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# **Religious Education (RE) and Ethics Education (EE) in Dialogue - International Perspectives with a Particular Focus on Swedish EE and RE Research**

von

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## *Abstract*

*Underlying the focusses of this article concerning 1) Swedish curricula, 2) different kinds of EE internationally and 3) empirical EE research, are the questions concerning what constitutes central content in ethics, and how ethics and religion as parts of an RE subject can be related to each other. It has been shown how EE can be of different kinds where some constructions place EE within RE, like the Swedish one, even if EE in the form of general values education or as hidden curriculum should not be forgotten. The analyses of Swedish RE curricula show a development where ethics in the beginning of the 1960s almost exclusively was linked to Christian faith but later became a knowledge area rather separated from religions. The different areas demand different activities of the students. While EE requires active reasoning and position taking, the content concerning religions is limited to be put in comparison to the student's own ethical perspectives. Moreover, empirical Swedish research has shown how EE within the RE subject tends to be marginalized and understood as having rather unclear knowledge character. It can be interpreted as rather one-dimensional, focussing on an argumentative competence, when a multidimensional understanding seems to be more common in current research. Based on ethics theory and socio-cultural learning theory, competence in the field can be understood as depending on acquired and contextually privileged moral discourses, which means that narratives – secular as well as religious – seem to be of great value.*

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*Schlagwörter: Ethics, Religions, Education, Students, Curriculum, Narratives*

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## **1 Introduction**

The English concept *curriculum*, in Swedish often translated as “läroplan”, has a broader meaning. “Läroplan” is a written text, often a national steering document defining what school and education shall achieve in general, and in specific subjects, such as Religious Education (RE), “religionskunskap” which literally translated means “knowledge of religions”. However, curriculum can be understood on different levels, comprising an institutional policy level, an instructional teaching level and an experiential student level (e.g. Goodlad & Su, 1992; Bråten, 2009). Therefore, before paying attention the Swedish RE curriculum, in terms of national policy, it can therefore be interesting to look into the teaching level, teachers’ intentions with their RE.

In an interview study with teachers in upper secondary RE, who had recently retired or were about to retire, a set of four ambitions emanated (Osbeck, 2009). These ambitions were labelled as “To give the chance to see how it all fits together”, “To contribute to religious literacy and a continued reading progress”, “To give opportunities to see yourself in the meeting with others” and “To develop an eye for the conditions of life and the possibilities for the human being”. While the first category is knowledge orientated, in which religions are understood as views on the human being, reality, society, history and ethics, and therefore both possible to understand as wholes and comparable, the last category emphasises an existential, almost psychological, teaching. The teacher Ingrid, whose narrative gave rise to this latter category, expresses that she wants RE to be a place where the students “take time to think, to turn off phones and all music machines and sit for a while and think, and formulate the thoughts that concern life, death, love, society and how we should live with each other.”

So, how may we understand these different RE curricula, expressed by the teachers? It is possible to interpret them as on a continuum expressing an increasing degree of existential teaching and a decreasing degree of knowledge focussed teaching? Such a continuum could perhaps be related to Michael Grimmitt’s distinction between an RE focussed on learning *about* religions and an RE emphasising learning *from* religions (1987), which also has been used for international RE comparisons (e.g. Riegel &

Zieberts, 2009). It could also be said that a difference between the first and the fourth category of teaching is that the first is more oriented towards religious studies, while the fourth rather towards ethics. This means in turn that there is a difference between Grimmitt's categories and the Swedish teacher category system. While both Grimmitt's approaches draw on religion as the source to learn about and from, it is more unclear what the students in Ingrid's existential and ethics focussed teaching are supposed to develop their perspectives from. What constitutes central content in ethics, and how can ethics and religion as parts of an RE subject be related to each other and strengthen one another? These questions are underlying in the following presentations of, *firstly*, the national Swedish RE curriculum, *secondly*, different kinds of ethics education internationally and, *thirdly*, empirical ethics education research from Sweden, and will *finally* be discussed in the concluding section of this article.

