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Religious Diversity
and Education in Europe

Martin Ubani, Inkeri Rissanen,
Saila Poulter (eds.)

Contextualising dialogue, secularisation and pluralism

Religion in Finnish public education

WAXMANN

Religious Diversity and Education in Europe

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Volume 40

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Martin Ubani, Inkeri Rissanen, Saira Poulter (Eds.)

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Introduction to contextualising dialogue, secularisation and pluralism in Finnish public education

This volume presents recent research focusing on religion in public education in Finland. “Dialogue”, “secularisation” and “pluralism” have been the key concepts in international discussions concerning religion, public space and education for the past decades (Jackson, 2004; Meijer, Miedema, & Lanser-van der Velde, 2009). The public space is an essential category of the modern civic state, which is used when referred to a forum in which the social and private identities of citizens are created and negotiated. Habermas (2011) and Taylor (2007) have famously described the birth of this space that has been interpreted as radically secular. Based on the prevailing secularist understanding, the public educational space is considered socially, politically and epistemologically neutral. Public space can be divided into general, political and institutional levels (Ferrari, 2012). At school, all three levels exist, as individuals have the right to express their freedom of religion, and they are supposed to debate about the differing views of a good life and, finally, to be treated equally as citizens.

With this volume, we wish to contribute to the current knowledge and conceptions about the processes that concern religion in public education by contextualising these concepts and respective phenomena into the current Finnish educational policy and practice. The purpose of this volume is to enrich and compliment the discussion concerning religion in education by drawing together empirical and theoretical observations from several case analyses from Finland. International comparative studies are integral for the development of knowledge on issues of religion and education. However, a localised research approach should be used to compliment such research as secularisation and topics connected to it such as church-state relations and pluralisation along with educational policies are context-dependent phenomena (Casanova, 2018). We hope that the focus on one country will offer the volume a shared platform to critically examine, deconstruct and propose aspects to further develop the discussion – academic, professional and public – with regards to religion in education.

Finnish public education offers an interesting case as a focus of analysis in many ways. Finnish society is becoming diverse and plural, but a little later and at a slower pace than some of the most multicultural and pluralistic European states. However, there is a growing multiculturalist awareness in the education policy (Räsänen, Jokikokko, & Lampinen, 2018; Zilliacus, Holm, &

Sahlström, 2017; Ubani, 2013). The Finnish public education is renowned for its effectiveness and learning outcomes. Finland is also a country where – similarly to other Nordic countries – the processes of secularisation at the different levels of society have recently been quite rapid. Furthermore, and connected to the above, the changes in the Church-State relations and the steady decrease in the Evangelical Lutheran membership rate that is currently roughly 70 per cent (Illman, Ketola, Latvio, & Sohlberg, 2017) and increasing diversity has caused tensions in the confessional religious education model and mono-cultural school ethos. The current “weak confessional” (Ubani, 2007) segregated model of religious education in Finland where students receive religious education according to their “own religion” without devotional or faith formation aims is today under increasing pressure to adapt, on the other hand, to the growing religious diversity and secular population and, on the other hand, to the need for religious dialogue by increasing the integration of students into the same instruction.

In the Finnish context, the questions concerning the position of Lutheranism are connected to, for instance, questions of majority representation, cultural heritage, citizenship and public education. Since the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, secularisation can be perceived as the key societal process for understanding the role of religion in public schools. Secularisation, taken here as a historical process of profound societal change in the relationship between religion and society – or church and state – mainly in reference to the decline of institutional forms of religiosity and religion’s loss of power and significance in secular matters, is applicable to the Finnish case. Huhta (2014) describes the years 1958–1992 as an era of active, yet moderate secularisation at the institutional level as the independence of both Lutheran and Orthodox “folk churches” from the state was being promoted. However, at the same time, their level of social significance increased, which was being done by means of public discussion and legislative decisions such as how the taxes were being collected (p. 144). Naturally, secularisation in Finland also includes the level of the individual: here, the rejection of institutional forms of religion and decline in membership, criticism of close state-church relations and weakening religious socialisation are emphasised and applicable to the situation in Finland, too (see Huhta, 2014).

