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# Identity, Cultural Change, and Religious Education

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Willem L Wardekker and Siebren Miedema

*How should we deal with the process of secularisation, the plurality of cultures, and the dominance of thinking about education in terms of transmission, when religious education has to foster the development of personal identity formation of pupils? In answering this question the authors present a transactional epistemology and transformative view on (religious) education and learning which both have far-reaching consequences for our views on socialisation and individuation. In religious education the gaining of religious experiences and the cultivation of a religious attitude are seen as part of everyday life instead of only being connected to certain religious practices. The approach suggested here can stimulate the growth of the pupils' capacity to integrate different and differing perspectives – ideals, norms, values, knowledge, narratives – into their own personality.*

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS A CONTEMPORARY PROBLEM

In the present time, the goals, contents, and position of religious education in schools are by no means self-evident. Instead, religious education has become a prime example of an area of which even its right to exist is contested between various groups with an interest in education. We think religious education is in need of a new interpretation and new school practices in order to remain meaningful in our present culture. In this contribution we suggest the beginnings of such an interpretation.

For the present predicament of religious education, at least three developments are important, which are interconnected. The first of these is the process of secularisation, the second is the growing plurality of our culture, and the third is the ever-increasing dominance of thinking about education in terms of transmission and accountability.

The effects of secularisation are exemplified by Dronkers' contribution on the situation in the Netherlands (Dronkers 1996). It is Dronkers' argument that, although the majority of schools in the Netherlands are religious (or rather denominationally bound) *schools* in the sense that they are organised in terms of religious communities, there is not a great deal of religious education going on. The existence of 'religious schools' is, according to Dronkers, defended on the grounds of the freedom of parents to select a school for their children. At the same time, however, the secularisation process has led to a situation where 'a majority of pupils in religious schools do not have an active religious background and their parents do not want them to be socialised into a religion to which they do not belong' and there is also a 'scarcity of teachers who are religious and are willing to undertake religious socialisation' (Dronkers 1996, 57). Thus, in many denominationally bound schools, religious education has been reduced to 'cognitive information on various worldviews' (as one school subject among others). Although the background for Dronkers' analysis is the rather special situation in the Netherlands, the effect will be visible in other countries as well.

The second, related, process is the growing plurality of our society. Commonly, plurality is thought of in terms of multiplicity of cultures: the fact that multiple cultures now come together in the

same physical areas. This makes it necessary to develop adequate ways of interacting with persons belonging to another culture. But it also calls into question the basic tenets of our own culture, which may make for feelings of uncertainty and for relativism. The implications of this multiplicity for religious education are twofold. On the one hand, it contributes to the development described by Dronkers. When we see that 'our' religion is one among many, it becomes difficult to defend the socialisation into just one (our own) religion, and *a fortiori* the right of existence of mono-religious schools is questioned. On the other hand, however, the multiplicity of religions is seen by many as a prime area where intercultural skills and attitudes like 'respect for others' may be taught. Thus, teaching understanding and respect for the beliefs of others becomes a prime aim of religious education. A problem here is that such aims are not unique to religious education, and many would argue that they are not central to it.

However, understanding plurality in terms of multiplicity of cultures is a rather superficial interpretation. Plurality as a characteristic of late modern culture is rather more complicated, and it has changed our way of life more thoroughly than the image of multiple cultures existing more or less peacefully together in the same physical space suggests. Growing up now is not the same thing as growing up a hundred years ago. Specifically, in our time it has become impossible to conceive of society as a stable and functional whole consisting of practices that are tuned to each other, that share the same basic orientation, and in which humans fulfil the tasks defined within the system on the basis of what they have learned in their youth. Instead, because of the growth of knowledge and the possibilities for communication, practices change so rapidly that people need to keep learning and to be flexible. These changes, moreover, are not harmonious; practices develop in different directions, and they hardly, if at all, share any basic values or orientations. Because everybody participates in many communities of practice at the same time, it has become impossible to experience the world as a unity; or to use a different vocabulary, there is no unitary life-world any more. The world is experienced as fragmentary and contradictory.