## 2 The national Swedish RE curriculum

The Swedish RE subject, as a neutral and plural subject, was constructed in the 1960s. The neutrality and plurality were stated in the curriculum of 1962, and the name change from Knowledge of Christianity to Knowledge of Religions was made in the subsequent curriculum of 1969. Since its introduction just over 60 years ago, the subject has been governed by six national curricula and from 1969 and onwards, three recurrent areas of the subject may be identified – religions, life questions [livsfrågor] with life interpretations and ethics – even though they have been labelled differently sometimes. The relationship between religions and ethics, as described in or following from the texts, has also varied. In the curriculum of 1962, 'ethics' is only mentioned in combination with "christian faith and ethics" (Ecklesiastikdepartementet, 1962, e.g. p. 217). However, already in 1969, ethics appears together with other religions and life questions (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1969, p. 176). The meaning of ethics in this context is not developed further, and in the curriculum of 1980, ethics is only a word of the three-part heading "life questions, faith and ethics" (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980, p. 127).

In the three curricula from the last 30 years, the relationship between ethics and religions is described more in-depth, but ethics is clearly also becoming an area of its own. In the curriculum of 1994 (as revised in 2000), the concepts ethics and religion can appear side by side without any indication of how they relate to each other, like "religious and ethical issues" (p. 82), but more often they appear as concerning different areas, which is the case in the section about what to achieve towards the end of compulsory school. In ethics, the students shall be able to "conduct ethical reasoning and see the consequences of different positions" and, concerning religions e.g. "have knowledge of symbols, rites, central stories and beliefs in some world religions as well as basic ideas and forms of expression in some other life views" (p. 85). While there are sentences describing ethics and religion in relation to each other, this is indicated rather

than explicit or elaborated on. Concerning the purpose of the subject, the curriculum states that “Processing existential questions and questions of faith and viewing life from an ethical perspective are part of a personal development process. Every person reflects on such questions and needs to acquire tools in the form of traditions, language and symbols to search for meaning in the questions that they face in life.” (p. 82). Religious tradition may be understood as language and tools in the personal development, where considering life from an ethical perspective is one part. In order to get the highest grade, the student should also be able to compare “one’s own positions concerning life questions and ethics with thoughts and actions in different religions and life views” (p. 86). The student’s own ethics’ position can be compared with religious perspectives, but in the same time as the sentence draws the areas together, it shows the students’ ethics and religious perspectives as separate entities.

In the 2011 curriculum, the ability to analyse phenomena in RE (and other school subjects) is central. The purpose is that the student is given prerequisites to develop his/her “ability to analyze how [e.g.] religions influence and are influenced by conditions and events in society” (p. 215). However, in ethics the verb forms are more active. The abilities to be developed are “to reason and argue about moral issues and values on the basis of ethical concepts and models” (p. 216). In this context, it may be noticed that the basis of ethical reasoning is ethical concepts and models. However, in the introduction of the curriculum, a connection is made between religions and people’s ambitions to interpret and understand life. “People have in all times and all societies tried to understand and explain their living conditions and the social contexts they are part of. Religions and other outlooks on life are therefore central elements of human culture.” (p. 215). Notice though, how traditions here not are considered tools in existential reflections as in the text of 1994/2000. The ability to reflect can rather be understood as emanating from opportunities to reflect.

A particular feature of the 2011 curriculum, is that it states specific knowledge requirements for each subject, each sub area and each grade, on which the National Tests are supposed to draw on. The first National Test in RE was launched in 2013, and the requirement in ethics concerned the ability to “reason and argue about moral issues and values by making *well-developed* and *well-supported* reasoning and using ethical concepts and models in a *well-functioning* way” (p. 223). The words in italics vary depending on the grade, and the ones mentioned here are for the highest grade. Even though the text mentions connections between ethics and religions, highlighting how religions address ethical questions and views on the human being (p. 219), such connections are not asked for in the knowledge requirements.

