same thing, or come in contact with a new thing, then our minds become disposed to change or improvement.

At least three 10th graders: Kristofer, Fusaylah and Moses, amongst others perceived the subject-RLE as relevant because it exposes them to something new.

Kristofer maintained that the subject-RLE is important because it has helped him to learn something new.

¹⁴¹ Pseudonym-Joan, School-A

¹⁴² Drucker, Peter F. (2003): *Functioning Society: Community, Society, and Polity in the Twentieth Century*, <http://books.google.no> retrieved 27.06.2014

I learn quite a new thing that I have not learned before ... about other religions and something like that.¹⁴³

According to Fusaylah the subject-RLE is relevant:

Because I ... learn new things, which I did not know ... it is interesting to learn about what other believes.¹⁴⁴

Moses said:

What I like about the subject is that it tells about other religion which I did not know about before ... and it makes me to freely familiarize myself with people of other religion much better. ... Religion is like philosophy ... many people for example can have different philosophy of life, and religion in a way is something in which philosophical people can believe in a god ... it shows that there are differences between people and what they believe.¹⁴⁵

Comparing the views of Joan with Kristofer, Fusaylah and Moses we see no big difference. However, while Joan perceives learning about other religion creates a functioning society, Kristofer, Fusaylah and Moses perceived the relevance of the subject-RLE being rooted in learning something new. I think that learning new things in addition to previous awareness, increases knowledge, understanding and ability to communicate better. When we learn about other people, try to understand their way of life, we can associate with them better, only if creating a better contact is our ultimate goal.

Alojzy, a 10th grade pupil of School-C thinks that the subject-RLE is relevant because: “... *It creates bridge between different people*”.¹⁴⁶ What Alojzy simply means is that the subject-RLE has the tenacity to bring people together. And I must say that this might happen when the subject is carefully taught and pupils are interested in learning.

As a matter of fact, everyone has the right to choose what he/she wants to believe. One does not necessarily need to be converted to a religion or a system of belief before creating a better

¹⁴³ Pseudonym-Kristofer, School-B

¹⁴⁴ Pseudonym-Fusaylah School-A, she has a Muslim background, and at the time of the interview, she had lived in Norway about two years.

¹⁴⁵ Pseudonym- Moses, School C

¹⁴⁶ Pseudonym-Alojzy, School-C a pupil with hybrid identity - Polish-Norwegian,

contact with the people involve. What is necessary in the process of teaching and learning is to, exhibit neutrality, respect for each other, and/or discover common grounds or interest.

Even though the subject-RLE is being perceived as relevant by the distinct pupils, because it helps them learn about other religion/cultures, create bridge between different people and helps society to function, there is another side to it. Approximately 33% of the pupils tried to express what they do not like about the subject-RLE. Among these pupils are Anita, John, Arnulf and Joan.

Anita a pupils of School-B agreed that RLE is an important subject, but teaching is boring with so much reading, homework or task to do. She says:

I do not have any problem with the subject in particular, but to do so much, reading, and doing assignments, I think it is boring.¹⁴⁷

In line with Anita, John said:

We have so many subjects ... so it becomes difficult sometimes to focus on the major subjects. we do not have much time because we have so many others ... so it can be problem ... there was another teacher who said it could be better if RLE was part of the social studies, but maybe it is a pretty big part.¹⁴⁸

Arnulf a pupil in School-C said: *“Sometimes we'll go a bit further with a topic ... and the topic becomes very extensive ... and it becomes boring”*.¹⁴⁹

According to Joan, at School-C, *“there are lots of repetitions ... a part that one has heard before”*.¹⁵⁰

Like other pupils, Anita, John, Arnulf, and Joan do perceive RLE as relevant subject, however, what they dislike about the subject deals with too many assignments, and repetitions. Their displeasure of the subject in this context does not necessarily relate to the content of the subject, but it pacts with their experience regarding the method of teaching.

¹⁴⁷ Pseudonym-Anita School-B

¹⁴⁸ Pseudonym – John, School-B

¹⁴⁹ Pseudonym- Arnulf, School-C

¹⁵⁰ Pseudonym-Joan, School-A

At Schools A, B and C, the subject-RLE for 10th graders has very limited instructional periods, with so many religions, philosophy and ethics to learn. The subject is taught twice a week for about 45 minutes. There are so many topics in the textbook to cover.

The RLE-teachers use their discretion to design the daily lesson plans, but it is apparent that they often face the challenge to enhance pupils' independent study, by giving series of assignments. These assignments are given to the pupils, in addition to projects in other courses, like mathematics, sciences, etc. So, as a result of limited class time for the subject-RLE, combined with excessive schoolwork or assignments some of the pupils exercise boredom or lack of interest for the subject.

Moreover, some of the pupils perceived the teaching of subject-RLE as repetitive because it contains historical facts and values that can be linked with social studies. There are some facts discussed in social studies which may feature in RLE from time to time. And pupils do not see big differences between the content of RLE from grades five to ten. For this reason, pupils may find it easier to conclude that they are learning fact and values about religion and philosophy repeatedly. But apart from that, pupils perceive RLE-subject as relevant because they learn the history, moral and values about their own cultures, as they study others.

5.3.3 Room for Building Moral/Ethical Values

The subject-RLE at school-A, B, and C is approved as an ordinary subject in line with mathematics, language art, social studies, etc. All pupils irrespective of whatever religious or cultural backgrounds receive knowledge in RLE. And there is no case for class exemption.

The shared goal for teaching in all subjects, including RLE is to:

Develop knowledge and understanding of the [Norwegian] national heritage and common interest of international cultural tradition... to provide insight into cultural diversity and respect for individual's convictions ... to promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking. Pupils and apprentices shall develop knowledge, skills and attitude to master their lives and to participate in work and fellowship in the society. They shall create joy, commitment and research.¹⁵¹

Within the framework of the shared goal, RLE like other subjects formulates room for building moral and social values in the backdrop of Norwegian cultural heritage and common

¹⁵¹ Lovdata. no: formålet med opplæringa §1-1

interest of international cultural traditions. The Norwegian cultural heritage is rooted in Christianity and humanistic traditions. This also implies that:

Education shall be based on fundamental values of Christian and humanistic heritage and tradition, such as respect for human dignity and nature of intellectual freedom, love, forgivingness, equality and solidarity; values that also appear in different religions and beliefs which are rooted in human rights [principles].¹⁵²

This statutory principle seems to suggest common morals and/or social values of humankind as respect for human dignity, the right for freedom, love, forgiveness, equality and solidarity.

The room for cultivating these moral standards may appear in subjects, such as RLE, social studies, language art, etc. Nevertheless, the subject-RLE is unique because it is the only subject in the Norwegian primary schools that has the propensity to deal with existential questions, even though there is less focus on such matters.

At schools A, B and C in Vest-Telemark, 10th graders are not only learning about religions and different worldviews, but also they are learning moral values and developing their minds for doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong. According to the RLE-teacher in School-C:

RLE ... it is where one takes up the question of values ... where one works with values ... where one can practice thinking about values questions as one puts himself in religion, beliefs ... making one more tolerant.¹⁵³

In reference to the subject-RLE, the question of moral values can be discussed within the context of the United Nation convention on human rights which highlights that everyone has the right to express him/herself freely; and that everyone has the right to consciousness and religion, freedom to change religion or belief in teaching, practice and observance. But such rights are expected to be exercised within the sphere of tolerance.

¹⁵² Lovdata. no: formålet med opplæringa §1-1

¹⁵³ RLE-teacher, School C

According to Hans Hodne RLE is the only subject where a statement from the United Nation Human Rights Committee (UN-HRC) and a judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) have been relevant for the design of the subject.¹⁵⁴

In Hodne's view, the opinion and judgment of UN-HRC and ECHR has contributed to the exemption scheme, which previously provided pupils rights to escape religious education section. Currently, it is not common for parent to exempt their child/children from RLE class. Every pupil in Norway, precisely 10th graders, learns RLE at equal pace irrespective of race, cultural or religions background. And the exemption scheme is thus being transformed in a simplified way, by creating greater focus on care in the choice of teaching methods, rather than greater change in the Norwegian Educational Act.¹⁵⁵

It is apparent that the goal for teaching RLE can also be defined within in the Norwegian Educational Act (NEA). This may be perceived as a signal that politicians may have certain control with the content of the subject.¹⁵⁶ Although it is emphasized within the NEA that instruction in the subject-RLE shall provide knowledge in diverse religions, philosophy of life and/or ethics, it is also stressed that teaching shall focus on the Norwegian cultural heritage, collective identity, and society's values and morals.

To reiterate, the Norwegian cultural heritage, collective identity, values and moral have their roots within Christianity and humanistic traditions. The humanistic traditions also have their central place in RLE. Here, humanistic outlook is based on the fact that human beings are different from animals, and thus have the ability to reason and freely make choices.