It is probably exactly this experience that accounts for the need many people now feel for some sort of religion that would reconstitute the lost unity. In that sense, the belief in the salutary effects of universal availability of information also has religious overtones, as it expresses the scientific belief that if we know everything we will ultimately understand everything as the unity it really is. But it is doubtful that this is a viable route. Due to the great impact the audio-visual mass media have nowadays, according to Gergen, people are hardly able to shut themselves off from the multitude of conflicting values, views, lifestyles and so on (Gergen 1991). He calls this development social saturation. Gergen points to the problems it causes for identification and identity development, although he is also positive about the possibilities for bringing the different perspectives into dialogue with each other. This may open up new horizons and enlarge the inclusiveness of a certain perspective.

Every person growing up in this late modern world, then, faces a continuous challenge to make choices, to maintain commitments to specific practices, values, and persons, and to integrate these choices and commitments, together with emotions, volitions, and experiences, into a more or less consistent personality. This construction is best thought of as being of a narrative nature: 'personal identity' is an activity in which an autobiography is continuously constructed and reconstructed

(Penuel and Wertsch 1995), as a re-working and an interpretation of personal experiences. This constructive activity is something that has to be learned, together with the actual making and maintaining of commitments. This is the real challenge of a plural society. The question then is what contribution, if any, education, and specifically religious education, can make toward learning to meet this challenge.

To be able to address this question properly, we first need to discuss the third factor contributing to the present crisis in religious education: the dominant view of general education as transmission of knowledge and skills. For it is this mode of thinking that effectively limits our view of the possible tasks of education and of the forms education should take to fulfil these tasks. In fact, it is the transmission model that gives rise to the dilemma in terms of which Dronkers couches the possibilities of religious education: within this model, it is seen either as socialisation, if not indoctrination, into the world view of a specific religious community, or as the mere giving of factual information about one worldview or various worldviews. In the next paragraph, we will elaborate on this unfortunate consequence of the transmission model, while in the rest of this contribution we will give some indications of how thinking in terms of a transformative view alters our conceptions of religious education.

## **TWO MODELS OF EDUCATION AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

We will use the ideal/typical distinction between the transmission and the transformation conceptions of education (cf Jackson 1986; Wardekker 1994; Miedema 1997) to elaborate the concept of educational identity. Crucial for the distinction between these two conceptions of education is the different epistemological basis of each view.

Foundational for the *transmission* conception is the existence of the ontological subject-object split. There is an objective world of meanings and facts that the developing pupil needs to absorb. In this view the teacher is seen as the mediator of the objective stock of knowledge, that is the accumulated culturally based insights and facts that need to be transferred to the pupils in order for them to adapt to and be able to take part in society. The process of transmission can be conceived as passive or as active. In the latter case the pupils are learning to learn, they acquire knowledge and skills in an active way supported by the teacher operating as supervisor, tutor or mentor. In both the passive and the active mode, however, the pupils should absorb the objective facts and general procedures. They should learn these facts and procedures precisely in the way that they are represented in the subject-matter, the curriculum documents. Religious education conceived as factual knowledge about various worldviews is consistent with this conception.

The model rests not only on a specific view of knowledge as representation, but also on a specific view of humans as rational beings who act on the basis of properly evaluating existing knowledge. Thus, the model incorporates at least one value: the transmission view presupposes the will and ability to act rationally, that is, guided by knowledge. Those elements of culture, however, that are more in the realm of emotions and affects tend to be excluded from the curriculum as such. Personality development is thus restricted to the extra-curricular domain; it has to do with school culture, with the human treatment of pupils, but not with the contents of instruction. There is thus

a tension between the curriculum and extracurricular activities that is difficult to handle for schools that do see personality development as part of their responsibility.