One of the integral questions with regards to Lutheranism – in light of the discussion which this volume brings forth – is the question of Finnishness and citizenship. The overlap between Finnishness and Lutheranism has its roots in Nordic nation state building where Evangelical-Lutheran Church formed the bedrock for religious-moral citizenship (Buchardt, Markkola, & Valtonen, 2013; Huhta, 2014). The birth of the public schooling system in the 1860s was marked by the change in controlling authority in which schooling was formally taken away from the church, as Huhta (2014) describes, this can be viewed as

the first instance of the secularisation of the Finnish public education (Buchardt, Markkola, & Anttonen, 2013). However, the prevailing educational ethos was characterised by the unifying trinity of Christian morality, the Lutheran faith and Finnish nationalism (see Huhta, 2014). National romanticism with a narrative of Finland as a God given Fatherland was combined with the Lutheran thinking of the Finnish state as a holy moral community that represented God's absolute reason. In education, the importance of religion for instilling Finns with a strong moral character was emphasised and the school was integral in this citizenship construction (Launonen, 2000; Poulter, 2016). In light of the above, perhaps it is of no surprise that still today in terms of public education in Finland, the position of Lutheranism is ambiguous: it sometimes seems to be very strong and inherent while at other times threatened, questioned or downplayed.

Recent decades have also witnessed counter-processes to secularisation. Many researchers have attested to religious metamorphosis and post-secularisation in a sense that religious plurality and the significance of religion in societal matters is growing. In Finland, there is also an ongoing process with regards to individual religiosity that includes the pluralisation and secularisation of beliefs. In terms of religious affiliation, currently about 4 million people in Finland (70 per cent) belong to Lutheran Church. Most of the people who leave the Lutheran Church choose to remain unaffiliated to any religious community: the non-religious and secular population is growing from this group. In addition, about 100,000 belong to other Christian groups such as the Orthodox Church, Free Evangelical Churches, Pentecostalism and Adventism. The largest religious minorities are Islam with an estimation of between 50,000–70,000 members, Orthodox Church with over 60,000 members and the Catholic Church with 14,000 members. There are fewer than 1,300 adherents of Judaism. Even though the Muslim population is growing rapidly, most of the immigrants are African Christians (see Illman, Ketola, Latvio, & Sohlberg, 2017).

The current national core curricula for public education from early childhood education to upper secondary education reflects how, today, multiculturalism is an integral policy principle that also steers the handling of religions in education (NCCBE, 2014; NCCUSE, 2014; NCCECEC, 2016; NCCPPE, 2014; Zilliacus, Holm, & Sahlström, 2017). This is in line with the changes that took place in public policies during the 2000s in Finland (Ubani, 2013). This can be evidenced with regards to the general aims of the national core curricula and also in the subjects of religious education and secular ethics, too.

For instance, in basic education, “Cultural diversity as richness” is mentioned in the curriculum as one of the central values which Finnish basic education is grounded on. The national core curriculum (NCCBE, 2014, xx) states that “each pupil’s linguistic and cultural identity is supported in a

versatile manner”. In many parts where the curriculum refers to diversity and its respectful treatment, worldviews and religions are mentioned as one form of this diversity. For instance, it is stated how the appreciation of diversity should guide school-home collaboration: “The joint reflection of school and homes on values, and cooperation underpinned by this, promote security and the pupils’ holistic well-being. The staff’s open-minded and respectful attitude towards different religions, views, traditions and conceptions of education lays the foundation for constructive instruction” (NCCBE, 2014, xx). In addition, the curriculum demands that “the knowledge that the pupils and their guardians and communities have of the nature, ways of living, history, languages and culture in their own linguistic and cultural areas are drawn upon in the instruction” (NCCBE, 2014, xx).