The humanists put the individual in the center of affairs, instead of God. They do not portray humans as righteous in nature, but propound that the individual in focus must learn to be human, endeavor to acquire knowledge and understanding, so as to avoid vindictiveness, and render love, respect and care for each other.¹⁵⁷

Most of the pupils I interviewed at School-A, B and C, were not too enthusiastic about discussing the subject of religion, but they were concern about mutual respect. They also believed mutual respect reduces violence and unnecessary arguments. For example, Martha of School-C said:

¹⁵⁴ Hans Hodne in Sjødal (red) et. al (2009:78)

¹⁵⁵ Hans Hodne in Sjødal (red) et. al (2009)

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Hareide, Dag (2011)

If we show respect we cut out violent arguments or discussions that may create resentments.¹⁵⁸

Sarah of School-A states:

To show respect is an important way to create better contacts (...) because they are humans and human must have respect for each other.

John of School-B also said: “Respect facilitates a better relationship it facilitates... concern”.

Martha, Sarah and John placed more value on respect in reference to solidarity in a society of diversity. The three distinct statements of these pupils have revealed that respect reduces violence and resentment, respect creates better contacts and respect facilitates a good relation and concern.

During my observation at School-A, B and C, I discovered cordiality and harmonious atmosphere on the schools’ campuses. Pupils appeared to render respect toward each other. During free periods, I observed pupils would slightly hit or touch some of their colleague and run around. Interestingly, those who were slightly hit took it as joke from their colleague. Slightly hitting and running around were viewed as some methods of play.

The schools’ campuses were quiet and peaceful, especially during class sections. At School-A, the period before RLE-class, I saw a Norwegian pupil (a boy, age 13) sitting in the corridor, during a class section. He should have been in class, while teaching was being carried out. I inquired from this boy about his reason for sitting outside during class period. He told me that he is a pupil with special health problem; and he often gain assistance from his teacher to let him go out of class for a while.

Further investigations, proved that the boy was telling the truth. However, what I noticed was the values/virtue of concern and respect shown to the boy irrespective of his health condition, background or learning disability. The teaching and learning was done at the boy’s own premise.

The teacher had a moral obligation to meet the learning needs of the boy irrespective of his condition; and it was also the boy’s responsibility to acquire knowledge, if he so desired.

¹⁵⁸ Pseudonym-Sarah, School-C

I do not really intend to say that the teaching of RLE led to the respect for the pupil that I met in the corridor, but that this value of respect is rooted in the Norwegian cultural heritage and humanist traditions; and it is therefore an integral part of the Norwegian schools', where RLE assists in the area of existential matters, even as it attempts to encourage diversity in the context of solidarity.

In a way to conclude this section, I would like to say that the subject-RLE is perceived as relevant at School-A, B and C. It is perceived as important because pupils learn about different religions, including their own. RLE provides opportunity for pupils to deal with ethical/moral and existential questions.

While teaching and learning about RLE, both teacher and pupils are challenged to exercise neutrality. Through RLE, pupils receive assistance to identify and develop moral/ethical values, such as respect and concern for human dignity and cultural values, and etc. The basic aim for these moral dispositions is to achieve tolerance and solidarity in a society of diversity.

5.4 Tolerance and Solidarity in Social Diversity

Tolerance and solidarity are interdependent concepts, especially when dealing social differences and indifferences in society. In other words, when matter of co-existence become imminent in society of diversity, tolerance is needed to generate solidarity and solidarity becomes significant in order to maintain tolerance.

According to Jostein Gaarder and others, solidary is a mutual responsibility.¹⁵⁹ Solidarity is about recognizing shared-needs, developing common grounds with people in difficult positions. In other words, solidarity is probably achieved when different groups of people, in a given society learn to identify themselves as one, based on common interest, beliefs and values.

The difference between *tolerance* and *solidarity* is that: tolerance is the willingness to accept or bear with emotions, expressions, beliefs, etc. that are different from one's own, whilst solidarity focuses on social and/or philosophical unity of interest between two or more people.¹⁶⁰ When tolerance and solidarity become necessities in a society of diversity, solidarity may become the end-result, while tolerance persists as the means to the end.

¹⁵⁹ Gaarder, Jostein, et al (1997:347)

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tolerance> , retrieved 18.09.13.

That is to say, without tolerance in a society of diversity, it might be difficult to identify common interest, common beliefs and values that are necessary to maintain solidarity.

A society of diversity is any place where two or more people with diverse cultural beliefs, nationality, religions, philosophies of life, and etc. exist. In the context of these diversities people strive to make rules in order to co-exist. The combination of different cultural communities and the policies that promotes their differences is described as multiculturalism.¹⁶¹

Olav Hovdelien argues that multiculturalism has the tenacity to create discrimination on cultural or religions grounds.¹⁶² Such discrimination might occur in the absence of liberal ideas and/or radical inputs.¹⁶³ Therefore to curtail or eradicate discriminations or intolerance in a society of diversity, the need for tolerance is essential.

I perceive tolerance as a virtue. It is concerned with the individual's attitude of openness, mutual listening, respect for human dignity and nature, freedom of choice and expressions, and so on, irrespective of cultural or religious differences.

As a virtue, tolerance can be learned. When an individual learns to tolerate, it may not just indicate that he/she has learnt about his/her rights and freedom, but also has learnt to exhibit respect and to protect others. Learning to tolerate does not necessarily debar an individual from his identity, beliefs or philosophy of life, but it contribute to mutual understanding, acceptability and/or solidarity.

Dangling on tolerance as a learned concept, the United Nations (UN) declared that:

Education policies and programs should contribute to development of understanding, solidarity and tolerance among individuals as well as among ethnic, social, cultural, religious and linguistic groups and nations. ... [I]t should help young people to develop capacities for independent judgment critical thinking and ethical reasoning.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiculturalism>, retrieved 08.07.14

¹⁶² Hovdelien (2011:73)

¹⁶³ Ibid

¹⁶⁴ See UNESCO: Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, 16 November 1995

It is apparent that the Norwegian legislations for religious education do not contradict UN declarations. The Norwegian primary schools A, B and C in Vest-Telemark relate to the promotion of tolerance and solidarity in the domain of diversity. And pupils are learning to augment their abilities to think freely and express themselves.

During interview with the pupils at schools A, B and C, I realized that they could not vividly define what tolerance is, but their responses suggested that they understood the concept, and that they were endeavoring to practice tolerance in their society of diversity.

Aleksy at School-C described his relationship with people of different cultural backgrounds as:

I really do not care about what they believe, you can believe in a fly with angel's clothing ... I just try not to disturb or harm others.¹⁶⁵

Aleksy's idea for tolerance is accepting and respecting people irrespective of their backgrounds or knowledge, and simultaneously making sure not to disturb or harm them. He observes the peace and freedom of his fellow human as an essential value.

The idea of tolerance does not mean that one inwardly agrees with what others say or do, but one tries to allow others to have rights to their own opinions and actions, as they become conscious of taking responsibility for their expression and actions.

In the book *Diversity and Tolerance in Socio-Legal context*, Frederick P. Lewis, argues that tolerance is less logical and more practical.¹⁶⁶ In other words, we probably do not spend too much time thinking about how to tolerate, but we are obliged to tolerate. We do not achieve tolerance by thinking about exercising it; we realize tolerance by just tolerating. Lewis affirms:

We all tolerate people with whom we disagree, those who think differently from us, believe differently, look differently, and who in some ways behave differently. We tolerate them,

¹⁶⁵ Pseudonym- Aleksy, School-C

¹⁶⁶ Frederick P. Lewis in Wagner, Anne & Bhatia, Vijay K. (red) (2009): *Diversity and Tolerance in Social-Legal context - Exploration in the Semiotics of Law*, Ashgate: USA

meaning not only that we do not kill them but that we work with them, do business with them, socialize with them, live next door with them, and occasionally marry them.¹⁶⁷

Lewis is suggesting that tolerance emerges primarily from practical conclusion we have reached, and we derived these conclusions around every day social experience, consciously and unconsciously over a long period of time. According to him, our everyday social experience frequently co-exists with intellectual and moral-based beliefs that are either implicit or explicit. Therefore we should tolerate ideas, expression and people we dislike, realizing that our own strongly-held beliefs may be “*shaken*” in the long run, desiring for change.¹⁶⁸ In any case, we are indebted to tolerate others because we also stand to be tolerated by others.

Aamir at School-A, assert how he relates to people with different cultural background and views that are opposite to his:

They deserve my respect so I must give them respect ... the real thing to do is to respect what they believe as long as it ... has no influence on my faith ... if you have a Christian faith you can be a good friend of mine. It affects nothing ... whether you are Muslim or Christian.¹⁶⁹

Aamir is initially concerned about rendering respect to people with diverse views and backgrounds. As a Muslim, he does not think that religion should prevent him from interacting with other people. However, just as he is prepared to show respect, he also expects that he would be respected in the same way by others.

Another pupil at School-B revealed that RLE – has helped him not just to know about other religion but to show respect.

If I see people dressed in special clothes for example, I know what they believe ... I will have respect for them ... if I haven't had RLE I could have wonder ...¹⁷⁰

Every pupil that I interviewed in some way agreed that through the subject-RLE he/she is not only learning to know about other religions, but learning also to tolerate and respect others.

