Hindawi Publishing Corporation
Education Research International
Volume 2012, Article ID 303565, 13 pages
doi:10.1155/2012/303565

Research Article

Moral Foundation of the Kindergarten Teacher's Educational Approach: Self-Reflection Facilitated Educator Response to Pluralism in Educational Context

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Received 23 February 2012; Revised 8 May 2012; Accepted 13 May 2012

Academic Editor: Kirsi Tirri

This paper investigates the moral foundation of Kindergarten teachers' educational approach from the perspective of sensitivity towards religions and other worldviews. As a context for the examination, the paper presents the current situation of the Finnish multi-faith kindergartens through the empirical mixed method data gathered from five day care centres in the capital Helsinki area. The findings illustrate that at present, the multitude of religions and other worldviews in the increasingly diverse Kindergarten context causes continuous negotiations among the staff on both the educational practices and in the teachers' educational partnership with families. In particular, there is a lot of uncertainty of how—if at all—education on religions and worldviews should be implemented in the multicultural, multi-faith kindergarten. Some of the staff members have difficulties in encountering religious diversity in a positive or neutral light, as religions are often seen through limitations to everyday practicalities and educational contents. It is argued that in order to develop a constructive, worldview sensitive educator response to pluralism, and thus to encourage the development in the moral foundation of the teachers' work, the teachers would need supported opportunities for dialoguous self-reflection. To support this, working models for intercultural and inter-faith sensitivity are suggested.

1. Introduction

In this paper we examine the moral core of teaching from the viewpoint of worldview sensitivity. More precisely, through the findings of our empirical data as well as the framework set by the national and municipal curriculum guidelines, we will explore the kindergarten teachers' response to worldview diversity. As a part of this, we examine the kinds of practical level educational approaches that are employed by the teachers in relation to worldviews, and the discourses they engage in dealing with the worldview diversity in the kindergarten. Finally, we will suggest some directions for supporting the teachers' self-reflection towards coping with the worldview sensitivity as a part of their professional development.

Due to increasing religious diversity, both the children and the staff in today's kindergartens and schools are exposed to more diversity of worldview backgrounds than the previous generations ever were. Nevertheless, the empathy towards other cultures and worldviews does not develop automatically when diversity in the environment increases. Rather, the worldview differences present a particular challenge to individual's own cultural and religious preconceptions [1]. In the educational setting, pluralism present in each group of children through the diversity of the home backgrounds intensifies the teacher's need for worldview sensitivity as a moral core of their professionalism; an essential part of their educational approach. However, although the special considerations for cultural and linguistic diversity in the kindergarten group are often already taken into account, the meaning of religions and other worldviews for the children is very often disregarded.

Besides the teacher's educational approach to instruction as a means of conveying educational contents, worldview

sensitivity as a part of the moral core of teaching also expands to the contents. Namely, from the point of view of the children, the diversity of the educational context emphasizes the importance of acquiring knowledge and the demand for supporting their own identity, value system, and worldview [2–8]. Furthermore, worldview sensitivity is an essential part of teacher's every encounter: in relation to the children, their families, and staff members. Children are very receptive to detecting the teacher's values from every tone of voice—even silence: by leaving a child's question unanswered, the teacher communicates that the topic is a taboo not suitable for discussion [9].

In the following, we will examine the data from five multicultural Finnish kindergartens as a case in inaugurating the need for a worldview sensitive educational approach as an essential part of the moral core of teaching. Through our empirical findings, we will illustrate some of the strengths and challenges of the present-day societal education in the increasingly pluralistic Finnish kindergartens. Thereby, we will demonstrate the need for a new kind of educational approach, in order to better meet the needs of the children from all kinds of worldview backgrounds. We argue that teachers need worldview sensitivity as an essential interpersonal skill in their work, in order not to segregate or marginalize anyone due to their worldview.

The context of our case studies, the capital Helsinki area, has become increasingly multicultural due to increased migration during the past few decades. In addition to immigration, the society is increasingly pluralistic due to secularisation as well as the privatisation of religion among the native Finnish population. There is also a growing interest in the new religious movements among Finns. [10]. Geographical variance in hosting cultural diversity both nationally and between different residential areas is significant. The kindergartens examined here are located in the so-called multicultural pockets of the city [11]. These city parts have hosted culturally diverse residency for a couple of decades now, and the day care staff thus already hold a rather long experience of working in a diverse educational setting. The diversity of home backgrounds among both the children and staff members in the educational context brings particular considerations for taking into account [the presence of religions and worldviews...] the presence of religions and worldviews in the kindergarten. In particular, there is a lot of uncertainty on how—if at all—should religious and worldview education be organized.