In line with these emphases in the whole curriculum of basic education also in religious education there is an increment of recognition of intra-tradition plurality, religions and non-religious worldviews along with developing of dialogue skills. There is also an explicit support for integrated practices among students from different groups of instruction in religious education, secular ethics and other subjects in the topics found relevant. Similarly, there is an increment of openness to the religious reality societies face in the subject of secular ethics (NCCBE, 2014). In this sense, religious education and secular ethics seem to view the significance of religion culturally, societally and even at the individual level in the most similar manner up to date since the formation of secular ethics as an alternative subject for religious education in 1985 (NCCBE, 1985).

In many countries, religious education is seen as instrumental in the handling of multiculturalism and pluralisation in public education (Biseth, 2009; Ubani, 2013). Religious education is compulsory in Finnish basic (7–15 years) and upper secondary education (16–18 years). The current model for religious education and ethics, which, among other things, grants students the right to religious education according to their own tradition but from a non-confessional basis, is different from the approaches adopted in other Nordic countries. Its legislative basis was reformulated in the early 2000s as part of the legislative reform of the Constitution of Finland in 2000, Act on the Freedom of Religion in 2003 and consequent changes on the in the Basic Education act in 2003. There the solution was grounded on both freedom from and for religion (see National Agency of Education, 2014).

The legislation ensures, as an organisational principle, that if the minimum requirement of three students from the same registered religious community in a municipality is met, the students are given religious education according to their own religion on the condition that the religious community is in the register of the Ministry Education and Culture and that there exists a curriculum for that religion. The same minimum requirement holds for students

who do not belong to a religious community: they are given instruction in a subject of secular ethics. There are some differences in how the students are placed in the groups, however. For instance, students who do not belong to the majority religious affiliation of the municipality are required to request their own instruction and students from Lutheran and Orthodox backgrounds are automatically placed into their own instruction. While the Finnish RE model separates the students based on their religious backgrounds, an explicit sign of the inclusiveness of religious and secular worldviews in education can be seen in public early childhood education and care and pre-primary education (Lamminmäki-Vartia & Kuusisto, 2017).

This volume consists of 12 peer-reviews & chapters. Besides the *Introduction* and *Discussion*, the volume includes nine topical chapters by invited authors and the inference of the chapters. The invited authors of the chapters are key scholars on the topic from Finland. Recent years have witnessed several completed studies and research initiatives in Finland concerning religion, pluralism and education. The volume combines their expertise and contextual knowledge with international developments, discussions and theories. The invited authors are experts from their respective fields including Religious Education, Multicultural Education, Religious Studies and Educational Sciences. The authors were given a topic connected with their research and asked to base their chapters on their respective studies on the topic. Therefore, each chapter summarises the authors' state of knowledge that is based primarily on their own case studies from the Finnish context. These chapters also solely represent the views of the respective authors.

There are nine topical chapters in the volume. These chapters discuss the themes of the book in different contexts in educational policy and practice. The first chapter is called *The governance of religious education in Finland: a state-centric relational approach?* In the chapter, Tuula Sakaranaho discusses the questions of accommodating issues related to pluralisation, secularisation and multiculturalism in the governance structures and practices of public religious education in Finland. This is followed by a chapter by Saila Poulter. Her chapter *Religious education as a means of citizenship education in Finland* focuses on the connection between citizenship, values education and religious education. The chapter shows, for instance, how the notion of citizenship in religious education has changed throughout the last century in Finnish public education from a morally good and religious Lutheran citizen to a dialogical and critical global citizen.

The third chapter of the volume chapter and written by Harriet Zilliacus is called *Key challenges in supporting identity development in segregated instruction about worldviews*. Among other things, Zilliacus shows some challenges in relating the current model for religious education that is based on one's own religion with the currents from multiculturalism and the de-

essentialised perceptions of identities. She offers integrated ethics as a solution to this problem. Vesa Åhs, Arto Kallioniemi and Saila Poulter have authored the chapter called *Developing integrative practices in a separative RE system: some Finnish perspectives*. The chapter describes how integrative classrooms would be suitable contexts for dialogue, mutual understanding between students from various worldviews and use empirical evidence to support their perceptions.