¹⁶⁷ Lewis in Wagner & Bhatia (2009:17)

¹⁶⁸ Frederick P. Lewis in Wagner, Anne & Bhatia, Vijay K. (red) (2009:17)

¹⁶⁹ Pseudonym-Aamir, school A

¹⁷⁰ Pseudonym Abraham, School-B

For them tolerance is tantamount to respect. They believed that respect is important for them just as it is important for others. Respect must be reciprocal, in order to achieve solidarity and/or socialization.

There are two forms of respect – negative and positive. Negative respect is developed on the basis of fear, terror, horror and force against one's own will. But positive respect is built on mutual love, politeness, and/or common courtesy.¹⁷¹

School-A, B and C, highlights mutual respect between pupils and their peers; and mutual respect between pupils and teachers and/or school staffs and verse versa. However, respect on the schools' campuses is regulated by specific rules. The main reasons for such rules are to create conducive learning environment, promote care for one another, eradicate bullying, and improve dialog and order.

The general guidelines of tolerance at School-A, B and C in Vest-Telemark are being summarized and asserted by the distinct principals as:

Here you should be allowed to think what you like, you should be allowed to say what you want ...but you must do it without hurting others. You shall do it with respect for others and you should have respect for others opinions that oppose yours.¹⁷²

You are equal good friends with your fellow pupils regardless of ... what kind of perception you have. In addition, it is clear that you are not good, if you misbehave – there is no tolerance for such, however, what you believe in, what you look like ... whether you are clever or not clever at school ... you shall accept the same values irrespective of personality ... we will not tolerate ... everything ... but you shall tolerate the person for who he is.¹⁷³

... tolerance means ... it is not only okay that I agree with myself, but to understand different opinions, as long as it does not... I think there are limits to it ... it should not go beyond the others ... it is important to accept others opinion.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ See Vibeke Øygarden & Liv Laksfoss in Skeie, Geir (red.) (2010)

¹⁷² Principal, School A

¹⁷³ Principal, School B

¹⁷⁴ Principal, School C

The key point in the principals' perspectives of tolerance at their respective schools is based on the dissemination and acceptability of opinions or behaviors, as long as such opinions and/or behaviors do not intent to destroy others. At School-A, one is allow to be free, but using one's freedom to hurt other is unacceptable. For School-B, equality or impartiality is a value of friendship, meaning that every pupil is a candidate for companionship. And at School-C, endeavoring to understand oneself and other is a crucial hallmark of tolerance.

These distinctive postures of tolerance at schools A, B and C, reveal some limitation to the act of tolerance, indicating that we cannot tolerate everything. And whatever is tolerated should be mutual. These positions confine the existence and function of tolerance within conventional moral or cultural values that bond humankind together – respect for freedom and expressions, respect for human rights, respect for justice and peaceful co-existence. These listed values strife to curtail intolerance.

Intolerance facilitates discord, misconduct and terror in society.¹⁷⁵ Prior to the teaching of RLE, it is apparent that many school in Norway had problem of intolerance, in form of disapproved bullying. Bullying is still a social factor in some schools, work places and/or corners of society.¹⁷⁶ In schools, it is one of the common forms of prejudice amongst pupils.

Many researchers have agreed that bullying is a multifaceted concept, and for this reason it may be difficult to define in a single form, period or culture.¹⁷⁷ But whatever the definition of bullying may entail, it is perceived as an unapproved and/or unacceptable social behaviour. A person or group may carry out the act of bullying based on their desire to exercise power over those they perceive as weak, or they may express intolerance over the victim based on cultural, religious or value differences.¹⁷⁸

Generally, bully is when an individual or group perform physical or social negative actions over a period of time against another person or group who cannot defend himself or themselves in that situation.¹⁷⁹ Bully is an obvious social problem. It may be visible, unclear,

¹⁷⁵ See Zagorin (2003)

¹⁷⁶ See Duffy, Maureen and Sperry (2012): *Mobbing – Causes, consequences and solutions*, New York: Oxford University Press, Roland, Erling (2014): *Mobbingens Psykologi – Hva kan skolen gjøre*, 2.utgave, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget & Sandsleth, Gudmund (2007): *Mobbing – Forstå, bekjempe og forebygge*, Oslo: Gyldendal

¹⁷⁷ Duffyand Sperry (2012) , Roland (2014) & Gudmund (2007)

¹⁷⁸ Roland (2014)

¹⁷⁹ Roland (2014:25)

hidden and sneaky. It is basically psychological and/or physical harassment or violence done against a person or group over a period, based on various reasons best known to the aggressor.¹⁸⁰

Bully is one of the major social problems in schools, which is difficult to eliminate.¹⁸¹ In many cases children who are physically weak, smart or strong; from poor or rich economic backgrounds, same or different cultures can be objects for bully in schools.¹⁸²

Group popularity, humiliation and exclusions are a few key reasons for bully.¹⁸³ It is about exercising individual or group power, it is concerned with degrading a person's personality and/or excluding the person or group from the social functions.¹⁸⁴ The effect of bully may include loss of respect, loss of status, loss of friends, psychological problems such as depressions, fear, and etc.¹⁸⁵

I perceive bully as an act of intolerance in reference to its definition, cause and effect. It is a willful act of refusing to apply ethical/moral principles and/or conventional human values that promote co-existence. Note that the central goal for intolerance in society of diversity to a larger extent has been to exercise power over the so-called weak.¹⁸⁶ Note that intolerant behaviors do not promote human dignity or human right, but they endorse humiliation and/or exclusion of the so-called weak.

Intolerance in its undesirable posture may exist in the domain of ignorance or the inability to identify the importance of individual similarities, differences and uniqueness. Disapproved intolerance may also exist in the domain of unwillingness to generate interdependency, solidarity and mutual respect in multicultural settings.¹⁸⁷ On the contrary, intolerance may be perceived as positive, when individual or group refuses to tolerate acts that are outside the norms and rules of society.

¹⁸⁰ Sandsleth (2007)

¹⁸¹ See Duffy and Sperry (2012)

¹⁸² Roland (2014)

¹⁸³ Duffy and Sperry (2012), Roland (2014) & Gudmund (2007)

¹⁸⁴ Duffy and Sperry (2012), Roland (2014) & Gudmund (2007)

¹⁸⁵ Duffy and Sperry (2012), Roland (2014) & Gudmund (2007)

¹⁸⁶ See Wagner & Bhatia (2009) & Kamen (1967)

¹⁸⁷ See Crow (2002)

Interestingly, School-A, B and C in Vest-Telemark has worked hard to curtail acts of bully on their distinct campuses. All the pupils I interviewed claimed they have never experienced bully. Likewise, they have not bullied anyone, in their respective schools. Of course, this does not indicate that their respective schools are totally free from bully; but that bully has been reduced enormously because school authorities and pupils have created rules to be respected and obeyed by both pupils and teachers. The rules are created to control the flow of all forms of intolerance, and at the same time promote tolerance within their limits.

In separate interview with principals at School-A, B and C, the principals confirmed that bully exists on their respective campuses, but at a very small scale.

We have had very little bullying in recent years, but the cases I know of ... is a bit related to intolerance, but also insecurity. There is a wish to belong to a group, a wish to receive position ... one may take a weak boundary to avoid being bullied ... but we have never had bully that deals with others religions or physical appearance ... but it deals with being accepted in a social group.¹⁸⁸

There have been some challenges that are associated with bullying also a little challenge to achieve calm during teaching periods. The bullying is related to exclusion, also someone may not be included in a play ... someone may not be permitted in a group when they are out having conversation or playing. It may also relate to hiding shoes, jackets it may not be very serious, but it will be serious for the pupils who is always expose to such act.¹⁸⁹

(...)There is very little bullying. This doesn't mean that it does not exist ... in every case, I say that it is very small.¹⁹⁰

The affirmations of principals regarding bully at their different schools, does not suggest that pupils have been bullied on the basis of religions, philosophy of life or physical appearance. But they agree that bully exists in a small scale, in other forms.

The common form of bullying at the schools is concerned with pupils' methods of sociability. Bully in this context, focuses on exclusion from a group. Pupils may not say why they are excluding a person form their group, since there are rules that govern them, and they might

¹⁸⁸ Principal, School A

¹⁸⁹ Principal, School B

¹⁹⁰ Principal, School C

not want to describe their actions in a way that may expose them as infringing the rule, yet they may hide their intention and bully indirectly.

The hiding of shoes, jackets, etc. is an indirect form of bullying, since the victim in this case does not really know who is carrying out the act against him/her. Notwithstanding, bullying in such a small scale reveals that the matter is gradually becoming a trouble of the past.

Unquestionably, the teaching of RLE in Norwegian primary schools aims to create an avenue for tolerance and respect for humankind.¹⁹¹ Yet it is obvious that young people often seem to create difficulties for themselves and others. And they are often misunderstood by adults who do not create friendly dialog with them in specific cases of bullying. Thus, I asked the principals about the method they used in curtailing matters of indiscipline or social conflicts among pupils at their respective schools.