Increasing pluralism brings new challenges in the societal educational arenas, including the Early Years' Education and Care (ECEC) and the Preschool Education provided in these kindergartens. The worldview diversity also raises the question of how to harness it for developing the children's competences for living in a diverse world [12]. In order to implement education corresponding to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (§14) [13] and in Finland the national Freedom of Religion Act [14] emphasizing the positive freedom to religion and for receiving religious instruction [15], and in order to meet the Religious Education objectives set in the national curriculum guiding documents [16, 17], there is a need to consciously develop new educational approaches. In other words, there is a need to better acknowledge not only the multicultural but also the multifaith, pluralistic educational setting the contemporary generations of Finnish children are growing up in.

2. Teachers' Moral Reflection and Pluralistic Educational Context

De Ruyter and Kole [18] write on the necessity of intraprofessional reflection about moral ideals of teaching. They argue that since teaching is a significant social good, both the teachers and the state have to take responsibility for the moral quality of teaching, and that both of these parties have their own particular role in this process. For teachers, this implies that they have to take responsibility in developing their professional morality in its full potential, in particular when it comes to defining its "optimal or aspirational dimension" that is pursued towards. This also includes their professional ideals. De Ruyter and Kole write that although the literature on teachers' professional ethics is relatively scarce, there are several arguments for the importance of ideals for teachers. They argue that in order to provoke teachers to think about the best aims and means of their work, they have to articulate their ideals through dialogue with their colleagues. This dialogue also contributes to their sense and meaning of their work [18].

We argue that the sensitivity to worldviews should be positioned among these moral ideals. Like Darling-Hammond et al. write that teachers need a "moral compass" to enable them to follow through on their commitments for all children.This requires ethical considerations in teaching. Diversity intensifies the need to develop cultural democracy enabling social minorities to maintain aspects of their community cultures and languages [19]. In the same way, also worldviews should gain a similar position in the kindergarten. It also has to be kept in mind that although not all teachers regard conscious acting as role-models to their students as a part of their work [20], the teacher in any case has a significant influence as a model in moral practices and caring approach such as respecting others' rights [21].

Husu and Tirri [22] have examined *teacher's moral reflection* from the perspective of three domains: (1) *the ethic of purpose*, providing the teachers' self-understanding which can lead to a sufficiently informed, justifiable ethical action; (2) *the ethic of rules and principles*, or a general guide to the teachers' actions and decision-making based on their set of moral rules and principles; and (3) *the ethic of probability*, where moral dilemmas are interpreted through an estimation of the probable consequences of particular educational decisions, after which the decisions are made so to maximize benefits and minimize harms. Their study illustrates how abstract theories can be used in real-life ethics in education, and how such "reference points" can help teachers in their work when it comes to ethical reflection.

After all, the quality of teachers' thinking and their ability to associate thought with action are of vital importance in their day-to-day work. However, since the actual teaching work often takes place within a hectic social setting of

the classroom where there is often very little time for reflection before taking action, teachers' behaviour is also much dependent upon their personalities [23]. This adds to the critical importance of attending to the beliefs of teachers already in the preservice stage, in order to prepare the educators for the moral work of teaching. Moreover, also in line with what Husu and Tirri write about the ethic of rules and principles [22], this builds towards constructing the conceptual framework for guiding the teachers in their actions and decision-making [24].

To facilitate the advancing of this part of the moral core of teaching, the teachers would need additional support in developing their sensitivity in the encountering of cultures [25] and religions [1, 26]. Teachers should be provided with opportunities to consciously work on their sensitivities in order to enable attitudinal changes. Through these, gradually also the wider operational culture of the kindergarten or school can be developed. Using increased sensitivity in encountering cultures and worldviews it is also possible to better understand the position of one's own culture and personal worldview among the whole variety of ways people use in making sense of the world. Such process enables an individual to become increasingly conscious on their own way of meaning-making and constructing reality [25].

Developing the individual's moral reflection, and through that developing one's sensitivity to recognizing other people's perspectives, may thus require an active intervention such as further training, in the context of this article that targeted for the kindergarten staff. Through such process, each educator would have an opportunity to develop their own thinking: to recognize and accept the differences between cultures; eventually facilitating a change of behaviour in the work as educational professionals. Bennett has presented a working model targeting the development of cultural sensitivity in particular. What he sees as critical here is that, firstly, understanding is gained about people's behaviour when encountering difference, and, secondly, after receiving further education targeted to cultural sensitivity, there is a change in the participants' behaviour [25].

More precisely, the model aims into gradually increasing the cultural sensitivity, through which the individual learns to understand the position of her own culture and worldview as options among others. At the same time, she becomes increasingly aware of her particular ways of constructing the reality and making-meaning. Bennett's model aims to improve cultural self-recognition alongside with increasing awareness of other cultures. Through such awareness, also the approach to cultural differences becomes more natural. The increased cultural sensitivity helps the individual to cope with cultural differences and increases the understanding of intercultural communication [25].