However, there is another side to the model. Its proponents usually do not deny that schools also have a task in the transmission of norms and values other than the value of rationality. This task, discussed in the Netherlands under the label of 'the pedagogical task of the school', is seen as a service of the school to the community of which it is a part. It is under this heading that the more specific task of religious education as socialisation into specific religious beliefs, values and views comes, along with the socialisation into more general civic or national values (cf Wardekker *et al* 1998). And it is easily seen that this task will decay, without evident damage to the 'main' task of the school in transmitting knowledge, when the community in question becomes less sure of its own views and values, and even of its own right to exist; and schools that define themselves as religious may seek refuge in transmitting factual knowledge about belief systems. It should be noted that the question of the validity of a specific religious and moral point of view is considered an epistemological problem, not primarily a didactical one. Thus for the pupils, it will make little difference whether knowledge or values are being taught: both knowledge and values will be presented as unquestionably valid.

In an education system based on this model, then, religious education may take three forms. It may be limited to the transmission of factual knowledge about belief systems (sometimes called a 'phenomenological approach') as a subject among others, which in our view eliminates the specific educational opportunities religious education affords, and may very well be, as Grimmit (1987, 45) suggests, incompatible with 'the critical and evaluative nature of educational enquiry'; it may be given the task of socialisation into one specific belief system, which leads to problems of legitimation in a plural society; or, and this is possibly the position most frequently taken, it may be seen as an area that differs from most other subjects in that its goals are oriented more towards personal development and transformation than towards preparation for future participation by the transmission of knowledge, skills and values. This last view, however, positions religious education as a borderline element of the curriculum, while also implicitly asserting that in other school subjects the transmission view is legitimate; in other words, it is prone to the position that personal development is something quite different from learning, say, mathematics. Religious education, in this view, helps pupils coming to terms with their personal development, for instance by suggesting ways of re-interpreting personal experiences, while a subject like mathematics is concerned with 'learning' not with 'personal development'. We do not consider such a division of subjects tenable.

The transmission model is all-pervasive in educational thinking, both on the level of educational practice and on the level of educational science. We want to emphasise, however, that we do not share it. In fact, we think that its supposition of strict rationality of humans is unwarranted even as an ideal, its model of objective knowledge is outdated and its splitting of the goals of education into two separate tasks is pernicious. The effect it has on thinking about the (im)possibilities of religious education is only one example of this. We turn, therefore, to its counterpart, the transformative view of education. In our opinion, this view is better suited for understanding and constructing the whole of education, not just some forms of religious education.

In the *transformative* view of education, the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and of norms and values as modes of being, knowing, feeling and acting is not, ontologically speaking, taken in the dualistic subject-object way but in a holistic or transactional way. In such a transformation conception of education, learning is defined as the growing capacity or the growing competency of pupils to participate in culturally structured practices. The idea of participation is fundamental here. It is not restricted to actual participation in face-to-face communication processes; instead, all individual actions are viewed as elements or aspects of an encompassing system of social practices, and individuals are viewed as participating in social practices even when they act in physical isolation from others (Cobb and Bowers 1999). The process of learning to participate proceeds along the line of participation (learning-to-join-in-activities). The core aspect of the learning process is not the transmission of teachable content or subject-matter, of knowledge, skills, values and norms, but rather the transformation of these into a heuristic base for acting. In other words, being able to show that you 'know' the subject-matter is not the main criterion for a successful learning process; it is only the starting point for 'real' learning processes in which both the subject-matter and the learner are transformed. This transformation by definition takes place in a social context or setting. Such a context is not to be interpreted as limiting, but as constitutive for all socially and culturally situated and structured acting and actions. Thus, we can formulate the aim of the school as enabling pupils to participate in socially and culturally structured practices that take place at a certain time and that are located within a particular societal setting.