We have dialog. People need to talk because we must create a climate of understanding.¹⁹²

It is a big challenge; of course ... it requires making an assessment of the meeting with the pupil ... on an individual note... a good relation with the pupils ... talk together to solve the problem.¹⁹³

If bullying occurs I assemble the parties involved ... the one being bullied and the one who bullied ... because we need to get information to know things ... handle such things. The goal is to solve the problem as soon as possible ... I meet the pupils with kindness ... in case of naughtiness, I take the matter private with the specific pupils ... we talk person to person.¹⁹⁴

Dialog is an essential method applied by schools A, B and C in dealing with pupils' misconduct, social misunderstanding or differences. But dialog with and between pupils in the context of RLE, includes writing and reading.

Pupils learn to dialog through reading subjects like RLE, where a text may not only be considered as expressions, but also as subject. Here the reading-pupil becomes present in the

¹⁹¹ Skeie (2010)

¹⁹² Principal, School A

¹⁹³ Principal, School B

¹⁹⁴ Principal, School C

event or situation as he/she reads, filling the space that is to his or her disposal in the world of the known and unknown.¹⁹⁵

Hans Hodne argues that the major objective of RLE is not only to acquire knowledge, but also to promote understanding, good attitudes, respect and ability to dialogue.¹⁹⁶ Through dialogue we increase our knowledge, augment our understanding, and find better reasons to respect different people and cultures. But to understand and respect other people involve putting oneself in their worldview and/or mindset so as to know few reasons why they believe the way they do.¹⁹⁷ In this way, knowledge will often lead to attitudinal change, but not necessarily always. Therefore it is important to work with a systematic attitude formation plan in RLE.

So as pupils improve their reading skills within the subject -RLE, they also improve their knowledge and understanding as they encounters facts, exercise reflections and seek for meaning in logical ways so that they can then express themselves better either through writing or conversation.

RLE-teachers and/or principals of school A, B and C, do encourage pupils to orally communicate in matters of misunderstanding, as a means to elucidate any error or confusion between or amongst pupils. Through verbal conversation with the pupils, in any act of indiscipline, the teachers/principals investigate the problem in order to cultivate, knowledge and understanding, and to assist in creating a comprehensive climate of harmony in their respective schools.

Accordingly, at schools A, B and C, dialogue is the most essential method of learning about cultural/religious differences and dealing with indiscipline among pupils. In actual fact, dialogue is the modern form of discipline that permeates the Norwegian schools system.

In contrast, the previous or traditional methods of discipline in Norwegian home and schools were associated with harsh-physical punishment in form of beating.¹⁹⁸ The goal for such physical punishing in the schools was to maintain respect for society's moral values,

¹⁹⁵ Skaftun in Skjelbred & Aamotsbakken (2010)

¹⁹⁶ Hodne in Sødal et.al (2009:80)

¹⁹⁷ Ibid

¹⁹⁸ Amundsen (2002)

obedience, devotion and honour. It was also a way of motivating pupils to learn, and ensuring that pupils do not violate educational values.

But around 1900s, physical punishment on children's bodies reduced. Children were now romanticized. The school was perceived as an arena to develop pupils as good citizens in society. And thus, children started receiving training in order to become independent, rational and democratic individuals.

Teachers and/or principals were to be careful, not to appear biased, hasty and inflict harm on children's bodies; and by 1936 it was forbidden to dispense any physical punishment on children in Norwegian schools.¹⁹⁹ Physical punishment was transformed to psychological punishment of the inner soul.²⁰⁰ It became very important to discipline the child from within – a discipline that deal with the soul. Such form of discipline does not only include dialog with the child who is to be punished, but it also demands perceiving the child as an individual who is natural and free, and who has the ability and desire to socialize and interact with others and his surroundings.

5.5 Making Friends in Multicultural Domain

According to Toni Buchan, children are born to be social; and being social or non-social is a choice for every human being.²⁰¹ A social person is one who interacts with others and his/her environments in a physical and/or psychological way. When people engage with their surroundings socially, they establish rules for their surroundings and culture, and in addition transmit their past, parental stories and their personal narratives to those in their world and across generations.²⁰²

Social scholars argued that parents often play specific role in the development of their children's identity and ability to socialize.²⁰³ At one hand religious parents may influence their children's development through verbal communications, disciplinary tactics, and induction in certain beliefs systems or engage in activities that promote children spiritual/religious development, such as saying prayers at home, or performing religiously

¹⁹⁹ Amundsen (2002:316 -18)

²⁰⁰ See Ellen Key (1900/2001), or Ellen Key discussed in Ellen Schrupf (2007:20)

²⁰¹ Buchan (2013)

²⁰² Buchan (2013:7-8)

²⁰³ Sjødal et al (2009) cf Roehlkepartain et al (2006: 298 -308) & Buchan (2013)

motivated charity for others.²⁰⁴ On the other hand, non-religious parents may motivate their children through secular or non-religious activities.²⁰⁵ What these scenarios do indicate, is the fact that children develop in the society or culture they find themselves.

Notwithstanding, during social interactions, children/youth may exhibit selective behaviors that may tend to influence parents' belief or values, and reinforce or undermined their parents' influential ability.²⁰⁶ In this frame, children/youths are perceived not just as natural and free individuals, but also as social actors in the social world having the tendency to interact and apply their own meaning to life, and display their respective role in relation to social change or societal demand.²⁰⁷ Besides, when children are in their teens, parental influence on them gradually reduces, and friends become more important in their lives.²⁰⁸

The 10th grade pupils at schools A, B and C in Vest-Telemark are interested in making friends. In spite of cultural, religious or ethnic differences, their desire to make friend is primarily based on closeness, common interest, and mutually enjoying opened relationships.

In other words, the pupils make friends when they first get in contact, identify common needs and then become friends, as they endeavor to avoid matters that may hinder their friendship/relationship. Through separate interviews at School-A, B and C, pupils expressed the importance of friendship and solidarity. Here are some comments regarding how 10th grade pupils at schools A, B and C create friendship.

You create friendship by first meeting them. And then maybe finding out differences and similarities ... friendship is a big part of everyday life.²⁰⁹

You must be cozy, nice and have common interest. ... I am also friendly with people who I think are cozy who I have become familiar with... it's very easy to get to know people you have met ... in the church, when you play football or things like that then.²¹⁰

I try to start with something common. But I met all best friends from kindergarten.²¹¹

²⁰⁴ Boyatzis et al in Roehlkepartia et al (2006:289).

²⁰⁵ Sødal in Sødal et al (2009:57 – 59)

²⁰⁶ Boyatzis et al in Roehlkepartia et al (2006:299 – 300) cf. Sødal et al (2009:57)

²⁰⁷ Amundsen in Sagberg & Steinsholt (2003: 47 – 52)

²⁰⁸ Sødal in Sødal et al (2009:59)

²⁰⁹ Pseudonym – Addison, School B

²¹⁰ Pseudonym – David, School B

I have some people who I can call friends ... when I came, I could not speak Norwegian, but everyone was a bit nice to me. They try to include me and it was such that we became friends.²¹²

I am opened to what people believe ... and I try to find things we have in common ... although I am not in friendship with everyone at school.²¹³

These aforementioned views reveal three major things. First, friendship begins with contact. Secondly, through contact common interest is discovered; and third openness is essential for friendship.

Regardless of religious, ethnic or cultural backgrounds, the main common grounds that pupils at schools A, B and C in Vest-Telemark possess, include: living in the same country, speaking the same language, attending the school, being in the same classroom, sharing the same teachers and taking the same lessons together. Based on these common grounds the pupils come in contact, and then try to discover common interest, in the wake of open mindedness, which may frequently bond them together.

Being opened for friendship and being tolerant to different views does not necessarily mean that one may befriend those who are arrogant. Arrogance and respect are incompatible. Arrogance triggers misunderstanding of common interest and undermines the creation of friendship.

One pupil at School-B said that her interest for making friends lies in football. She says: "... *if we can play football then we become friends*".²¹⁴ Although this statement reveals football as an apparent interest for many young boys and girls, the truth is that young people create friends or become socially integrated when they identify their common interest with events or things that easily attracts all people.

By learning RLE, pupils at School – A, B and C integrate themselves socially on the ground of common interest, by which they exhibit the sense of objectivity/neutrality. That is to say, by exercising objectivity during team-play, team-work or group assignment in RLE, pupils define similarities, commonly interest and socially integrate.

²¹¹ Pseudonym- Joan, School-A

²¹² Pseudonym-Moses, School-B

²¹³ Pseudonym-Aamir, School-A

²¹⁴ Pseudonym-Mary, School B

Demonstrating neutrality during discussions in RLE is the most common interest for the pupils. Here pupil, learn, listen, discuss and acquaint themselves with different religions, ethnic groups or cultures, with impartiality and respect. It is with this posture that pupils learn to discover similarities and/or differences that form reasons for friendship, solidarity/social integrations.