The chapter from Martin Ubani is called *Religion, multiculturalism and Finnish schools: the secularist-culturalist transition*. Among other things, the chapter shows how the secularist and culturalist frameworks in the handling of religions in public schools are connected not only in religious education but also in the school policies and practices. The chapter maintains a view that Finnish public education is in a state of transition towards the culturalist handling of religions, and that the Lutheran Church and Lutheranism(s) tend to be treated in a different framework than, for instance, Islam. This discussion is being followed by the chapter *Inclusion of Muslims in Finnish Schools* by Inkeri Rissanen. The chapter shows in many ways how the handling of Islam and Muslims in public schools is connected with broader issues such as the development of multicultural citizenship and recognition of minority identities. The chapter includes examples from the school as a whole and also from Islamic religious education.

Religion and secularity in school festivals – experiences and challenges from Finland by Pia-Maria Niemi is the seventh chapter of the volume. Pia Maria-Niemi discusses the issues related to developing inclusive school traditions. She argues for the need to critically examine the cultural heritage and symbols that are part of school festivities, and she sees it as important to develop new traditions in the school that would represent the past, present and future. In her chapter, Anuleena Kimanen discusses the aspects related to dialogue in Finnish religious education and especially highlights the need to recognise the positions and perspectives of students when developing practices for worldview encounter as part of religious education. She highlights the commonality of a secular outlook among students participating in the lessons. The chapter is called *Encountering religion in a secular context: How do Finnish students perceive and encounter religions and worldviews in the classroom?* The last topical chapter is called *Intercultural and interreligious sensitivities in a Finnish educational context*. The chapter is written by Kristiina Holm, Elina Kuusisto and Inkeri Rissanen. The chapter summarises the research results on Finnish teachers' and students' intercultural and interreligious sensitivities. It presents the particular challenges related to developing sensitivity to religions and discusses the need for gender-sensitivity as well as the acknowledgement of local demographics in intercultural and interreligious education in Finnish schools.

The next chapter is called *Key issues of religion in Finnish public education*. It is an elaborated synthesis of case analyses and provides the main themes identified with regards to the topic of the book: it can be viewed as the “analysis of analyses”. This inference chapter similarly to the introduction and discussion was authored by the editors. The changing authorship order in these chapters reflect the editors’ democratic and shared process of working with this volume. Please note that in the inference chapter and in the *Discussion*, the other chapters are referred to with the author of the chapter without a year to distinguish between their respective publications.

The reader should also note that currently in the discussions describing religious education and ethics in Finland, there are several concepts being used to describe the model or the respective subjects depending on, for instance, on the theoretical framework being used. In principle, this volume uses the concepts that have become common in the international discussion. The current solution for religious education is called *religious education and secular ethics* when the discussion incorporates both subjects. When the discussion focuses only on the instruction of “one’s own religion”, *the model or solution for religious education* or simply *religious education* is being used. The reader should note that the official translations for the two subjects are religion and ethics (NCCBE, 2014). However, in international literature, *religious education* has been used to describe the subject and this is why that is being used here. *Secular ethics* is being used because, again, it has become common in international literature. Furthermore, this clarifies the situation as one solution for the full integration of the subject is called *ethics* and as religious education includes aims related to ethics, too. In addition to *ethics* or *integrated ethics*, we use *integrated worldview education* and *integrated religious education and secular ethics* to describe integrated instruction – the choice is made based on the emphases of the authors. However, concerning the recent research based experiments or ground-level integration of students, we use *integrated religious education and ethics lessons or instruction* or *practices* to highlight that, in these situations, the students are supposed to study according to their own respective curricula even if it is being done in shared classrooms usually for some periods of time. However, we trust that the context of expression will support the correct understanding of the meaning, too.