From the definition of learning as participation and transformation, it follows that learning is seen neither as exclusively cognitive nor as an individualistic act, but that all domains of human ability and potentiality (be it cognitive, creative, moral, religious, expressive or whatever), that is the development of the whole person, should be taken into account by the school. We emphasise that the transformation is an active process on the part of the pupil. In the process of transformation the subject-matter, being the starting point, becomes the personal property of the pupil. So, the transformation is an activity authored by the pupil himself or herself. It is necessary that pupils take this step in order to acquire their own personal identity.

Although the above description of the transformative view is in a number of ways based on the neo-humanist 'Bildung' model, we have introduced some new elements, namely the relation to cultural practices, that are derived more from neo-Vygotskian, Deweyan, Meadian, and generally social-constructionist points of view (cf Gergen 1985; Hermans *et al* 1992). It is also close to, for example, the views of Grimmit (1987), except for our emphasis on the role of cultural practices, whereas Grimmit is more oriented toward individual development ('humanisation'). In the following paragraphs, we will expand on a number of these elements, and then ask what possibilities this view offers for a redefinition of the position and goals of religious education.

## **HUMANS ARE CULTURAL SIGNIFIERS**

Like the transmission model, the transformative view rests on a view of how human beings act in the world. In this case, the basic image is that of humans as signifiers. Humans in most cases do not make explicit decisions for action based on objective knowledge of the alternatives. Instead, by being (bodily) in the world and transacting with it, they form images and meanings on which

they act. There is thus a continuous interplay between action, signification and reflection. Meanings are never 'objective' but are always the result of the instantaneous and creative relation between the human being and its environment, a relation that may be characterised most adequately as 'a moving whole of transacting parts' (Dewey 1980, 291). Not all transactional relations

ask to be known, and it certainly does not ask leave from thought to exist. But some existences as they are experienced do ask thought to direct them in their course so that they may be ordered and fair and be such as to commend themselves to admiration, approval and appreciation. Knowledge affords the sole means by which this redirection can be effected. (Dewey 1980, 296)

So, knowledge is not sought for its own sake, and neither is it purely aimed at the continuation of acting as such, but at the problematical in the broadest sense of the word. Knowledge has a function for the other domains of experience as well. From this perspective knowledge is 'a mode of experiencing things which facilitates control of objects for purposes of non-cognitive experiences' (Dewey 1980, 98). This implies that humans do not strive for the final 'truth' about the world (except in special practices such as science), but are content with 'satisfying' meanings, those that enable them to act in a satisfying manner in given situations. More significantly, however, knowledge is not the central concept in understanding human existence; instead, this role is reserved for the concept of experience. Knowledge is seen as just one aspect or mode of experiencing, and it is not, as in the transmission model, something that exists on its own. Personal development is not equal to amassing knowledge; it occurs when experiences, including their knowledge aspect, are re-interpreted into a way of life.

No human being, however, ever finds itself in a position in which it can signify at will (and possibly, co-ordinate the meanings thus created with other humans at a later time). Humans are born into a culture, which means that all of the world already has a meaning. New-born humans have to acquire these meanings in order to be able to participate. Most of this acquisition process is not, at least initially, made explicit (the ability to 'learn' meanings in an explicit way, as in schools, has to be learned itself); learning to participate develops by participating in socio-cultural practices, albeit (in the beginning) in a peripheral manner (Lave and Wenger 1991). In that way, a never-reflected-upon fund of meanings, the 'life-world', is generated. Although no two human beings construct exactly the same life-world, enough of it is shared to make communication and co-ordination of actions within practices possible. In fact, cultural practices may be interpreted as culturally pre-defined meaning systems that enable co-ordinated activities. Such meaning systems encompass interpretations of the world (including other human beings) and abilities for interacting with it in order to obtain intended results, values and norms, and so on. These systems, although allowing a wide variation of interpretations, are not totally arbitrary, because they need to enable practical interactions with the world. They are shared by the group of people that engage in the practice, and thus form its associated *community of practice*. Thus, growing up may be described as acquiring the abilities to participate in practices, or as becoming a competent member of several communities of practice. Note, however, that nearly every human being is a member of at least one such community from before birth: its parents have expectations and will act towards it accordingly.