In multicultural society, dealing with religious matter is often observed as a delicate issue. In Norway, people often refrain from discussing religious matters for fear that such discussion may transform into violent dispute that may hinder friendliness and peaceful coherence in the society.

I asked the pupils of School-A, B and C if they think that there is a possibility, in this modern period, to discuss religious matters, without creating dispute or harm. In response to the question, majority of pupils could not be very sure if it is possible to discuss religious matters without harm or dispute, yet I became interested in what two of the pupils said:

No not really ... everyone has his/her own opinion. So if there are many different opinions just accept it.²¹⁵

Some problems will always be there ... some people will say that their belief or religion is correct ... it's only their belief that exist, but ... it always lead to a discussion ... everyone can find out that there is actually some good with all of them and ... if everything is too similar the world would be much more boring.²¹⁶

Undeniably, opinions, problem and/or conflict do exist where human exist. But opinions need to be understood and respected. Problems need to be solved and conflict reduced or eradicated. Everyone has the right to his/her views, experience and belief; and everyone faces the challenge and responsibility to solve problems and to reduce or eliminate conflicts that are detrimental to human co-existence, especially if the conflict or problem derive from one's own action.

In the pupils' perspective, discussing religious matters may not necessarily create harm or dispute, as long as such discussion is done with tolerance and respect for one another.

Religion or belief in itself do not create problem, but people create problems, especially when they intend to impose their religion or belief on others.

²¹⁵ Pseudonym Mary, School-B

²¹⁶ Pseudonym Esther, School-A

However, in attempt to create and maintain friendship and solidarity it is important to cultivate a sense of tolerance and objectivity/neutrality and focus on similarities, during discussions.

Even though being social and making friends is deemed important by the pupils of schools A, B and C, in Vest-Telemark, it is also important to note that concept of being friendly or social is quite different from having best friends.

Pupils exhibit friendly behaviors, but they do not perceive every colleague as best friends. A friendly behaviour may entail respect for the other, showing kindness, concern, etc. But a best friend may be one who beyond showing kindness, concern, etc., exhibit mutual trust and confidence.

At school A, Joan, a Norwegian girl is perceived as friendly. She has social contacts with other pupils at school based on common interest, but her best friends are those she grew up with in school. As a way to socialize with the other pupils at her school, she says: *“I try to start with something common. But I met all best friends from kindergarten”*.²¹⁷

From kindergarten, Joan has been with the same friends. They have created stronger bonds and mutual trust over the years. Although, she socializes with others, yet she is more opened and free with her best friends.

As a matter of trust, Joan can discuss any issue with her best friends, without creating conflict or dispute with them. Notwithstanding, where there exist misunderstanding between she and her friends, she knows how to resolve it, not only because of the longtime friendship, but also both she and her friends understands their shared cultural values and ways of solving their problems. And those cultural values which Joan is conscious of, is what she tries to identify in the others that she gets acquainted with.

Joan’s cultural consciousness and practiced cultural values may often have the tendency to conflict with those which are foreign to hers. But in such situation, she exhibits the attitude of neutrality/objectivity and defines similarities in order to socialize with those she has not grown up with.

In the backdrop of neutrality/objectivity, 10th grade pupils at schools A, B and C, are neither interested in discussing religious matters with the aim of awakening spirituality, nor are they

²¹⁷ Pseudonym- Joan, School-A

fascinated about religion in general. In separate interviews with 10th grade pupils at their respective schools, every pupil revealed that they do not focus on discussing spiritual or religious matters in groups outside of school hours.

For them RLE is being taught to them in the context of neutrality/objectivity so that they can cultivate the general principles for creating friendship and solidarity in a multicultural domain; and as well produce shared identities and contribute positively to the improvement of their surroundings. Consequently, the pupils' connection to religious matters and discussion take place only during RLE-classes, and through home assignment, but not during free-time discussion with friends.²¹⁸

Thus, although pupils are not fascinated about personal spiritual development through religious subject in schools; and since the subject-RLE does not encourage pupils to believe a specific religion, yet many of the pupils I interviewed were aware of the religions or beliefs they have grown up with.

5.6 Reflection and Self-consciousness

At schools A B and C, pupils study RLE by also reflecting on what they have learned. Besides, they are conscious of themselves in reference to their personal belief and religious affiliations.

According to May B. Postholm, the term "*reflection*" derives from a Latin word which means to "*turn back*".²¹⁹ Through reflection one thinks about what has happened or about what has been said. By reflecting, one may see the need to make tradition a subject for change and development.²²⁰ When a person reflects, he/she may probably discover or realize truth that he/she never thought that he/she knew.

About 98% of the 10th grade pupils at School-A, B and C, revealed that they do not practice any religion, but through reflecting on the subject-RLE, they found it difficult to separate themselves from the belief religion or culture they have grown up in. To reiterate, the subject-RLE is a non-evangelistic course. It is a subject that provides a common frame of religious, ethical and philosophical references for pupils.

Through my investigations, I asked the pupils to reflect on their own definition for religion. The common definition for religion that permeates the pupils' thoughts was that "*religion is*

²¹⁸ See Skaftun in Skjelbred & Aamotsbakken 2010:11 cf. (Breidid & Nicolaisen 2011: 45 – 53).

²¹⁹ May Britt Postholm in Aamotsbakken (red)(2010):Læring og medvirkning, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget

²²⁰ May Britt Postholm in Aamotsbakken (red)(2010:51)

about faith". They were definitely conscious of the fact that there are different kinds of faiths and/ beliefs systems, and at the same time aware of their cultural and/or religious heritage, even as they endeavor to understand the current culture they live in.

For example, Esther has a background from china. She defines religion as "*a way to have something to believe ... to have some kind of hope*". To conclude her definition she says:

I am atheist". But I see that I get a little closer to Buddhism. I noticed ... like meditation, when it is mentioned ... I have tried it several times ... So I try to feel some of the tradition there ... not all but some.²²¹

Esther has a general knowledge about the meaning of faith, but claims to be an atheist. Being an atheist indicates that she does not believe in God. Nevertheless, she finds her connection to Buddhism during RLE-class, because that is a part of her cultural heritage.

Thomas a Norwegian pupil at School-B also perceives religion as a phenomenon involving faith. He claims to be religious neutral. He asserts:

I grew up with Christianity, of course ... so I get closer with it than other, but in a way I am very neutral. I really do not believe in anything special. I am quite connected to all.

Thomas easily connects with Christianity during the teaching of RLE because it is his religious and/or cultural heritage. But he does not favor any particular religion. His views and reaction toward religion is of course intertwined with the secularized concept of religion, and with the Norwegian humanistic traditions, which propounds equality, and respects for human rights and dignity.

The secularized concept of religion places all religions at equal level, highlighting use of objectivity, neutrality and critique. In such context, religion is perceived as stemming from or out of human activities, and not something that exist on its own.²²² In this vein, secularized societies recognize religions and religious expression as human, cultural and/or social phenomena that crave the respect of the entire community.

²²¹ Pseudonym-Esther, School-A

²²² Andreassen, Bengt-Ove (2012)

Another 10th grade pupil at school-B, called David, emphatically describes himself as Christian. David identifies RLE as a quite good subject. He says:

I really like to learn about other religions and stuff, but I like to learn more about Christianity since I am a Christian.

David does not relegate respect for other religions, even though he claimed to be a firmed Christian, but he likes to reflect and be conscious of his religion while learning essential values of other religions. By learning about other religions David does not only discover values that are similar to his, but also he develops positive attitude when relating to people who believes in those religions that he study.

It doesn't matter what faith, philosophy or belief the pupils have, the teaching of subject-RLE does not seem to separate them from their philosophical, religious and/or cultural heritage. Pupils attempt to maintain their beliefs and/or philosophy, and build new concepts upon them as they acquire knowledge in RLE.

Amara is a 10th grader at School-C who originates from Africa. Amara is a Muslim. He claimed that he reflects more on Islam during the RLE-section. Amara states:

I still keep to my own religion although I learn about others ... and I respect the other religions ... but it does not draw me closer to them ... It is good that we learn about other religions, then we learn to respect another.²²³

Amara is still a Muslim in spite of learning RLE. And he is not against learning about other religions. He believes that learning about other religions produces respect. As I think along with Amara, I realized that RLE is a subject of reflection, and not evangelism or spiritual development. It is a subject that helps pupils to reflect on what they believe; investigate, improve ideas, and be conscious of themselves and their society. Amara freely chooses to maintain his religion, while he learns to identify and adopt social values that the subject-RLE displays.

²²³ Pseudonym-Amara, School-C

Pupils from the same country like David and Thomas do have differing views in references to faith and philosophy of life. David is attracted to Christianity because it is part of his traditional/cultural heritage, but claims to be natural in terms of religion. For Thomas, Christianity is not just a traditional/cultural heritage, but also it is the religion he subscribes to. Despite David and Thomas' individual perspectives, both acknowledge the relevance of RLE, and receive knowledge of social values the subject-RLE presents.