We would like to finish this chapter by expressing our gratitude to the series editors of the Waxmann series “Religious Diversity and Education in Europe” for accepting our proposal for this volume to be published in the respective series. We are also grateful to the authors of the chapters for showing professionalism, commitment and patience in this endeavour. In addition, we would like to mention here that Bachelor of Theology Antti Hänninen gave us some help by checking some of the references. Finally, we would like to thank Waxmann Publishing and Executive Editor Mrs Beate Plugge for assistance and

goodwill throughout the process. Our hope and trust is that this volume will be a worthy contribution to improving the lives of children, youth, guardians and educators – the whole school community. The volume is intended for the researchers, policymakers, practitioners and students of religion, multiculturalism, pluralisation, secularisation and dialogue in education. This volume is dedicated to the fine group of teachers of religious education and ethics in Finland.

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The governance of religious education in Finland: a state-centric relational approach?

Abstract: During recent decades, there has been a need in Finland to come to terms with growing social, cultural and religious diversity. This is also reflected in the way that religious education has been implemented as part of a national curriculum of secular, state-supported schools. In order to review more closely at how this implementation has been undertaken, this article will utilize a state-centric relational approach, consisting of five modes of governance. Each of these modes of governance entails a particular kind of dialogue, which in this article is understood as social interaction between the state and different social actors. With the help of this theoretical approach to the governance of religious education, the article will discuss different challenges that have arisen in the increasingly secularizing and pluralizing society of Finland.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, Finnish society has undergone a rapid social change, which in one way or another is linked to globalization. Consequently, there has been a need to come to terms with growing social, cultural and religious diversity in Finland and to develop social policies addressing issues arising from this diversity. Acting as a sort of barometer of social change, schools mirror the growing cultural and religious pluralism of a society. Hence, they have become important loci for cultural encounters and a testing ground for the multicultural policies of a country. At the same time, the formal education of state-supported schools reproduces the main cultural values of the society and reinforces a given national identity. Thus, education is crucial when modern societies aim at confirming and redefining their unity and identity in the face of rapid global and local changes. (Sakaranaho, 2013; see also Seligman, 2014; Van Arragon & Beaman, 2015; Rissanen, 2018; Sakaranaho, 2018.)

In principle, one of the aims of a state is to provide society with good governance. What good governance is in practice, however, is always context-bound (see Bevir, 2012, pp. 101 ff.). In the face of the aforementioned social changes, the Finnish state aims at treating all its citizens equally, and as part of this equal treatment it recognizes its citizens' right to hold different cultural and religious traditions and identities. This line of policy is also reflected in Finnish basic education, where, in accordance with the current national core curriculum for basic education, cultural diversity is seen as "a positive resource", and pupils

and students are to “be educated to a world that is diverse in terms of culture, language, religions and convictions” (NCCBE, 2014; see also Zilliacus, Paulsrud, & Holm, 2017; Mäkelä, Kalalahti, & Varjo, 2017; FNAE, 2018c). How the Finnish state aims at reaching these aims and thereby managing growing cultural and religious diversity in practice is one of the crucial questions that this article looks at in relation to religious education (RE).

During recent decades, the processes of globalization, widening societal fragmentation and a consequent complexity of social issues have led to a growing critical discussion about the role of the state and the viability of its hierarchical mode of governance vis-à-vis all these changes. In general, an agreement seems to prevail that the state does not have enough resources to take care of increasingly complex social problems but needs to share the responsibility with other interest groups, such as private enterprises, charitable organizations, or different non-governmental organizations in general. In governance research, however, there is a disagreement regarding the roles of the collaborative parties and the question of which are more central in the governance of the current society. Briefly, one can divide these opinions into three approaches, which emphasize the role of the state, markets or actors of civil society, respectively. (See Bevir, 2012; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007; Bell & Hindmoor, 2009.)