In the 2022 curriculum, many perspectives and wordings in RE are the same or similar to those of 2011. Still, in ethics, the ability to reason and argue is stressed while the purpose concerning religions is to develop knowledge about (p. 188). It is explicitly

expressed that, in ethics, the teaching needs to give tools to reflect, but it is not indicated as in the 1994/2000 curricula, that there is a connection between religions and ethics. "The teaching should stimulate the students to reflect on different life questions and ethical approaches as well as giving students tools to be able to analyse and take a position on ethical and moral issues." (p. 188). In the ethics core-content section the presence of religious perspectives is a bit more frequent than in 2011, but also here positioned as separate from the students' perspectives (p. 192). The knowledge requirements in ethics still only concerns the student's way of reasoning.

Finally, one may add that the relationship between the subareas of RE - religions, ethics and life questions - can be noticed also in terms of how much attention they are given. The name of the subject seems to give a first indication: the subject is called "Knowledge of Religions", differing from e.g. Norway, in which the title of the very much similar subject is KRLE, i.e. Christianity, Religion, Life Views and Ethics. Hence, ethics and life questions risk becoming invisible in the Swedish RE subject, and from empirical studies it is shown that this risk also is real. Teaching about world-religions seems to dominate the teaching, marginalizing other sub-areas (Skolinspektionen 2012; Skolverket 1993, 54-55). Besides, ethics is often taught as a separate field, not seldom driven from moral dilemmas like abortion, euthanasia and death penalty (Osbeck, 2011).

### **3 Ethics Education in comparisons**

The Swedish Ethics Education (EE) presented above, constitutes of course only one kind of EE, while there in an international context are many more subject constructions. However, international comparisons in the field may be challenging.

#### **3.1 Challenges in international comparisons**

When it comes to international comparisons, Ethics Education seems to face similar challenges as the Religious Education, generally (e.g. Schweitzer, 2004). Just as RE, Ethics Education is in practice an unclear concept. The same heading can in practice mean different focusses, while different headings can refer to very similar content focuses (Korim & Hanesovás, 2010).

What the broadest and most overarching title of the subject would be, is for instance not clear. While Korim and Hanesovás (2010) use character education, others see this as the label of a specific tradition in the field that goes back to Aristotle and the virtue ethics (Howard, 2005). When regarding character education as one of the traditions in the field, Moral Education is often used as the umbrella concept (e.g. Howard, 2005), capturing at least two other main traditions. Firstly, the cognitive developmental tradition that is strongly affected by the Kohlberg legacy, often focusing on ethical decision-making, on reasons, and moral developing in understanding what is just and

what constitutes justice. Secondly, there is the caring tradition that has received a lot of attention, a tradition with Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings as central names. This tradition has links to the justice tradition, but has in opposition come to stress the importance of relationships. (e.g. Howard, 2005).

In international comparisons, also translation problems constitute real challenges. A literal translation may not capture the underlying concept, but a more interpretative translation may occur as confusing when realising that the label literary means something else. As an example, the Finnish, to RE optional, subject *Elämäntietäminen* can be mentioned. The title of the subject is translated into English both as Ethics and as Life Stance Education but is in Swedish called *Livsåskådningskunskap* (knowledge of life views / world views).

### **3.2 'Ethics education' appearing in different ways and in different forms internationally**

Moreover, it is important to be aware that 'ethics education' in school, also beyond its different labels and different focuses, appears in a variety of ways (Korim & Hanesová, 2010; Rothgangel et al., 2014; Rothgangel et al., 2016). 'Ethics education' can appear as a separate subject, as a sub-subject within RE, as a sub-subject within broader subjects, as a strand in general curriculum but also as hidden curriculum.

When it occurs, firstly, as a separate subject it can be both compulsory and optional. As a part of an RE subject, secondly, it can primarily have the shape as ethics of specific religious tradition/s or constitute a field of its one, as general ethics, but there can also be combinations of the two. Examples of broader subjects that may include ethics, thirdly, are Citizenship, Life Skills, Health Education and Social Studies.