Certainly, the views of Esther, Thomas, David and Amara reveal that young people (age 15) have the ability to reflect on their own; adopt new ways of viewing things; and be conscious of themselves and their environment.

Moreover, by learning in the wake of objectivity, rationalism and critique they exercise their abilities to adjust to new values, while attempting to maintain portion of their traditional, cultural/religious values they inherited. Through this practice, they create room for understanding changes and the challenges society proposes to them, even as they develop their own views or meaning of life.²²⁴

5.7 Preview of the Future

I agree with those who think that all knowledge is powerless unless it is put into practice. Putting knowledge into practice is one of the key essences of learning. Theory and practice are indisputable peers; and their values are essential in all form of learning processes.

According to Hanken and Johansen, when a child is considered as unique person, possessing his/her own values, then teaching or learning should promote the child's own activeness. That is to say, learning should stimulate the child's personal concept of aestheticism, social and practical values.²²⁵ Such principle for educating children will undeniably develop their social competence, democratic consciousness, ability to be independent and take initiative.²²⁶ And to some extent, what children suggest doing, and what they are capable of doing can be accepted or observed as their future actions and opportunity for acquiring more knowledge.²²⁷

²²⁴ Evenshaug and Hallen 1993 cf. Kneezel & Emmons in Roelkepartain, King et al (2006)

²²⁵ See Hanken & Johansen (1998)

²²⁶ Sandsleth (2007:59)

²²⁷ Buchan (2013)

5.7.1 Future Perspective in Progress

To reiterate, currently, 10th graders at schools A, B and C in Vest-Telemark acquire knowledge in the subject-RLE. Teaching is done in cognizance with the national educational policy, which highlights that religious and ethical teaching should be treated on professional or academic level, especially in the domain of cultural diversity.

Collectively, pupils from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds are learning about major religions such as, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, including other philosophies of life, humanistic worldviews and/or ethics.

During teaching and learning at School-A, B and C in Vest-Telemark, every religion or ethical topic receives the same treatment in the scope of diversity, objectivity and critique. Although teachers use approaches that are slightly different when presenting their lessons, yet more emphases are laid on the most significant tradition of every religion that is in focus. As a result, on one hand, instructions in RLE neither inspire pupil's conversion to another faith, nor does it encourage personal spiritual growth. On the other hand, RLE is presented as an integrate subject, in which pupils are introduced systematically to the historical backgrounds of major religions, beliefs, worldviews or ethical concerns.

For all intents and purposes, the model of teaching at School-A, B and C emanates with two significant postures. At one hand it opposes the traditional form of teachings that emphasized pietism as the ultimate goal for obtaining knowledge; and rejects learning processes that mingled children, youth and adult at the same premise for attaining knowledge.²²⁸ On the other hand, the model embraces concepts of change and continuity.

For change, a new space is created for children to learn at their own premise, in separate age groups; allowing all subjects including RLE to be taught within the scope of equality, objectivity and diversity. And in the face of continuity, children still receive the opportunity to learn, to be loved, protected and develop as moral and patriotic individuals in society.²²⁹

The key results from the combination of change and continuity is that pupils learn within the space of reasons, objectivity/neutrality and diversity with the aim of being, creative and

²²⁸ See Aries (1962/1969)

²²⁹ See Pollock (1983)

productive, and to be developed as free individuals, expressing their own minds and actions with responsibility and accountability.²³⁰

In order to augment objective, creative and productive skills, the 10th graders at School-A, B and C obtain instruction in RLE as a part of the process. Through RLE, and other subjects the 10th graders are increasing their abilities to express themselves verbally and textually as well.

With the use of textbooks and digital tools, such as computers (internet) and PowerPoint projectors pupil do not only express themselves in writing and oral communications, but also they increase their skills in understanding information related to RLE.

I have observed 10th graders read their text books to do assignments and follow class lectures. The reading helped them to retrieve information, reflect over the information, draw their own interpretations or meaning with critique and rationality.

When I undertook separate interviews with pupils at School-A, B and C, I observed and heard each pupil articulate his/her understanding in reference to the relevance of RLE, socialization, and the need for respect, neutrality/objectivity and tolerance in matters of diversity. Some of the views expressed by the pupils have already been discussed in this chapter. And those views of the 10th graders revealed them as individuals cultivating the capability to dialog, to gain understanding, to promote tolerance and render respect when socializing with other people irrespective of their ethnic, social and/or religious background.

From the teacher's perspectives, I discovered that pupils take periodic exams, test and/or home assignments. The written examinations, tests or home assignments in RLE, given to the pupils by their teacher, from time to time, help to increase the pupils' ability to reflect on cultural, ethical and/religious issues, and at the same time develop their understanding and skill to contribute to areas where change in society is needed.

The use of digital tools was an advantage to both teachers and pupils during process of learning in RLE. Essentially, with the help of digital tools, computer and/or internet, booth

²³⁰ Hanken & Johansen (1998), Dale (1990) , Pollock (1983) , Anne Solberg (1997) & Schrupf (2007)

pupils and teachers accessed information and made valuable presentation of knowledge in class.

At three different instances, I observed the use of PowerPoint presentations. First, when the RLE-teacher of School-C used PowerPoint projector and some materials from the internet to teach. Second, when the pupils at School-B did PowerPoint presentation in class, having retrieved some of the information from the internet, and third, when some of the 10th graders at school-A used their computers to write and to save the information that they have retrieved from their text books.

I realized that the subject-RLE was obligatory for all pupils at School-A, B and C. Thus, there is no religious reason for the 10th graders' withdrawal from the RLE-class as it was in the previous religious education subjects, in which knowledge of Christianity was the central focus. This is because the subject-RLE has attracted the pupils' curiosity to learn about other religions, cultural and/or philosophy of life, even as they come in contact with their respective beliefs or worldviews.

Nevertheless, during the learning process of the subject-RLE, the teachers' role was to assist the pupils to learn on the ground of neutrality/objectivity and help them to cultivate the attitude of tolerance and respect for others. And as the pupils reflect over the teachings and lessons from RLE-textbooks, they become inspired to find reasons for relating to other pupils with good conscience irrespective of ethnical, social or religious background.

Interestingly, the nature of the subject-RLE sets no religious boundary for the eligibility of teachers. Any trained teacher with Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or humanistic background is eligible to teach the subject. However, the major way the RLE-teacher at School-A, B and C helps their pupils to tolerate and show respect to people with different cultural backgrounds, beliefs or faiths, is by teaching with fairness and/or being neutral/objective, within the context of the Norwegian cultural traditions and educational policy.

Socially, pupils at School-A, B and C are gradually integrating. These processes involve those with immigrant background as well. There is a clear awareness and believe, among pupils that the subject-RLE is aiding them in making friends. Some of the views regarding how

pupils make friends have already been discussed in this chapter. However, making friends and socializing at schools A, B and C are done on neutral ground and common interest, and not necessarily ethnic or religious background.

On the contrary, bully may still be a problem to contend with in different schools. However at school-A, B and C, bully exist on a very low scale; and the cause of bully does not relate to religious prejudices, but rather it is a way of exercising social power and/or method of creating play which may not be understood by the victim or teacher.

In spite of the reports from the schools' principals that there are a few bully on their respective campuses, 100% of the 10th graders I interviewed asserted that they have not been bullied on their respective campuses, and they have also never bullied anyone.

The decrease of bully among pupils at School-A, B and C is improving the process of socialization or solidarity; and also increasing positive behaviours. This may also imply that pupils are learning to understand themselves and those around them. However, what an individual may understand about himself and his action may not always conform to society's perception. As a result, society may frown at that person's view or action, and vice versa.

According to Marie M. Pagliaro, all behaviours, both positives and negative are purposeful, orderly, and have the aim to attain social recognition.²³¹ Bully which is also deemed as an unacceptable or dysfunctional behaviour in schools is no doubt exhibited as a way to obtain social recognition. Thus, in order to curtail or eradicate social problems or negative behaviours, such as bully at school A, B and C, principals or teachers apply dialog as the most essential method of discipline.

The use of dialog contradicts the traditional methods of punishing or disciplining pupils for wrong doings.²³² The traditional method of disciplining pupils in schools contained physical punishment such as beating with a cane. This was the previous form of discipline principals or teachers applied as the means of dealing with pupils' misbehaviors. On the contrary dialog is the modern disciplinary method applied in schools to assist pupils achieve social recognition in a more convenient or acceptable way.

²³¹ Pagliaro, Marie Menna (2011): *Education or Bully? –Managing the 21st-century classroom*, UK: Rowman

²³² See Amundsen (2002)

In the case of misbehavior, the principals and RLE-teachers at schools A, B and C engage pupils into dialog so that pupils may understand themselves within, and recognize their values and the values of others around them. Through dialog the principals/teachers help the pupil to create appropriate goals of learning how to relate or socialize with others. Rules are generated by pupils and schools authorities to guide each one of his/her conduct in relation to socialization and study.