This can also be applied to sensitivity towards worldviews, which are a critical part of a culture [27]. Abu-Nimer [26] has developed Bennett's model in particular in relation to interfaith dialogue and the development of a positive attitude towards the "other"—or a religion that is perceived as such. Abu-Nimer sees religion as crucial in the development of cultural sensitivity, since it holds a central role for the identities of both the individuals and communities. He thinks Bennett's model does not fully recognize the significance of religion in the development of cultural sensitivity; Abu-Nimer states religion can even become a hindrance for the development of cultural sensitivity, as it holds such strong influence in individual's cultural behaviour and her views of other people or groups. After all, religious values and norms form a central part of cultural identity [26].

The way of experiencing and reacting to cultural or religious differences can become a crucial part of individual's worldview, thus affecting to the manner in which he behaves in interaction with others. Since the religious dimension of identity reaches deep also into the spiritual, moral, and ethic aspects, it differs from other dimensions of cultural identity. Thereby, encountering other worldviews can cause a stronger reaction than what the encountering of cultures usually does. Abu-Nimer's model describes the different ways in which people react to the differences of worldviews and cultures. By working according to this model, it is possible to deepen the consciousness on one's personal way of reacting to, encountering of and dealing with the difference [26].

When aiming to develop the sensitivity towards cultures and worldviews, it needs to be acknowledged that every individual experiences and encounters the differences through her own perspectives, anchored in her personal life history. People also differ in the ways in which they interpret life events such as cultural encounters. Furthermore, cultures and worldviews differ from each other in a multitude of ways, and these differences should not be disregarded [25]. Bennett's and Abu-Nimer's models depict the different attitudes from ethnocentrism (disregarding cultural differences or denying their existence in one's own living environment) to ethnorelativism (recognizing cultural differences and accepting these) in regards to the development of intercultural sensitivity; correspondingly, in Abu-Nimer's model these ends of the developmental spectrum are religious relativism and centrism [25, 26].

Cultural sensitivity affects the cognitive, affective, and behavioural level in people. These are in continuous change and they all affect each other. Thus, Bennett states sensitivity represents dynamic learning, including the elements of increasing awareness and widening understanding. Through these, interactive skills are constructed. The dynamic and nonlinear nature of the process is evident in that an individual can also return to the earlier stages in his development of sensitivity if he faces such difference for which he is not yet prepared [25].

When it comes to religions, Abu-Nimer has focused in particular to the ways in which the cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements have mutually affected in individual's attitudes towards the "other." In his view, attitudinal change is possible when all these elements are present: the interaction with other worldviews touches the emotional (heart), rational (head), and practical, as in doing something together (hands) levels—corresponding to Bennett's dimensions of knowledge, emotion, and behaviour. Abu-Nimer illustrates the process of attitudinal change by placing these three aspects (head, heart, and hands) as the vertices of a triangle,

with the individual's spirituality (spirit) as the centre of the triangle. He does not want to separate confessional "religion" from "spirituality" (religion as the expression of individual spirituality) [28]. as the centre of the triangle. The goals to which the process of increasing religious sensitivity aim to reach are in a crucial position: (1) learning to cope with the differences that arise; (2) increasing the cultural and religious competences; (3) becoming increasingly aware of one's own reactions towards the "other"; (4) to recognize situations relating to the interfaith dialogue; (5) to learn concrete means in which to improve interfaith communication in one's own day-to-day environment. Even the small, daily encounters and actions can work as a starting point through which respectful attitude is expressed in one's everyday life [26].

3. Conceptual Underpinnings

Every individual holds a *worldview*; an ontological and ethical orientation to the world, humanity, and life questions. It is not merely knowledge and understanding of the world, but also a philosophy of life, crucial in defining human existence and providing meanings to immanent reality [27]. Worldview is the individual's "primary frame of reference or life philosophy" that may reflect a particular religious faith or be nonreligious (e.g., atheist, agnostic, and/or "spiritual, but not religious") [1, page 441]. *Values* are people's views of what is good and preferable; general aims for actions that are stable from situation to situation, however altered in significance, and by which people evaluate both their own actions and the world around them [29–31]. *Religion* is a way or a special mode of believing, a part of which the individual's *beliefs* are the "supreme objects of individual and collective convictions" finding their expression in the "body of practices, behavior, and institutions" [32].

We have chosen to use the concept *worldview sensitivity* here, as we want to emphasize the equal inclusion of both religious and nonreligious worldviews in the educational context. Although worldview sensitivity comes close to some previously used notions, none of these targets explicitly enough what is meant by it in this article. *Moral/ethical sensitivity*, as the awareness of how actions affect other people, the ability to see things from the perspective of other individuals and groups, which from a professional perspective also includes the norms of one's profession and recognizing when these apply [33], addresses the area in more general terms than the sensitivity to the worldviews per se. *Intercultural sensitivity* [25] as a concept operates in a more general level too: although religion typically forms a core part of a culture, the discussion on cultures typically includes for example languages but the position of religions and other worldviews often remains overlooked. Moreover, *interreligious sensitivity* as a notion leaves out the nonreligious worldviews.