When ethics is shown as a strand in general curriculum, fourthly, it can as in Sweden have the form of stated fundamental values or general perspectives, like an environmental perspective, towards which all teaching and schoolwork should aim. In Sweden 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." (p. 5). Besides these values, sustainability is given a central position, a perspective that shall permeate the teaching (2022, p. 9).

Fifthly and finally, ethics education can be understood as operating as hidden curriculum, i.e. as more or less unspoken values and norms taught through interactions, modelling and classroom culture. By way of example from my own research, it has been identified through classroom observations how RE may run the risk of constructing religion as a phenomenon to mock and religious individuals as deviating (and strange) in relation to a secular norm taken for granted (e.g Osbeck & Lied 2012; Osbeck, Sporre & Skeie, 2017).

The varieties of forms of EE and variations in ways that EE can operate presented, can also be understood in relation to the fundamental division in values education between explicit and implicit values education. It can be noticed how the four first categories can be understood as expressions of explicit values education while ethics education in form of “hidden curricula” expresses how much of values education and ethics education is ongoing implicitly (Cox, 1988; Thornberg, 2008).

Despite the many forms of EE, Korim and Hanesova (2010), following Manfred Göllner (2002), have stressed the possibility to identify three focusses or content emphasises in EE. The teaching may emphasise different kinds of skills such as life hermeneutical, ethical reflexive and a moral behavioural one. But there are of course also other divisions and typologies that are possible to make from the varieties that can be found both nationally and internationally. A rather often referred division is Tiffany Mary Jones' (2009), in which she describes values education as conservative, liberal, critical or post-modern. Besides, Gunnar Gunnarsson has in relation to the Icelandic Life Skill subject described a quite foundational distinction between teaching ambitions that more clearly relate to the self-knowledge of the students and others that to a larger extent focus on knowledge of society (2014).

## **4 Empirical Swedish Ethics Education Research - and tendencies in the practice**

As mentioned previously, the first National Test in RE was conducted in 2013, and the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies was given the task to conduct the test by the National Agency for Education.

### **4.1 Ethics education as marginalized in RE teaching**

The first findings and the trials of the tests indicated that the test tasks in the sub-area Ethics surprised the teachers. Some teachers responded that the test made them wonder whether Ethics really was such a central part of the RE subject as the test signalled. Since previous empirical research had found the ethics area as marginalized in the RE subject (see above and e.g. Skolinspektionen, 2012), the responses were not surprising. The same pattern can be seen in e.g. Lativa, from which it has been reported that the content concerning religions is more clear to the teachers than the ethics content (Geikina, 2014). The responses in relation to the first national RE test also indicated that the teachers thought that the tasks concerning Ethics were more difficult to assess than others.



## **4.2 Ethics education as hard to assess due to its unclear character in the RE context**

To examine more thoroughly the indications that the teachers found the Ethics tasks to be more difficult to assess, a think-aloud-study was conducted focussing on teachers' assessment challenges. The identified challenges mainly concerned that the teachers had competing ideas about what students should be given credit for during assessment in Ethics. For instance, the study showed a larger teacher interest in rewarding argued altruistic values, in ethical insights, and in the use of precise and characterizing concepts. It was concluded that the sub-area Ethics gave rise to special assessment challenges that seemed to be related to its partly unclear character in the RE context (Osbeck et al, 2015). Due to vague understandings of what constitute knowledge in the field and a realization that the test largely will influence practice, through so called teaching to the test effects (e.g. Conroy, 2013), the need for further research regarding varieties of conception of ethical competence was clear. The students seemed to have their knowledge tested on contested grounds.