The main interest of this article is not to take part in the argument about the most appropriate approach with respect to the governance of the state and society but rather to outline different levels of hierarchy where the governance of religious education in state-supported schools of Finland takes place. For that purpose, it utilizes the state-centric relational theory of governance developed by Bell and Hindmoor (2009). It must be noted, though, that Bell and Hindmoor are ardent defenders of the state. Not only do they argue for the continuing importance of the state, but they also normatively defend its use of power in contemporary society, even if in collaboration with other social actors. This article, while in agreement with the argument that the state still has an important role to play in a growingly plural society, does not subscribe to the normative approach. Instead, it rather freely uses the state-centric relational theory as a heuristic device to discuss how the system of school education in general and religious education in particular operate in Finland. In so doing, it also makes some observations about the role of the markets and civil society networks, which to date have received very little attention in research on educational issues in Finland (see Ubani & Tirri, 2013, p. 113). From this kind of analysis, it is possible to reflect on the role and importance of the state and different sectors of Finnish society in the management of increasingly complex social issues, of which education is one of the most crucial ones.

In the following, the state-centric relational approach with its five modes of governance is briefly outlined. From there on, the article discusses each

of these modes of governance in relation to the Finnish system of religious education. To date, governance as a theoretical approach has been utilized very little in Finland in the study of religions or religion and education. Hence, more systematic work is needed, and this article will contribute towards that end (see Martikainen, 2007; Martikainen, 2013; Sakaranaho, 2015; Sakaranaho & Martikainen, 2015; Sakaranaho, 2018). The aim of this article is not to advocate any particular system of religious education but rather to discuss, in light of the chosen theory, how religious education is organized in Finland in the face of undergoing parallel processes of secularization and pluralization, and what kinds of dialogue or interaction this theoretical model involves on different hierarchical levels.¹ Based on this discussion, the article ends with a reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the state-centric relational approach as a theoretical model for explaining the governance of religious education in a secular European welfare society such as Finland, concluding with some further questions to be addressed.

2. The state-centric relational approach and five modes of governance

In brief, the state-centric relational approach developed by Bell and Hindmoor (2009) distinguishes between five modes of governance: hierarchy, persuasion, markets, community engagements, and associative governance. It must be noted that each mode of governance also entails different kinds of dialogue, which in this article are understood as social interaction between the state and other social actors in Finnish society.

Governance via hierarchy refers to the authoritative action of the government or agencies of the state, for instance, by means of taxing, allocating resources, or legal and other enforcement mechanisms. With respect to education, different school acts constitute the main legal basis for the state steering. Governance via persuasion concerns the aim of the state to change people's attitudes and behaviour through inculcating in them different modes of "self-discipline" or "compliance", for instance, in relation to personal health, the environment, societal security, and so forth. In education, school curricula are one of the main examples of state persuasion. Governance via markets takes place when the government outsources some of its main functions to private firms and thereby develops different kinds of public/private partnerships. The commercial production of schoolbooks for use in comprehensive education in Finland

1 In this article, I focus on religion(s) and for the most part leave out questions about ethics as a school subject (see Sakaranaho & Salmenkivi, 2009).

is an example of this. In addition to the marketization of its functions, the state also governs via community engagement when it shares decision-making with local communities and citizens. In Finland, the state shares the responsibility for comprehensive education with municipalities. Finally, governance via associations takes place through different networks, which operate in compliance with the state in order to reach certain policy aims. As an example, one can mention different networks that are constituted around issues concerning religion in general and religious education in particular.