Pupils, who are victimized in the case of bully, also receive counsel that helps them to regain their status or respect amongst fellow peers. Through education and dialog pupils learn to exhibit appropriate behaviours and develop the concept of showing respect to other people irrespective of their background or experience.

At present, the 10th graders at schools A, B and C do not seem to have specific problems with the subject-RLE. Generally, pupils perceive the subject as relevant and valuable. Nevertheless about 10% of pupils interviewed do think that slight improvement in the subject needs to be made.

For instance, Ole said: “...we must learn about thing things that happened in daily lives”.²³³ In addition to the historical knowledge the subject-RLE presents, Ole wants current events to be intertwined with it. And I think connecting RLE to current events would provide a better room for pupils’ to be more reflexive in their thinking. Here pupils will learn to connect the pass with present and best prepare themselves for the future.

5.7.2 Prospective Perspective

When I asked the 10th graders at School-A, B and C about what they intend to do with the knowledge they have acquired so far from learning RLE. A few of the pupils said:

I am not quite sure. I think I’m going to use it every day to respect others ... that’s what we have learned... we learn much about religions to be prepared for that.²³⁴

I will try to explain to people who want to know what a particular religion is about, and I will try to convey my knowledge of religion in the best way I can. (...) If someone disagrees with

²³³ Pseudonym-Ole, School-A

²³⁴ Pseudonym David, School-B

my faith or my explanation, I will still carefully explain why I am devoted to such faith. And if they still do not agree with me, I will just let it be so.²³⁵

I will spread the teaching in a way to show people ... whatever different they are or different they look ... they are actually alike ... for RLE is about ethics and morality, and I have seen many similarities no matter how different the religions are.²³⁶

I think I'm going to understand other people's faith and culture better then.²³⁷

I do not know ... but it's quite alright to have it [RLE].²³⁸

Predicting or knowing what the future holds is practically difficult. Although the knowledge we gain daily or the knowledge we have acquired determines how we might counteract future challenges, yet it is often not clear about what the future really is. The above responses of the 10th graders of schools A, B and C reveal some form of uncertainty about their future actions regarding what they might really do with their knowledge in RLE. Notwithstanding, they seem prepared to apply their knowledge of RLE to promote respect, tolerance, and solidarity.

The first comment from David in School-B highlights showing respect to people. This respect is indeed expected to be displayed in any sphere of diversity, where religious or ethical issues may have the potential of creating social barriers. The comment from Amara of School-A suggests an act of tolerance. Amara for instance, is prepared to explain his faith to any interested person without imposing his view on his listener(s). Amara and the people in his world may agree to disagree as long as their agreement or disagreement does infringe the regulations of the society.

Sarah of School-C propounds equality and similarities in human cultures. In the wake of philosophy or ethical matters, Sarah has learned that there are certain similarities in cultures or religions. She is prepared to spread the message of tolerance and solidarity even as she continues to identify similarities within cultures or religions.

²³⁵ Pseudonym-Amara, School-A

²³⁶ Pseudonym-Sarah, School-C

²³⁷ Pseudonym-Anita, School -B

²³⁸ Pseudonym Naomi, School-C

Anita of School-B has gained the momentum to understanding people's faith in the future. And Naomi may not know yet what she is really going to do, but she believes that it is quite alright to have RLE in school. She does not seem to ignore the relevance of the subject –RLE.

The 10th graders at schools A, B and C are aware that the subject RLE is meant to assist them cultivate the virtue of tolerance and respect for other people regardless of their culture/religion. They are also aware that tolerance and respect is essential for solidarity. In the state of preparation, they have future expectations. They anticipate exhibiting their individual abilities to formulate a shared future of tolerance and respect in any society of diversity.

Even though one cannot deny the ambiguity of the future, it is imperative to identify and appreciate the pupils' ability to express their minds based on the knowledge they have gained, or are gaining from the subject-RLE. As they learn about their own cultures, and the cultures of others they also find means to contribute with their own reflections. And since religious or philosophical questions can often be based on personal conviction, which may not project physical evidence, the need for mutual trust, respect, tolerance and objectivity are subsequent imperatives for ascertaining healthy discussions.

In the quest for tolerance, respect, and solidarity in societies, schools and the globe, the 10th graders of schools A, B and C should be recognized as active learners. They are participating in school work, using tools and actively seeking to create meaning and to contribute to the development of society at large. I observed them also anticipating a future in which they would use the opportunity to convey the message of respect, tolerance and solidarity in society of diversities. I envisage that this future will be one in which religious fanaticism will gradually subside, but religion will remain significant for some people, while respect tolerance and solidarity will be the hall mark for co-existence.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Recapped: Discussion

In this thesis I have endeavored to analyze and/or discuss RLE in Vest-Telemark primary schools, with specific reference to 10th graders' perception and experience regarding tolerance and solidarity. I have aimed to identify ways the subject-RLE is practically organized and taught to 10th graders at three separate primary schools in Vest-Telemark. I have also tried to analyze the pupils' views or experiences of the subject-RLE in reference to tolerance and solidarity, within a domain of diversity.

As way to maintain anonymity I have earmarked the three primary schools I conducted my study as school-A, B and C, and the pupils that I interviewed have been assigned pseudonyms. All persons interviewed during the research willingly obligated themselves to the process. They were neither selected randomly, nor through a snowball process, but rather through a voluntary process.²³⁹ The RLE-teachers and principals volunteered to be interviewed when they were asked. In their various classrooms, the 10th graders also volunteered to be interviewed, when they were asked. Those 10th graders who raised their hands to participate in the interviewed became the selected samples for the research.

In addition to interviews, I have carried out non-participant observation to ascertain the way teachers practically present their lesson and how their respective pupils respond to the learning process.

I have also drawn upon the historical development of religious education in Norway, including theories that define the correlation between religion, philosophy and ethics. I have considered social ideas regarding the development of the child/childhood with special emphasis on the children/youth as social actor in forming their own lives, others and their environment.

Generally, discussions concerning the subject-RLE in this thesis have been done within the confines of the new cultural studies – a discipline that does not have a unified theory, but rely on diverse field of studies that include different approaches, methods, or academic perspectives.

²³⁹ By snowball process I mean a research method that involves chain referral sampling, where a respondent/informant may recruit future informant/respondent to participate in the same research.

6.2 Recapped: Discoveries

As a result of the academic approach I have implored in writing this thesis, I discovered that:

1. RLE was established in Norwegian schools upon series of reformed projects. And the goal for teaching is to create room for all pupils to acquire religious education at equal level, and to stimulate the act of tolerance and solidarity, by allowing pupils and their teachers, through teaching and learning processes, to exercise neutrality, objectivity and critique in society of diversity.
2. The organization of the daily teaching plans of RLE, in at least three schools in Vest-Telemark is slightly different. However, every school relies on the general curriculum to apply creativity and design daily lessons or class activities. And the overall objective for teaching RLE is rooted within the Norwegian cultural heritage and traditions; juxtapose with UN convention on human rights.
3. The 10th graders at schools A, B and C perceive the subject-RLE as relevant because it assists them to learn about other religions or cultures. By leaning about other cultures and religion, the pupils cultivate the attitude of neutrality, tolerance, respect, and friendliness. And friendliness among the pupils is thus establishment based on shared cultural values or what they have in common; and how long they have learnt to trust each other.
4. Through RLE, pupils are also being inspired to curtail bully on schools campuses. This is because pupils are basically learning to tolerate others irrespective of race, ethnicity, cultural or social backgrounds.
5. For the future, the 10th graders of schools A, B and C are generally contemplating on sharing their knowledge of tolerance, respect and solidarity they have gained from RLE. Although, a minority of pupils does not know exactly what to do with their knowledge, yet everyone interviewed wished to promote tolerance, respect and solidarity in society of diversity.

6. In the frame of neutrality/objectivity, the 10th graders I interviewed at schools A, B and C, are neither interested in discussing religious matters with the aim of awakening spirituality, nor are they fascinated about religion in general. Nevertheless, they are conscious of the religion/culture or worldviews they have grown up with, and at the same time endeavoring to focus on mutual respect and/or tolerance, as a way of forming solidarity in a society of diversity.
7. The 10th graders ability to express themselves during interview reveals that they have the capacity to serve as actors in the development of their lives, others and their society. It also shows that children in 10th grade, at age 15 have the ability to focus on the meaning of life and formulate goals.

Moreover, I have also discovered that the subject RLE influences tolerance and solidarity in three ways:

1. By allowing pupils to learn historical facts about major world religions, including other religions, which may be viewed as alternative religions.
2. By not encouraging conversion to others religions; and not focusing on spiritual practices that each religion contain, but creating room for neutrality/objectivity during teaching and learning.
3. By allowing and motivating pupils to think objectively and critically in ethical, social or religious matters.

