



Non-confessional and non-denominational Education about Islam in state schools – The Case of Sweden

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- One of the most secular countries in the world
- The most multireligious country in Europe.
- 10 million inhabitants
 - 8% Muslims
 - Many are secular:
 - A third visiting a Muslim congregation more than once a year.
 - 150 000 belong to a Muslim organisation
- Often negative focus on Islam
 - Media
 - Politics



The media and the religion education school subject are the most important sources of knowledge about religion among young people
(Sjöborg 2012)



Religion Education today

- Non-denominational/non-confessional
- No special status
 - Compulsory – no possibility to opt out
 - Also in religious schools
- Study of Religions approach – mainly *about* religion:

“The subject of religion has its scientific roots primarily in the academic discipline of religious studies, and is by its nature interdisciplinary. It deals with how religions and outlooks on life are expressed in words and action, and how people formulate and relate to ethical and existential issues”. (Skolverket, 2011)

Connection to the former state Church



- 1686: *Ecclesiastical Act* charged parents and masters with the domestic responsibility of teaching their children and servants to read
- 1842: compulsory schooling
- 1919: start of secularization of school

- 1962 non-denominational *Knowledge about Christianity*
 - Neutral and Objective
 - Also about other religions
- 1969 Change of name, non-denominational *Knowledge about religions*
[*Religionskunskap*]

”Fundamental values”

The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school should represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility. Teaching in the school should be non-denominational (Skolverket 2011, 9).

Secular and neutral *and* marinated in Lutheran Protestantism

- Celebrations of Protestant Holidays
- Religion as *faith*: cognitive aspects focused
- "Life question pedagogy"
- Textbook organisation





Islam in Swedish Religion Education

1-3, age 7-9:

- Some ceremonies, symbols and narratives in Christianity, Islam and Judaism

4-6, age 10-12:

- Rituals and religiously motivated precepts, and also holy places and locations in Christianity and the other world religions of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism.
- Key ideas behind rituals, precepts and holy places in Christianity and the other world religions, such as those expressed in religious narratives in the Bible and other records
- How different life issues, such as views on love and what happens after death, are depicted in religions and other outlooks on life
- What religions and other outlooks on life may mean for people's identity, their lifestyles and group affiliation.



grade 7-9, age 13-15

- Key ideas and documents in the world religions of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism.
- Varying interpretations and practices in world religions in today's society.
- The main features in the historical evolution of world religions.
- The relationship between society and religion in different times and places.
- The role of religion in some political events and conflicts from a critical perspective.
- Conflicts and opportunities in secular and pluralistic societies, such as over issues concerning freedom of religious expression, sexuality and views on gender equality.
- How different life issues, such as the purpose of life, relationships, love and sexuality, are depicted in popular culture.
- How religions and other outlooks on life can shape people's identities and lifestyles.
- Ethical questions and the view of people in some religions and other outlooks on life.
- Ethical concepts, which can be linked to questions concerning sustainable development, human rights and democratic values, such as freedom and responsibility.

(Skolverket 2018, 221-222)



Islam in Swedish RE-textbooks

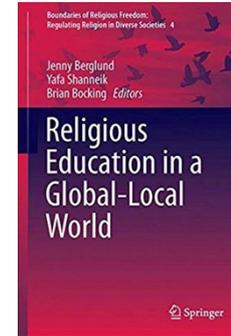
Christianity was founded by Jesus the Jew, who was deeply inspired by messianic expectations in late Judaism. Christianity's holy book is the Bible, which among other things teaches that the unrighteous will go to hell. The Christian religion has been propagated through crusades and through European colonization and oppression of people in Africa and Asia. The Christians believe in one God and Jesus as his son. Christians go to church every Sunday. Dissidents have frequently been persecuted in Christian Church history. In Northern Ireland there is a war between members of various Christian churches.

(Härenstam, 1993, [my translation])



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Textbooks:



- The man
- The prayers
- The book
- The deeds
- The faith
- Purity regulations



Representations of Religion/Islam



- Geographical representation
- Islam - Islamism
- "Maximalist" representations of Religion
- Essentialism



“Religiosification”

When the actions and values of a human being are referred to their religious identity, not to the fact that they are sons, football players, politicians, artists, mothers, hipsters or criminals.

Problem: Reduces and clumps together!



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Believing, belonging and behaving: some considerations when teaching about Islam

Jenny Berglund and Bill Gent

Even for teachers who have acquired specialised knowledge about religions, teaching about particular traditions can be daunting: I don't think I know enough. What happens if I get things 'wrong'? Am I up to date? What if some students know more than me? In this article, which is the first of two articles on this subject, a Swedish and a British researcher into Islam offer some guidance.

An ethnographic approach

- To study what people actually do:
 - **Explain why they do differently!**
- A way of problematizing "maximalism"
 - ie to only present the most devout within a religious tradition

“The Teacher of Religion as Ethnographer.”

- Awareness of power
- To see the lived religion
- See different dimensions of religion
- Avoid stereotypification
- Reflection on your own "backpack"
- See human be





Avoid “Religiosification”

When the actions and values of a human being are referred to their religious identity, not to the fact that they are sons, football players, politicians, artists, mothers, hipsters or criminals.

Problem: Reduces and clumps together!

Importance of Teacher Education!

But also: engage in the publication teaching material:

- Textbooks
- Films
- Online material