Religious education is an illuminating example of how complicated the issues are in terms of the negotiations of different interests groups with regard to education. In recent decades, religious education has gained new significance on both the national level and the European level. One can name at least two reasons for the interest of national governments and different European bodies, such as the Council of Europe or the European Court of Human Rights, in religious education. First, the rapid increase of immigration to Europe after the Second World War set into motion a process of cultural pluralization, forcing European states to create new multicultural policies in order to meet the challenge of growing diversity within European borders. Second, and partly linked with the first issue, national and European bodies are increasingly concerned with maintaining the stability of European social and political order against security threats coming from both inside and outside the borders of the EU. With respect to these concerns, religious education is seen as a means of securitization in the governance of religions in Europe (Himanen, 2012; Sakaranaho, 2013; Rissanen, 2018; Sakaranaho, 2018; see FNAE, 2018b). These general European trends are also visible in Finland, as exemplified in the following discussion on the governance of religious education.

3. Governance via hierarchy: the Finnish system of education and educational acts

In a similar fashion to that of other Nordic countries, the Finnish education model stipulates “one school for all” (Zilliacus, Paulsrud, & Holm, 2017). Hence, in Finland, basic education is provided within a single institution and the school year is the same nationwide (MEC & FNAE, 2017). The Finnish government opted in the 1970s for a general system of comprehensive education that aims to educate all Finnish children in a uniform and equal manner. Thus, basic education is compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 16, in addition to one year of preschool education at the age of six (FNAE, 2018a). Even though there is no compulsion to take part in comprehensive education in state-supported schools, in practice this is what is happening nationwide.

Attendance in basic education is nearly one hundred percent (99.7%) and the number of students taking part in upper-secondary education (96%) is also extremely high (see Holm & Londen, 2010). Without a doubt, one reason for this is the small number of private schools as an alternative; the permission to start such a school is not easily granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Hence, aside from a few exceptions for religious or other ideological reasons, the general understanding is that children are educated in the state-supported primary and secondary schools, and most of these also continue in the upper-secondary schools. At the same time, since the 1990s the government has relinquished much of its authority in decision-making to the municipalities, which are in charge of the daily administration of the state-supported schools in their vicinity (see Ubani & Tirri, 2013).

Thus, the system of education in Finland is an elemental part of the secular governmental governance of Finnish society, and it has been so already since the 1800s. In Finland, an important change concerning school education took place with a statute enacted in 1865 in the countryside and in 1873 in the cities, where ecclesiastical and secular administrations were separated from one another and the municipalities took over such “secular” tasks as healthcare and education. (Sakaranaho, 2013.) Perceiving education as a “secular” task is also reflected in the way that religious education is, in principle, organized in Finland as a part of school curriculum of public education; it serves the educational purpose of the secular and plural society rather than the interests of religious communities (FNAE, 2018c). In practice, however, the aims of religious education have to a large extent supported the socialization of pupils as members of a religious community. At present, some tension prevails between these aims, especially with respect to the education of minority religions.²

In recent decades, the Finnish state has developed multicultural policies aimed at fostering the cultural identity of people coming to Finland with different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. This aim has had clear practical consequences in Finnish state-supported schools where pupils with different linguistic backgrounds now have a right to learn their native tongue as a part of the school curriculum, along with Finnish and Swedish language. In a similar fashion, the state favours a multiple solution as regards religious education by granting the right to education in different religions at school.

Finland follows a rather exceptional model of religious education. Members of registered religious communities, depending on certain conditions, have the right to “education in accordance of their own religion” (Basic Education Act

2 It goes without saying that regarding the opportunities around the religious socialization of children, communities representing majority and minority religions are in a very different position (Sakaranaho & Salmenkivi, 2009).

1998), and therefore religious education in Finnish schools is “separative” (Alberts, 2007), “pluralist monoreligious” (Ubani, 2013) or “single-faith” (Rissanen, 2014), depending on the perspective (see Sakaranaho, 2018; Ferrari, 2014). In addition, ethics is taught to those pupils who are not members of any religious community. Consequently, several religions, as well as secular ethics, are taught in Finnish schools (Sakaranaho, 2013; Ubani & Tirri, 2013; Zilliacus, Paulsrud, & Holm, 2017).