As an educational approach and a part of the moral core of teacher, the concept worldview sensitivity denotes the awareness of worldviews as something that each individual holds and the recognition that there is thus an immense diversity of perspectives. Worldview sensitivity involves the ability to respect the diversity of the worldviews held by individuals and groups. In professional terms, choosing one's courses of action in a manner that provides recognition to the differing views and does not cause harm (such as social exclusion, discrimination, marginalization) to anyone due to their worldview, but gives space to the differences. Worldview sensitivity acknowledges the differences between worldviews without ranking them and provides space and respect to each individual's personal worldview [5, 27]. After all, in line with Näre's [34] concerns on gender sensitivity, the idealistic notion of "neutrality" in Religious Education disregards the meaning of worldviews in utilizing the "value-free" operational models of a secularized society as a norm. Furthermore, it is still often disregarded how even the same tradition influences the life of different families in a variety of ways: not everyone shares the same beliefs and customs [28, 35].

Diversity here refers to the multitude of individual characteristics and backgrounds; in particular the multitude of religions and other worldviews that are present in the homes of children and adults operating in the day care context. Furthermore, *pluralistic* here refers to the diversity of values; whereas "*multi-faith*" refers more generally into the presence of various traditions, religious and nonreligious, in the educational context. It is also acknowledged that besides the diversity stemming from different faith backgrounds, the values and beliefs vary significantly also both within the "majority" and the "minorities" in the society, which is also visible in the kindergarten.

The educational setting under focus in the here presented case studies is the Finnish *kindergarten* or *day care centre* (here used as synonyms) context, providing Early Years Education and Care for the children of ages 0–6. Preschool for 6-year-olds is commonly integrated with the kindergarten rather than school; this is also the case in these five day care centres.

4. Case Study Examination of Five MultiFaith Kindergartens in Finland

Through the empirical and documentary data presented below, we aim to delineate the reflected foundations of the kindergarten teachers' educational approach to worldviews in the pluralistic setting. More precisely, this problem is targeted through the following research questions: How do kindergarten teachers respond to pluralism in the educational context? What kinds of discourses and practical level approaches do they employ regarding the diversity of worldviews and worldview education in their work?

The Developmental Models for Intercultural [25] and Interreligious [1, 26] explain different reactions to other, respectively, cultures and religions. Recently Holm et al. [36] and Tirri and Nokelainen [37] have developed quantitative measures on these sensitivities. Although we gathered data using a mixed method design with a variety of tools, due to the nature of case studies and the limited size of the sample, our analyses on their part bring a more qualitative

perspective to this very timely discussion on the field. Three sets of data were utilized for the present analysis. These are described in the following (see Table 1).

Firstly (Data 1), Lamminmäki-Vartia gathered data in a municipal kindergarten with an ethnographic approach [38, 39]. These data were gathered through participant observation of kindergarten groups' day-to-day educational activities, inclusive on Christmas and Easter times; research interviews of the staff, and a questionnaire data from the educational teams about the cultural and religious diversity of children's home backgrounds. This kindergarten presented an interesting case due to a religious education development project going on during the time of data gathering [8].

Secondly (Data 2), Kuusisto gathered mixed-method [40] empirical data in four municipal kindergartens with an action research approach. The empirical data was gathered with surveys and focus group discussions with the staff, parental interviews, participant observation, and discussions with the children. The data were gathered as a part of the research and development project "Multicultural Children and Adults in Day Care" (http://www.mucca.fi/) [6, 41].

Thirdly (Data 3), the authors have used the available national, municipal, and day care centre specific documents as a part of the data. In the following presentation of the results, we will start by describing the framework set by the curriculum guiding documents from the perspective of the position of worldviews in the early years' education and care in Helsinki.

The data were analysed with content analysis, also utilizing some elements from discourse analysis (Data 1 in particular), and the Atlas.tI programme (Data 2). We have aimed to maintain as much of the participants' own voice in the article as possible, thereby we have included as many authentic data extracts as possible. These are marked with the number of the set of data as well as the method used in order to set the context (e.g., focus group discussion, interview, or observation situation) for the reader.

5. Framework Set by the Document Guidelines on Position of Worldviews

The curriculum document guidelines (Data 3) are to form the basis and an overall framework for the practical educational work, and thus hold a significant role in the present examination. Regarding the position of religions and other worldviews in Early Years' Education and Care (ECEC) and preschool in Finland, the guidelines are based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child [13] and the national, 2003 updated Freedom of Religion Act [14] which emphasise everyone's positive right to religion and worldview. The document regarding the education and care of children between the ages 0–5 is the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland [42], and National Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool [43] regards the education of the 6-year-old preschoolers. These guidelines include a religious orientation, which is nonconfessional. The societal change towards a more multicultural and pluralistic Finland is reflected in these documents. When the Religious Education contents previously emphasized learning about religion in terms of the gradually increasing commitment to one's "own" religion, presently the focus is on the role and impact of religion in the development of the growing child [44].