This process of socialisation, however, has a process of individuation for its necessary reverse side. For one cannot become a fully competent member of a community of practice if one does not have a specific contribution to make. This process of individuation rests on the fact that cultural meanings have to be appropriated, transformed into one's own personality. In this process, personal elements like genetic make-up, emotions, and unique experiences gained in past and present circumstances play a significant role, so that no two persons grow up to have exactly the same personality. It is exactly these interpersonal differences that make for changes in cultural practices. Some of these changes just occur because of the different views participants bring to the practice; at other times, changes are intended. Ultimately, no practice can stay 'alive' without change; and being able to contribute to changes that are perceived as necessary is a structural element of the competency of participants. This implies that participation is never just technical, manipulative or instrumental, but always has a moral side because choices have to be made concerning the direction in which a given practice should develop (cf Mead 1934, 200 onwards). And just like other meanings, the material this moral side is built upon, like goals, ideals and values, comes into being within the context of acting.

In this view, the task of education (specifically, of the school) is to assist young people in the double process of socialisation and individuation, of becoming competent members of communities of practice (and note that we do not see this task as finding some sort of balance or compromise between socialisation and individuation, as these are two sides of one and the same process). Information and values must always be seen in the perspective of how pupils are able to transform these into elements of their participation. In this respect, it is a problem rather than an asset that schools have developed into practices in their own right, separated from the social practices into which they are supposed to introduce pupils, because learning to participate is best done by participating.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**

Since in the transformative view, all of education (and not just, as in the transmission model, some marginal subjects like religious education) should contribute to the personal development of pupils, we need to ask what specific contribution religious education can make to the development of a flexible and integrated personality in the double process of socialisation and individuation. Superficially, it may seem that religious education could be interpreted as 'learning to participate in a religious community of practice'. This position implies that one should learn about religion, and be introduced to the ways and beliefs of a religious community, simply because it exists as an important part of culture. However, in present circumstances, such a position would contribute to the problem of personality development rather than to its solution, because it leaves the question of *why* one should make a commitment to such a community, let alone a specific one, unanswered. The same is true for a cognitive introduction into worldviews, which has the added problems, first of not even making it clear that a commitment might be required, and second of leaving us with the question whether such an educational practice stimulates the development of personal identity formation at all. In both cases, moreover, it is doubtful that education will penetrate to the core of what a religious practice is about, and it risks contenting itself with paraphernalia, rites, and maybe some values and norms. And reasoning along the same lines, we

must conclude that teaching understanding and respect for other people's convictions, however laudable this intention in itself may be, falls short of the demands made on education if it is to be of help in personality development.

We follow the pragmatist line of thought of Dewey and Mead here (cf Miedema 1995), in stating that the religious *domain* should not primarily be seen as a separate social *practice* among other practices. Although religion often develops into separate practices, this (as is the case with education) may be a barrier rather than an asset: it makes it too easy to relegate the religious to a specific time and place, with no consequences for other practices. By speaking of the religious *domain*, we emphasise that it should be thought of as a possible aspect of all experiences and activities, in the same way as we think of their cognitive, creative, or moral aspects. This implies that religious education is not primarily about participating in a religious community (although that may be a necessary element in it) but about the way and the quality of participating in all types of cultural activities.