The right to religious education is based first and foremost on membership in a religious community. Thus, by giving preference to the rights of religious communities over individuals, the law reflects the relationship between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Finnish state. In this regard it fails to take into consideration that the idea of registered membership can be very alien to the followers of many religious traditions and to people from different countries. For instance, only around ten to fifteen percent of Muslims are registered members of an Islamic community, and there are also many other religious communities who find the idea of restricted membership too narrow as an appropriate concept of belonging. In the case of Finland, the strong ties between the Lutheran Church and the state reify the status quo of the mainstream religion, while making some concessions to the minorities. It is an example of a situation where the current structure of church-state relations is so heavily informed by the understanding of the dominant Church that it can end up lacking in sensitivity to religious diversity. One could go even further and argue that the traditional system of church-state relations reifies certain national ideals of identity, thereby strengthening the line between “us” and “them”, and in so doing it ends up “othering” religious minorities. This can be the case especially when there is no understanding of intra-religious heterogeneity. (Sakaranaho & Martikainen, 2015.)

Moreover, seeking to address religious diversity while holding to certain national ideals concerning school education easily leads to tensions and debates about the role of religion in education but also in society at large (Willaime, 2007 p. 64; see also Miedema, 2007, pp. 269–270; Van Arragon and Beaman, 2015; Sakaranaho, 2018). Finland is no exception to this. As a result of globalization, there are people in EU countries such as Finland who represent religious traditions which have no historical lineage in the country and do not necessarily fit into the institutional structure established through interaction between the state and a dominant Christian church. When looking at the case of Finland, it is obvious that Christian institutional structures constitute, explicitly or implicitly, a normative model for the organization of religions. Hence, religious communities which are new to the country need to fit one way or another into the relations between the church and state as they have historically evolved. The institutional necessities and benefits that can be drawn from these relations

are obvious in the way that religious education is organized and managed in Finland. (Sakaranaho & Salmenkivi, 2009; Sakaranaho & Martikainen, 2015; see also Kuusisto & Kallioniemi, 2016.)

4. Governance via persuasion: the Finnish National Agency of Education and school curricula

Finland has been portrayed as a country that, in a similar fashion as Sweden, enjoys a mix of egalitarianism, shared values, and a homogenous population, but today needs to come to terms with growing cultural diversity. As mentioned above, equality is one the main principles of Finnish education. This is also reflected in the Finnish model of creating a curriculum whose aim is to provide education for all and minimize social differences. Hence, no discrimination is allowed in education on the basis of “gender, age, ethnic or national origin, nationality, language, religion, political opinion, sexual orientation, health status, disability or any other reason that concerns the individual” (FNAE, 2014, p. 12; FNAE, 2018c). It is furthermore argued that this is still the case in spite of the changes since the 1990s in the governance of education, in which more individualistic views and neo-liberal reasoning have gained prominence. (Zilliacus, Paulsrud, & Holm, 2017.)

In the face of growing cultural diversity, educational policies in Finland are on par with other Nordic countries, which have moved from an assimilationist approach to that of two-way integration. The latter, however, has been hampered in recent decades by some sort of “multicultural backlash” and an increasing concern for security issues. In any event, it is important to ask “whether [in Finland] educational policies today are confined to managing pre-defined inter-ethnic relations within the nation state or reflecting a wider perspective on diversity and identity” (Zilliacus, Paulsrud, & Holm, 2017; see also Simola, Rinne, & Kivirauma, 2002.) One way to do this is to look at the Finnish curricula of religious education, which in principle aim to serve the interests of different religious communities.

In general terms, a curriculum can be viewed as an “invention of modernity” that “involves forms of knowledge whose functions are to regulate and discipline the individual” (Popkewitz, 1997, pp. 131, 140).³ Thus, the curriculum is an important tool of social regulation and power used in a secular society by the state in order to manage individuals’ interpretation of social reality and the

3 Popkewitz’s thinking is influenced by Michel Foucault’s ideas about “governance” (see 1997, pp. 141, 147), but he does not develop this theoretical perspective further.