## **4.3 Varieties of conceptions of ethical competence to be taught in compulsory school**

The project "What May be Learnt in Ethics? Varieties of Conceptions of Ethical Competence to be Taught in Compulsory School" (EthiCo, Later EthiCo I) was funded in 2015 by the Swedish research council. The researchers were Olof Franck, Annika Lilja, Karin Sporre, Johan Tykesson and Christina Osbeck as the principle investigator. The purpose of the research project was to identify and elucidate varieties of conceptions of ethical competence and critically analyse and discuss them, in relation to each other and in relation to ethical theory, as potential educational content in compulsory school. Besides from theoretical perspectives - which were represented by Martha Nussbaum, Knud Ejler Løgstrup, Seyla Benhabib and Peter Singer - the varieties of ethical competence were studied from policy perspectives as well as perspectives of teachers and pupils.

As indicated above, the EthiCo I project was developed from the perspective that the knowledge requirements of the Swedish curriculum and its tests may risk limiting central knowledge in Ethics. That is, there may be broader conceptions of ethical competence than the analytical and argumentative competences, stated by the Swedish curriculum (see above). Analyses of test constructions as well as students' response also showed how the knowledge requirements limited the focuses of the tests so that primarily a reasoning - analytical and argumentative - competence was tested (Sporre, 2019). This was found despite the fact that the students' test responses also showed

broader competences such as existential understandings and conceptual competences where the nature of a relation, situation or an action that is an object of an ethical analysis is clarified (e.g. to clarify the nature of forgiveness, concepts such as conscience, remorse and redressing are helpful) (Osbeck, 2017). As previously shown in the think aloud study with the teachers, the analyses of the test responses also showed competences to weigh values in relation to each other and argue for collective and societal values.

Comparisons in relation to international curricula, in addition, showed the Swedish RE curriculum as lacking interest in action competence and being individualistic in the sense that it fails to place ethical competences in a societal context by addressing current issues such as multi-cultural and citizen-oriented topics (Lilja et al., 2018; Sporre, 2021).

What the interviewed teachers stressed as important ethical competences, beyond those in the Swedish knowledge requirements, involved an understanding of current ethical dilemmas, which often are of an everyday life character. Such an understanding may be of an empathetic kind but may also be a reflexive understanding, drawing on critical thinking for instance. How ethical competence can be related to perseverance as well as to action competence was also shown through the teachers' interviews (Lilja & Osbeck, 2020).

Moreover, the student interviews showed how ethical competence also can be understood as

a rather contextual, holistic, procedural and everyday-life-related competence - which clearly includes an ability to weigh values in relation to each other (Osbeck, 2018). The kind of ethical competence that the interviewed students expressed as needed was related to certain situations, especially friendship, education and future, as well as societal issues like migration and climate. Furthermore, situations, values and needs for ethical competences were shown as intertwined in the interviews with the students. When ethical competence is thought of as an everyday life competence, the ability to identify ethical issues becomes important, as well as a carrying out competence and a reconsidering competence, where the individual takes responsibility for previous decisions. Of importance was also how the interviewed students, when they stress an examining and weighing ability, also emphasise the importance of being aware of different options, including being knowledgeable and well-informed of the phenomena at stake.

#### **4.4 Ethical Competence as a multi-dimensional competence**

In summary the EthiCo I project shows, through the analyses of the various empirical data, varieties of conceptions of ethical competences beyond the analytical and

argumentative ethical competences of the Swedish RE curriculum and national tests. The analyses show the importance of an identifying competence concerning ethical dilemmas in everyday life, a weighing competence in relation to collective and societal values, a competence of being well-informed about the issues at stake – the phenomena that a current dilemma or demanded analysis is about, an action competence, a perseverance competence, a reconsidering competence, but also a competence to contextualise ethical issues in the multi-cultural and global society of today.

Against the background of an additional review study of over 1900 research articles in field, the EthiCo I project come to summarize the findings in an even shorter way. Ethical competence could advantageously be understood as a multidimensional competence in contrast to the one-dimensional competence dominating the Swedish curriculum. In such a conceptualization ethical competence contains sensitivity, judgement, motivation and implementation (cf. Rest, 1986), but also to be informed and knowledgeable of the issues at stake, as well as being context sensitive and communicative (Osbeck at al., 2018).