In our view, then, religious rites and practices, doctrines and narratives, should primarily be seen as cultural artefacts, as instruments or devices that are meant to influence and guide our thinking and acting in a specific way. They open up a space in which it becomes possible to experience and interpret what is normally outside the scope of cultural practices, to see that there is more to the world than meets the eye. They invite us to de-centre from and to reflect on everyday life in a specific way. In short, from a pragmatist view they are considered to be *transformative resources* of the life-world. They give room to what may be called religious experiences. Human practices by themselves can never realise the potential fullness of existence: practices may be corrupt or corrupted; the totality of practices which we are committed to does not give a full and consistent meaning to our existence. The religious attitude and experience, then, are concerned with the existence of that which is not incorporated in human practices, and cannot be understood in terms of such practices; therefore, it cannot be known directly, but can only be talked about in the forms of narratives, symbols and rituals. They are concerned with what is not, with hope, desire and solidarity. The grasping of the possibilities of a life as a whole is mediated by ideals, values, norms, and inspiring narratives which can be found in the local stock of cultural experiences, and even more broadly in the cultural fund of humankind (cf Alexander 1987, 255).

The religious experience, thus understood, would lose its point if it were completely isolated from other, daily experiences. On the contrary, it is potentially a dimension of every experience, a dimension that deepens everyday experiences. De-centring needs to be accompanied by re-centring. Due to the continuously occurring transaction of person and surrounding conditions, experiences occur continuously. In order for things experienced to be composed into an *experience*, the material experienced needs to run its course to fulfilment.

Then and only then is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences ... Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualising quality and self-sufficiency. (Dewey LW10, 42)

In contrast with normal action where experience is fragmented due to extraneous interruptions or inner lethargy, having a religious experience is characterised by a *consummatory closure*.

The actual religious quality in the experience described is, according to Dewey, the better, deeper and enduring adjustment in life and its conditions, creating significant moments of living. The way in which the experience functions determines its religious value. If the reorganisation actually occurs, it is a force on its own account (cf Dewey LW9, 11). The term 'adjustment' is crucial here: it characterises the religious quality of an experience as distinct from 'accommodation' and 'adaptation'. Accommodation is the mainly passive modification of particular personal attitudes, that is particular aspects of action and not the entire self, in accordance with the environment. With lasting external conditions we become habituated. The process in which we modify the environment so that it will be accommodated to our wants and demands is called adaptation. But, as Dewey states, there are also changes in ourselves in relation to the world that are more inclusive and deeply seated and pertain to our being in its entirety. A characteristic of these modifications is that they change us permanently. In this process of adjustment as the reorganisation of our being in its entirety, the constitution of the person itself in her or his fundamental striving is at stake (cf Alexander 1987, 255; Joas 1992, 210).

We are not primarily talking here about a religious experience as something that, once in a lifetime, suddenly happens to a person, although we do not deny the possibility. Rather, our position is that 'everyday' experiences re-interpreted from a religious attitude and with the help of religious 'devices', can become deeper and 'fuller', acquire a meaning that goes beyond the immediately given. Thus, for example, for William James 'life ... can only be lived to its fullest if it is provided with the vital support of religious belief or experience pointing to the self's embeddedness in a universal order' (Miedema 1996, 353). 'The function of the enveloping whole, of the concept of God, is to assure the self that its aspirations can be fulfilled providing that the self works and contributes. God, as the energising force in life, supports our strenuous efforts. Religious experience and belief are the basis of action, determining how we shall act.' (Miedema 1996, 356)

Religion, then, should not be considered by itself. On the contrary, the religious attitude can free the religious domain from the fixation on patterns of just conventional ritual behaviour and dogmatic belief propositions (cf Götz 1970, 185). This pragmatist stance is a critique on every attempt at *reducing* the religious institutions, practices and experiences to merely compensatory or ornamental functions in daily life (cf Joas 1992, 209), to objects that may be regarded in the same way as art objects in a museum. Such an approach cuts them off

from that association with the materials and aims of every form of human effort, undergoing, and achievement. [However, the primary] task is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience ... and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognised to constitute experience. (Dewey LW10, 9)

Such a reduction occurs when we interpret religion as something by itself, a set of practices that people adhere to for no intelligible reason (or at least, for no reason that is relevant to our personal existence), that are followed because they have always been followed. It often occurs when religion becomes institutionalised. In that sense, institutionalisation may be a hindrance to true religious experience.