6.3 Implications

In the wake of these findings, I am aware that the respondents and informants I interviewed during this research; and their views or experiences, may not represent all the schools in Vest-Telemark, Telemark County or the nation-Norway. Nevertheless, the pupils who were interviewed perceive the subject-RLE as relevant in reference to promoting mutual respect, tolerance and solidarity/social integration, in a society of diversity. This does not only imply that the views and/or experiences of the 10th graders offer greater hope for tolerance, mutual respect and solidarity in Norway, as a nation of diversity, but also it implies that if people's

knowledge about their own and diverse religions, cultures or worldviews increases, on the platform of objectivity, it might provide a greater future for concrete dialog, understanding, mutual respect, tolerance and solidarity. And as the spirit of mutual respect, tolerance and solidarity permeates our planet in the backdrop of religion, philosophy and ethics, violence in the name of religion and all forms of antisocial behaviors currently perpetrated in some parts of our world will be curtailed, and hope for harmonious co-existence in our world will be eminent

Finally, the way the subject-RLE is arranged and taught at different schools, may never be completely free from some problems in time, nevertheless, further studies to investigate and identify pupils' actual needs in references to the subject and their learning process would result into much more understanding of the teaching and learning phenomena.

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Appendix I

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet

Til: Foreldre og deres barn i 10. klasse
(Gjelder grunnskoler i Vest Telemark)

Siden 2008/2009 skoleåret, ble faget religion, livssyn og etikk (RLE) innført. RLE er en revidering av faget Kristendoms -, religions og livssynskunnskap (KRL). Målet for endringen er å gi elevene kunnskap om verdens perspektiv på religion, livssyns, etikk og andre humanetisk syns som understreker respekt for menneskeverdet, intellektuell frihet, kjærlighet, tilgivelse, likeverd og solidaritet. Dette betyr at undervisning i det nye faget skal skape kritiske synspunkter, objektiv forståelse, respekt og sunn dialog mellom mennesker med ulike oppfatninger om tro, livssyn og kultur²⁴⁰.

Jeg er student på høyskolen i Telemark, og har valgt til å skrive masteroppgaven min på engelsk, om temaet: *RLE in Vest-Telemark Primary Schools: an analysis of 10th grade pupils' perception and experience in reference to tolerance and solidarity.*

Undersøkelsen vil finne ut:

- a) Hvordan RLE er organisert i praksis og undervist som fag for elevene i 10. klasse på Vest Telemark Grunnskoler.
- b) Hvordan elevene oppfatter og opplever faget RLE i forhold til toleranse og solidaritet?

For å få et helhetlig perspektiv over RLE og svar på spørsmålene mine, er det viktig at jeg gjør en kort observasjon mens undervisning av faget er i gang, og gjør et kort intervju på Grunnskolen. Dataene fra intervjuet skal registreres på lydopptaker og notar. Det vil ta ca. 30 minutter for å intervju en person. Rektoren, lærer og elever skal intervjues. Sju elever på 10. klasse i tre forskjellige, utvalgte grunnskoler skal intervjues.

Det er frivillig å delta i undersøkelsen. Alle personlige informasjonen og data for undersøkelsen skal fremstilles på en anonymisert måte, og navnet til deltakerne skal ikke bli publisert i min oppgave. Dette betyr at alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt, og når masteroppgaven min er ferdig, vil alle personlige data bli slettet. Foreldrene eller rektoren kan bruke rettighetene deres til å sjekke intervjuguide før elevene deltakelse.

Det er viktig også å få vite at studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS. Også fra 6. januar 2014 vil jeg gjerne begynne med RLE undersøkelse på skolene, og håpe til å innsamle alle data før 6. februar 2014. Men prosjektet vil fullstendig avsluttes i 12. juli 2014²⁴¹; da vil alle personlige dataene slettets. I forbindelsen med dette ønsker jeg dere samtykke til å delta i forskningsprosjektet mitt.

²⁴⁰ <http://www.udir.no/Lareplaner/Finn-lareplan/endringer/Informasjon-om-ny-lareplan-i-religion-livssyn-og-etikk-RLE>

²⁴¹ Denne tiden var forlenget til september 2014

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien
Sett kryss på hva du vil delta på/eller samtykker.

For foreldre:

Jeg samtykker at barnet mitt i 10. klasse delta i forskningsprosjektet

For elever:

Jeg samtykker til å delta i intervju

(underskrift av prosjektdeltaker, dato/skole)

Appendix II

Intervjuguide til Elevene

1. Personliginformasjon

Skole _____
Kjønn _____
Nasjonalitet /Opprinnelsesland _____
Alder _____
Klasse _____

2. Spørsmål

- a) Hvilket år begynte du å motta undervisning i RLE som religiøse fag?
- b) I din egen mening, hva er religion? Eller hva vet du generelt om religion?
- c) Hvordan får du opplæring i RLE?
- d) Har din kunnskap i RLE påvirket livet ditt på noen måter? Kan du si noen om det?
- e) Hva liker du best om faget - RLE?
- f) Er det problemer / saker om faget du ikke liker?
- g) Har undervisningen trekket deg nærmere til en bestemt religion? Hvilken?
Hvorfor?
- h) Hvilken religiøs gruppe er du knyttet til?
- i) Hvordan ser du på religiøse mennesker, eller folk med religiøse syn som strider mot dine personlige troer eller verdier?
- j) Har du lyst til å assosiere, diskutere eller lytte til venner eller folk med ulik kulturell og religiøs bakgrunn? Hvorfor?
- k) På hvilken måte (r) ønsker du å dele mening (er) om dine personlige verdier, etikk eller tro med andre mennesker som kanskje er uenig med deg?
- l) Tror du religiøse spørsmål kan diskuteres uten tvist eller harme? Hvordan?
- m) Tror du den måten RLE er formidlet er tilstrekkelig til å gi rom for religiøs toleranse?
- n) Hvordan skaper du felleskap /vennskap med andre elever på skolen?
- o) Har du blitt mobbet? Eller har du mobbet noen før?
- p) Hva skal du gjøre med kunnskapen fra å studere RLE?
- q) Diskuterer du RLE fag med andre elever på skolen? Hvorfor? Hvorfor ikke?
- r) Vil du foreslå noen endringer eller forbedringer i faget - RLE?
- s) Er det noe annet du ønsker å legge til?

Appendix III

Intervjuguide til RLE – Lærerne

1. Personliginformasjon

Kjønn _____

Nasjonalitet /Opprinnelsesland _____

Sivilstand _____

Alder _____

Arbeidssted _____

2. Spørsmål

- a) Du er lærer i RLE fag her på skolen. Hvor lenge har du undervist faget -RLE?
- b) Har du undervist faget-KRL før?
- c) Hva tror du er forskjellen mellom RLE og KRL?
- d) Hvor mange elever i 10. klasse på denne skolen tar RLE som fag?
- e) Tror du RLE er relevant for elevene du underviser? Hvorfor eller hvordan?
- f) Er det en måte at undervisningen i RLE kan føre til religiøs toleranse? Hvordan?
- g) Fortell meg hvordan reagerer dine elever til praktisk undervisning av faget – RLE?
- h) Hvordan organiserer du din leksjon og/eller klasse for undervisningen?
- i) Hva er noen av elementene som du tror hindrer din måte å undervise eller å oppnå ditt klasserom og profesjonelle mål?
- j) Hvordan samarbeider elevene for å gjøre undervisningen din effektive?
- k) Har du fått støtte eller klage fra foreldre om din undervisning? Hvis det var klager, hvilke saker tror du ville det være, og hvordan ville du reagere?
- l) Dersom en elev vil spørre deg om ditt personlige syn eller tro om en bestemt religion under undervisnings timer, hvordan tror du ville svare?
- m) Liker du å undervise RLE - fag? hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?
- n) Underviser du andre fag? Hvilke?
- o) Er det noe annet du ønsker å legge til?

Appendix IV

RLE – Intervjuguide til Rektorene

1. Personliginformasjon

- a. Kjønn _____
- b. Nasjonalitet /Opprinnelsesland _____
- c. Sivilstand _____
- d. Alder _____
- e. Arbeidssted _____

2. Spørsmål

- a) Hvor lenge har du vært rektor, særlig for denne skolen?
- b) Hva er befolkningen av skolen din? Hvor mange gutter og jenter?
- c) På hvilket nivå vil elevene begynne ta RLE som fag, på skolen din?
- d) Tror du at RLE er relevant for undervisning i norsk skole? Hvorfor?
- e) Det har vært historiske endringer om religionsundervisningen i norsk skole, hva vet du om dette, med henvisning til KRL og RLE?
- f) Tror du at formidling av RLE kan føre til religiøs toleranse? Hvorfor/Hvordan?
- g) Hvor godt er elever integrert sosialt på skolen din? Kan du beskrive eller gi et eksempel?
- h) Som rektor, hvilken rolle spiller du for å gjøre elevene bli kjent sosialt uavhengig av religiøse, sosiale eller kulturelle bakgrunn?
- i) Toleranse er vanskelig å måle. Hva er ditt nivå, merke eller definisjon for toleranse på skolen din?
- j) Det er ofte vanlig at barn og unge skaper problemer eller komplikasjoner. Hva er dine metoder for å håndtere dårlig oppførsel effektivt?
- k) Er det noe annet du ønsker å legge til?