The Ethical Orientation in the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC [42] focuses on values and norms, stating that the children's daily life events are to be analysed from the viewpoint of questions of right and wrong, good and bad; the questions of justice, equality, respect, and freedom are to be dealt with; as well as their fears, anxiety, and guilt are discussed in safe environment. As for the religious-philosophical orientation, it is stated that its core is formed by religious, spiritual, and philosophical issues and phenomena, more precisely:

> *Interest is taken in the traditions, customs and practices of the child's own religion or beliefs. The child is offered an opportunity to experience silence and wonder, to ask questions and ponder over issues. The child's sensitivity and ability to understand non-verbal and symbolic are respected, supported and strengthened. Insights are gained into the customs of various religions and beliefs close to the child [42, emphasis added].*

In the 2010 renewed National Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool [43], it is stated that the freedom for religion is assured by the constitution, and that this freedom for the preschool age children is employed by their guardians. In these guidelines, the entity on ethics and worldviews consists of ethics education, cultural worldview education, and religious education or the optional ethics and life questions education. From these, ethical education is seen as being included in all education, and is mutual to everyone. The cultural worldview education also includes everyone; it is studied together with the whole group. Its aim is the development of thinking in regard to worldview; including, more specifically, that the child is being heard on his/her questions regarding worldview, the opportunity to gain knowledge on the customs of one's own religion or other worldview, and the other religions and worldviews represented in the group. Furthermore, the religious education in preschool aims to provide an opportunity to encounter matters relating to religion and to familiarize oneself with religious festivities and the reasons why and ways in which these are celebrated. Also, it aims to provide an opportunity to familiarize with the main contents of one's own religion. The optional ethics and life questions education aims to develop potential for encountering life questions dealing with issues like worldviews and cultural identity [43, 45].

6. Findings on the Teachers' Response to Pluralism in the Studied Kindergartens

In multicultural kindergartens, diversity is a part of the children's everyday life: in all the five kindergartens that were present in the data, over 40% of children came from other than "native-Finnish" family backgrounds. To illustrate

Table 1: Research methods, participants and gathered sets of data.

	Data 1: Multi-method data gathered by Lamminmäki-Vartia			Data 2: Multi-method data gathered by Kuusisto						Data 3: Documentary data
Method	Observation	Interviews	Questionnaire data	Staff focus group interviews	Interviews with parents	Observation of pre-school groups	Interviews, discussions, storycrafting	Surveys with educational practitioners	Survey with educational teams of three	Textual data
Time of data gathering	Nov 2007–March 2008			Nov-Dec 2008	Dec 2009–Feb 2010	March-April 2009	March-April 2009	Dec 2008, May 2009	Aug-Sept 2009	2008–2010
Research participants	Day care centres ($n = 1$) day to day activities, the staff and some 90 children, with particular attention to a group of 20 children aged 3–6	Personnel of one day care centre ($n = 16$)	Day care centre educational teams ($n = 5$)	Personnel of four day care centres ($n = 45$)	10 parents (between ages 28–55; eight females and two men)	Some 80 children and ECEC personnel	80 children (5-6-year-olds)	(1) The staff members of four day care centres ($n = 35$) (2) Educational practitioners participating in staff development seminar ($n = 40$)	ECEC teams ($n = 45$ individuals), each responsible for a group of children	(1) National curriculum guiding documents; (2) Municipal curriculum guiding documents; (3) Kindergarten-specific documents; (4) ECEC teams' plans targeting diversity
Form(s) of data	Field notes; transcribed notes, 93p. all together	Transcribed interviews (50–70 min each), 76p. all together	Questionnaires	Transcribed focus group discussions(1.5–2.5 h each, 8 h altogether)	Transcribed interviews (20–60 min each)	Field notes; photographs	Field notes, recorded discussions	Questionnaires	Questionnaires	Documents

the worldview diversity: in one of these kindergartens there were 55% from various Christian backgrounds (mainly Lutheran, some Catholic or Orthodox, and one Seventh-day Adventist). Secondly, 31% of the children were Muslim. The third largest group, with 7% of children, had no religious affiliation. In addition, there were Jehovah's Wittnesses and a Buddhist child (Data 1).

From the perspective of the day-to-day running of the kindergarten, worldview diversity is often seen as a challenge. It is often perceived through the limitations that different worldviews bring into what the children (and adults) present are not allowed to eat, see, hear, or do due to their confession. This is reflected in the communication with parents, as often the "educational discussion" with the families perceived as "religious" focuses on what cannot be done with the child because of the family worldview—whereas with some families there is little mention about religion at all.