However, the communities that practise and support religious experience are essential. Religious 'devices' rarely work by themselves. They are of a social nature and require a supporting community. Stories need to be told, rituals need to be performed in public. Religious communities may be seen as centres for de- and re-centring, for participation and distancing. As noted before, religion functions for many people as a way of making their peace with the world. However painful living may be, knowing that there is more and that all will be well in the end makes it bearable. Religion can even show the way to a joyous experience of living. However, the function of religion can also be the opposite: making us alert to what is missing and wrong in our practices, an exhortation not to be content with the world as it is and not to take our life-world and the practices founded in it for granted. The pragmatic approach to the religious domain combines the two strands: integration and change, on the basis of evaluation and critique of the existing situations and practices by making use of the stock of culturally bound and culture-transcending experiences. Religious communities can play a central role in keeping alive and renewing this 'stock'. *But they are always in danger of forgetting that renewal is necessary, and of losing one of the two aspects of integration and critique from their view.*

This view of religion does not focus on one specific set of religious practices, on one religion only. It tries to grasp the essence of what we understand by 'religion' as such. Religions (in plural) are seen as instances of religion, developed within specific groups. Note especially that this interpretation of the religious domain does not, in our opinion, pre-judge objective truth claims, for example, that God really exists. Such claims, however, though relevant to the legitimisation of specific practices, do not form the essence of the religious experience. But ours is not a neutral view. It does posit a certain interpretation of what religion is about, and it rejects interpretations of religion that either are fundamentalist or remove religion from daily life, while not denying that the 'devices' for religious experience may differ in quality.

### **CONDITIONS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION THAT STIMULATE PERSONAL IDENTITY FORMATION**

Finally, what does all this imply for varieties of religious education that might give pupils the possibility to develop a flexible and integrated personality in the double process of socialisation (sociality) and individuation (creativity)?

First of all, religious education should not be conceptualised primarily or even solely in terms of knowledge or cognitions. Schools that organise separate activities in which only objective information about a religious word view or on different religious worldviews is given under the label of religious education do not offer the optimal conditions for active and dynamic personal *identity formation processes. Knowledge should be positioned in a functional relation to the religious experiences the pupils gain.*

Explicit presentation and representation of religious 'material' in the form of religious frames of reference, models, practices, rituals, and narratives is a necessary prerequisite for making individuation on the basis of socialisation possible. Presentations and representations are not intended to be transmitted by the teachers and internalised by the pupils in their presented or represented form, but offered as possible identity-forming material for the pupils. Rather than being an

institution for the transmission of religion-related knowledge, the school should function as a community where religious (as well as other) practices are re-presented in such a way that pupils have the opportunity to participate in these practices, and experience the meaning of these religious practices as devices for remembering the dimensions of existence that are not automatically present in our daily lives. This also means that this function of religious devices needs to be explained to them.

In religious education the gaining of religious experiences and a religious attitude should not be fully separated from the gaining of other experiences and attitudes. This works both ways: the specific elements of religious education should be connected to everyday life, and schools should be open to the potential religious qualities of all kind of experiences. Every artificial distinction between the religious and other domains of experience should be precluded. In other words, religious education is not just about religion. This also implies that religious education should be open, non-dogmatic, non-compelling, and giving the pupils all the possible room for creative experimenting.

Personal identity formation in religious education should include fostering the pupil's critical-evaluative attitude. This is not the acceptance of or full identification with, the view of the teachers, but the growth of the potentiality for an active and critical reconstruction of different and differing perspectives (ideals, norms, values, knowledge, narratives). These practices and processes in school may result in the growing capacity of the pupils to integrate these perspectives into their own personality in order to allow the possibility of reconstruction of the self.

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