#### **4.5 A need for tools and possible teaching approaches in Ethics Education**

With an understanding of ethical competence as multidimensional and a perspective of such a competence as central for the school's ethics teaching, the question is close at hand how such an ability can be developed? How can teaching be conducted to enable students to develop a multidimensional ethical competence? The questions can be understood as central also based on other previous research stressing the tension between, on the one hand, the curriculum's high ambitions to develop young people's ethical competence and, and on the other hand, an awareness of such a task to be unclear and difficult to teachers who often have a reactive and unplanned ethics education (Anderstöm, 2017; Thornberg, 2006), and a need for teaching tools and possible teaching approaches (Gardelli, 2016).

#### **4.6 A fiction-based approach to Ethics Education as a possible way forward**

While ethicists and philosophers have pointed at fiction as of importance for the development of ethical competence, (e.g. Nussbaum, 1990; Nussbaum, 2008), not that much empirical research can be found regarding this. So, in 2018 the Swedish Institute for Educational Research funded the project “Refining the ethical eye and ethical voice – The possibilities and challenges of a fiction-based approach to ethics education”, also called EthiCo II due to its close connections with the EthiCo I project. While the EthiCo I project clearly was a WHAT-focused Ethics Education project, the EthiCo II project was HOW-focused.

The purpose of the EthiCo II project was to plan and investigate with school-teachers to what extent and under what conditions a fiction-based ethics education designed in collaboration can develop (such a multidimensional) ethical competence of 11 and 14-year-old students. Furthermore, the purpose was to identify potential difficulties with such an ethics education approach. The research questions concerned students' development of ethical competence, differences between classes in relation to the teaching models and how the teaching is carried out, teachers' insights during the work and what can facilitate or hinder the development of ethical competence. Ten classes participated, five with their ordinary teaching and five with the fiction-based approach to ethics education.

#### **4.7 Theoretical underpinning of a fiction-based Ethics Education**

The theoretical underpinning for why a fiction-based approach to ethics education is reasonable comes from Martha Nussbaum who among others stresses that we through fiction come in contact with destinies that we never have the chance to be part of ourselves, we develop sympathetic imagination and also cultivate this capacity when reading fiction so that we become skilled in using that capacity in everyday life. Through fiction and the gained ability to imagine, we develop 'knowledge of possibilities' so that we can see and be prepared for scenarios that might happen, and may also develop ideas about alternative actions that do not seem to be at hand but could be present. Through fiction, we develop new visions, hopes, possibilities and beliefs that will shape and have an impact on our ongoing recreation of reality (Nussbaum, 2008).

All these abilities are central for what here has been called a multidimensional ethical competence. It certainly is of importance for moral sensitivity, since to listen, to see and be empathic are great deals of what moral sensitivity is about. In turn, this has consequences for moral implementation directly, but also indirectly for moral judgement and moral motivation. However, why it is so that fiction is of importance for ethical competence and how this can be understood could be elaborated on further.

Consequently, Mark Tappan's sociocultural perspective on moral development where he stresses how fiction develops repertoires of moral discourses and thereby conditions for moral functioning - which in addition could be understood as moral sensitivity, judgement, motivation, implementation - has been of value.

Tappan's perspective is located in a theoretical tradition where our actions and our learning take place in relation to tools at work: physical as well as linguistic tools (Tappan, e.g. 2006).

Here language mediates our entire relationship with the world around us. Of importance is also the contexts and practices in which we are active, the discourses and dialogues that are at work there - the form, the content, and the concepts in these discourses. In these practices learning tends to be directed towards a "competent actor", as defined in

that context, which is something that in a classroom is influenced by both teacher and students. So, as shown, Tappan's perspective directs focus towards discourses, available through fiction readings, but also towards how these are being used in further discussions and practices.