> *We haven't been asking so exactly what religion they are affiliated with—from these "ordinary Finns". From the point of view of activities, we've just been interested in what the children can participate in and what they can't. So not really about what their affiliation is. The Muslims do let us know that themselves (Data 1/interview with a staff member).*

The fact that the teachers' personal attitudes and presumptions towards cultures and worldviews differing from their own are visible in the everyday encounters and practices in the kindergarten became clear both in the interviews and field observation (Data 1) and focus group discussions (Data 2). It can be asked, how can the teacher provide positive recognition to each child's worldview, if religions are only visible in the operational culture as something causing limitations and restrictions? The use of words and expressions disparaging some cultures or worldviews may be unconscious, but the message that is transmitted to the children can nonetheless be very clear. To illustrate this, we'll share a fieldwork note from the lunchtime in one of these kindergartens.

> *Anne [teacher] chooses veggie balls to her plate. She sits in the same table with the children. Suddenly, Nelli [child] starts to laugh and bursts out into singing in a loud voice: "Anne is a Muslim, Anne is a Muslim!" pointing to the food on the teacher's plate with her finger. "No, I definitely am not!" responds Anne (Data 1/observation).*

The practical level response to the challenge brought by the increasing worldview diversity of kindergartens has not been to increase the visibility of worldviews but rather the opposite. The contents and methods that are regarded unsuitable to any of the children in the group have commonly just been cut off. Though it has been done in the name of the minority rights, it does not serve either the minorities or the majority. Furthermore, the cutting off has been done without much questioning of what will these contents and means be replaced with [44]. Hence, this "culture of cutting off" [46] has thinned both the contents and the methods from the whole group.

> *Regarding this [Religious Education] we're a bit lost here. And I suppose this is the case in many other kindergartens, too. That—we cannot see that our own Lutheranism is getting lost here. The religion of this country. Because of multiculturalism it [the educational activities] only includes this secular. Terrible hurry to grow the ryegrass and craft the [Easter] chicks to the tables and [Christmas] elves in the windows. It is left only to this material level. And in many cases the elves are left away, too, in order not to hurt another religion that doesn't stand elves (Data 1/interview with a staff member).*

One of the main reasons why religious or worldview education is not implemented in some multicultural settings appeared in the data to be the wide spectrum of worldviews present in each group. However, such overly cautious attitude to "other" religions—also strengthened by societal secularism—can sometimes cause excess reactions. The Quran may be openly discussed with the whole group, even a visit to the Mosque can be planned, but the Bible is not mentioned or Church visit intended with the whole group since some of the group are "these multiculturals" (Data 2/staff focus group discussion). For several kindergarten teachers in this relatively secular societal context, also Christianity was among the "other," not perceived as so familiar, religions.

What was regarded as particularly challenging among the teachers was providing positive recognition to what were considered as the "other" worldviews. Some teachers did not see this as their task in the first place, whereas others said they simply do not know enough of these faiths in order to teach the children. However, in general, the teachers spoke for an educational approach that would recognize positively different faiths. These issues also caused a lot of uncertainty. For example, when a child had started singing a traditional Christian Christmas Carol in the corridor, a staff member was wondering whether she should have silenced the child because peers were present from families that do not celebrate Christmas: "Then what, when there are others [sic] present; how to deal with that? Is it appropriate or not?" (Data 2/staff focus group discussion). Thus, focusing the discussion of RE merely on what and for whom to include in the contents so to include wide enough coverage of traditions is sometimes not seeing the wood for the trees. Since the implementation of RE is very much up to the personnel of each day care centre, the actual educational practices vary greatly across the country as well as each town or city or even between the different groups in the particular day care centre unit.

In multicultural educational setting, such as in any other day care context, the careful planning and implementing of worldview education demands preparation, which naturally takes time. Still, when it comes to a multifaith setting, the special considerations that the particular setting is regarded to demand, are often talked about only through their

negative aspects. This reflects how the teachers—despite of all fine talks—still do not recognize worldview diversity as an asset in their educational approach and its practical level implementation [2]. In order not to exclude any of the children because of their worldview, there is a need to organize the religious/worldview education with a new approach, and this demands a deeper input than what the document level can reach into: it demands self-reflection and moral dialogue on the very basis of each teacher's work. Reaching the educational aims set in the documents is first and foremost an attitudinal matter and referring to the difficult practicalities may work as an excuse in the operational environment dialogue for not implementing RE. In some kindergartens, RE responsibilities were "handed over" to the local Evangelical Lutheran congregation, from where someone came every once in a while to hold a short story time for the children [44, 46–49]. Such out-sourcing of "the religion," of course, does not serve any of the children: neither the Lutheran nor the non-Lutheran, and in particular not the non-Christian children, who are commonly excluded from these activities altogether.

After all, for example working in small groups targeted for a particular language needs or social skills development is already a daily routine in many Finnish kindergartens—using a similar approach to instruction of own religion would be equally simple to implement. Similarly, group discussions with children are also a part of the daily programme, discussing worldviews among other matters would be easy to do [4, 5, 44, 47]. Applying these methods also to worldview education just does not happen in many kindergartens. Like one of the teachers says "Religious Education should be a normal part of the every-day activities, not just a "lump" that is lifted on the table "Now, here we have the Religious Education!"—it should be present all the time in some way." (Data 1/interview with a staff member). Widening the regular group discussion topics so that they would also deal with worldviews as a part of the everyday would not demand any additional preparation from the teachers—just added sensitivity and a wider educational approach.

The "culture of cutting off" and more generally the overly cautious attitude towards religions in multicultural educational settings have caused thinning of both educational contents and methods. Instead, new approach should be employed in worldview education in order to provide the children with tools for understanding their diverse environment. Active development of educational contents and methods better suited to the multifaith context are needed, as well as some active questioning of the customary ways of doing things (see also [48, 49]). Such new approach would demand the enrichment of contents with the appreciation of the variety of worldviews present in the group, for example, familiarizing with the festivities celebrated in each of the families throughout the year when those become timely in the children's homes, or reading stories from different traditions, singing songs, making plays, and playing games (see also [44, 46, 47, 50]).

The above described approach is to some extent utilized in many other settings where multifaith society has longer traditions, for example in the UK and Netherlands. In one of the kindergartens where the empirical part of this study was completed, the Evangelical Lutheran Church worker who was carrying out some of the kindergarten "morning vespers" had started developing "Multicultural Religious Education" together with the kindergarten staff. The aim here was to hold "morning vespers" that would be "suitable" to all of the children in the group.

> *The church worker who had come to hold the morning vesper: "Do you know what, children. The Muslims celebrated Ramadan just recently, isn't that so?"*
>
> *Children: "Yeeah!" [loud reply in the kindergarten hall]*
>
> *Church worker: "At the end of that, there was a big, joyful feast. A similar one than Advent is for Christians. A fasting time for calming down—although it sometimes seems we never can really settle down, we just have more and more hassle every day. Our duty is to think about other people, too. To start considering, who are those around us that we should take special care of, who may have some misfortune or sorrow; those that are near to us that we should particularly care for. In a similar way, Ramadan has been for taking into consideration those people who may not have all things well like we do (Data 1/observation).*

The positively recognizing way of speaking about worldviews that was aimed by the church worker was seen as an encouraging example by some of the staff members.

> *Through these [vespers] I have gotten a new perception of what we are aiming to do here. That—right, this must be the way forward here, this is the way to do it. All religions should become visible through the mutually shared aspects. What the church worker has brought up that we don't segregate here. That these [children] get this and those get that, but those matters that are for everyone. (Data 1/interview with a staff member).*

It was not all of the staff members that saw such an approach as a good idea. Some thought giving positive recognition to another religion than the "customary" Lutheran/Christian one was not such a good idea: "Personally I regard it healthy that those [Islam] festivities are not that visible in here." (Data 1/interview with a staff member). However, the position of religion in the children's home cultures was understood by many.

> *Religion is an important part of everyday life in many of our multicultural families. We need to know and understand something about that, so our know-how about this needs to be developed, so we can understand the families and the matters that are important to them. So we can serve the families better and understand the life of the child when there is the religion that influences.*

If we don't know, we cannot understand." (Data 1/interview with a staff member)

The above quote illustrates also how the "other" religion is seen as something that the families from immigrant background have. The secular Lutheran, thus, is a strong norm in the discussion about religions in Finland [7, 27, 51]. It remains disregarded that many of the immigrants moving to Finland are in fact Christians [10] and that the so perceived "majority" in reality is immensely varied [7].

What was found as one functioning approach in some of the kindergartens was that when the staff took some time for thoroughly explaining to the children's parents, what exactly will be going on for example in the kindergarten's Christmas festivities. Furthermore, the Christmas celebrations were organized in such manner that the families who did not want their children to see the Nativity scene, were able to join the party without going to the room where that was presented. After this PTA meeting, all of the families wanted to join the kindergarten Christmas party. The parents do want their children to familiarize with the Finnish traditions, including the ways in which Christmas and Easter are celebrated in Finland. Some also wanted their children to take part in the kindergarten Christmas Church service to see what that is like. This demands an active and openly communicative and appreciative approach from the staff, but it contributes towards transparency of the educational agenda of the kindergarten, thereby also building the trust with the families (Data 2) [6].