#### **4.8 A fiction-based approach to Ethics Education - what it may mean in practice**

In line with the collaboration ambition of the project, EthiCo II was conducted in close cooperations with the teachers in all the four phases of the project. In the development phase literature was chosen, and the teaching activities connected to the text reading were fixed, so that the fiction-based approach to ethics education could be implemented in the academic year 2019/2020. The approach had nine interventions, or lessons, that were carried out approximately monthly. Each lesson had the same structure and consisted of four different steps. The lesson began with a text reading by the teacher, followed by a shorter exercise giving an opportunity to think about the text. Thereafter discussions in smaller groups followed with reoccurring questions, before the lesson ended with a whole-class gathering focussing on the central perspectives from the group discussions.

The questions that the group discussions were based on had two focusses. Firstly, how the students interpreted the read story in relation to some ethical questions, and secondly what kind of general reflections they had concerning these questions. The ethics questions concerned right and wrong, good and bad, what it means to be a good person, and what a good life can be. The fiction texts concerned four themes which students, based on results from EthiCo I, expressed that they needed ethical competence in relation to; relationships, education and future, migration and climate. In line with Tappan, the texts had the purpose to widen the students' moral discourses on these themes.

#### **4.9 Findings from EthiCo II**

One of the most important conclusions regarding the students' development of ethical competence and the contribution of the group discussions is how they give the students opportunities to be active and creative, and in that develop their moral discourses in the practices that function as proximal development zones. Well-chosen literature constitutes contexts that are at once familiar and foreign, and in this sense broaden their perspective (Lilja et al., 2023). Furthermore, an important insight is how the teachers see the students' development of ethical competence as connected with the possibility of literature to build bridges between how something is and how something could be. A fiction-based ethics education may give the students larger space, when acting in and with their contexts (Lyngfelt et al, 2023).

Analyses of the joint seminars, between teachers and researchers, have given rise to insights on how important teaching acts in, in this kind of EE approach, are to help students to focus on the relevant aspects of the teaching goals. The reading and text work demands what has been called a “raking” from the side of the teacher. Finally, the project has shaped awareness about difficulties with research on teaching effects. Some specific challenges concern the shaping of close relationships between the target competence, in this case the multidimensional ethical competence, the current teaching approach, here the fiction-based approach, and finally the test (Sporre et al., in press).

## **5 Religious Education with Ethics Education - developing repertoires of the good life**

In this article it has been shown how EE may be of different kinds, with different focusses, where some constructions place EE within RE. This is the case in Sweden where RE is a compulsory subject, in both mandatory school and upper secondary school. However, the analyses of Swedish RE curricula show a development over the course of years where the studies of religion and the studies of ethics have become rather separated within the RE subject. In the present curriculum, EE demands active reasoning and position taking of the student, while the contribution of the religion content is limited to be put in comparison to the student’s own ethical perspectives.

Furthermore, this article has presented how development in the field of ethics, concerning among other things perspectives of the good life, can be understood as an expansion of moral discourses making it possible to think in relation to current issues in richer and more nuanced ways. The importance of narratives in this context has been stressed for the development of ethical sensitivity and imagination through which we among others can create ideas about alternative actions not present, new visions, new hopes, and new possibilities.

The findings stress the importance of further empirical development studies which unlike non-participant observation have the possibility to study education that not yet is happening. The presented studies have shown how ethic analyses demand factual knowledge about the phenomena constituting the object of analysis. Existential ethics demands existential understanding, a gradually widened language on life, a fact that speaks in favor of letting religious studies and ethics studies mutually influence each other. Religions provide narratives through which young peoples’ existential discourses can be expanded. Thereby they may advantageously complement fiction within themes of special concern to young people such as those about relationships and social exclusion/inclusion. Perhaps religious stories even may be of a special value when it comes to stressing inclusion for all people, also the ones disregarded by society, and in that stressing the message of unconditional love – a message that seems to be of

importance for a performance society continuously struggling with inclusion and exclusion.

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