Functioning cooperation with individuals from different cultural and worldview backgrounds requires appreciation also to one's own background [52]. If the whole group activities that are aiming towards so-called religious neutrality are the only form of religious instruction, the children do not get support for their own religious identity; neither do they develop tools for understanding their own tradition. Understanding other traditions only becomes possible with enough knowledge on one's own. Thereby, both the small group activities for children with similar worldview backgrounds and the whole group activities that are mutually shared have their own role in kindergartens. The kindergartens RE has also an important role in the perspective to give the children a "language," so that they are able to talk about and understand things related to religions and worldview's. In that way the worldview education can also be connected to S2 (Finnish as the second language) teaching. This "giving a language" is not only important to children with immigrant background but also to those many children whose homes are secularized and/or the RE is not regarded as so important. As one teacher said:

These children will be among those who run the country in the future. If they are not learning here to discuss: "oh, so you're about to celebrate Ramadan, we'll have Christmas and you're Hanukkah is approaching." For example these. In the kindergarten, the seed is sown for recognizing that there are other ways and parties with other names but that these share similar elements. "So you believe this and we this." The thought that there are other ways to believe and that I do not have to hit this guy because in his home he's been taught this matter in a different way or in no way at all." (Data 1/interview with a staff member).

When looking at the data through the point of view of these teachers' and staff members' moral reflection [22], the discourses in justifying the meaningfulness or the lack of it when it comes to providing worldview education to the children reflects some ideas of the level in which these educators have actually been reflecting on these matters. Whereas many staff members talk about worldviews only through the practical level limitations that the different worldviews bring to the everyday, such as through the complaining of the vast number of religion-based diets to consider; others are somewhat self-conscious of how they should have dealt with some particular situations, such as the pondering of whether she should have silenced the child singing a hymn in the corridor or not. Still others bring up deeper considerations on the opportunities of teaching worldviews, such as the above example of the giving of a language approach. Overall, it seems that worldview issues in general have commonly not been reflected on very much by the educational staff, perhaps with the exception of those for whom a particular religious worldview is a personally meaningful part of life.

7. Discussion: Towards Worldview Sensitive Educational Approach

In the above, we have presented examples of our empirical data on the presence of religions and other worldviews in the multicultural, pluralistic Finnish kindergartens (Data sets 1 & 2). Based on these and the document level framework (Data 3), we argue that although there are numerous individuals who already hold a worldview sensitive educational approach, and along these ideals, use functioning, inclusive practices in their work; the more generally maintained attitudinal climate towards diversity of worldviews in early years' education is not sensitive enough. Thus, many marginalizing practices are still used, and numerous children and adults get excluded and marginalized, even discriminated, because of their worldview in their everyday. This is not only true with religious worldviews, but also the nonreligious ones. Furthermore, the full potential for supporting inclusion and social cohesion is not utilized, not even to the level required by the national guidelines (Data 3). Thereby, there is still a critical need for developing the moral foundations of teaching through a new, increasingly worldview sensitive educational approach.

The presented findings illustrate how a single day care centre can portray a "miniature world" with the cultures, languages, and worldviews present. That a multicultural kindergarten is usually also a multifaith one—and that worldview diversity is immense also when the group would not have any children with an "immigrant background"—is often disregarded in the discussion on diversity. However, multiculturalism should self-evidently include the worldview diversity as a part of the everyday. Dialogue, and familiarizing

with a variety of religions and other worldviews, works towards increasing openness and tolerance [53]. Kindergarten teachers have thereby an excellent opportunity—and in the light of the Finnish National Guidelines, for example, also a responsibility—to discuss worldviews and also more generally the matters relating to the family worldviews of the children present in the group. Aiming towards a deeper communication in this respect, not merely going through a check list of "what the child is not allowed to do, see, hear and eat" would enable the staff to promote genuine dialogue between different worldviews in the kindergartens. At the same time, the teachers would be able to develop in their own work when it comes to worldview sensitivity. The diversity within each tradition and between the families [28, 35], and the confusion caused by this among the day care staff also came out clearly in the data. This finding emphasizes the importance for the teacher to sensitively encounter each individual child, rather than seeing him as a representative of a particular tradition, and to positively recognize her culture and worldview from her particular starting points.

A respectful and sensitive attitude is also something that the religious leaders from different faiths in Finland have been concerned about [54]. This includes the right to an education on not only her own religious tradition but also other religions and worldviews. The aim is constructing a balanced cultural identity accompanied by understanding others and the acceptance of diversity; bringing children into mutual dialogue and respect [54]. In the globalized, pluralistic present-day world, culturally and religiously sensitive educational approach should be a self-evident professional attribute in particular when working in the educational sector. It should be recognized as an essential part of the continuous professional development, relating to the relationships towards the children, families, and co-workers. Kindergartens do, after all, hold a key position when it comes to the opportunity for enhancing mutual respect in the society. For realizing this opportunity, the educators need to execute an actively antioppressive, respectful approach in their professional life, towards every individual, despite of the differences in people's cultural and worldview backgrounds. Without such approach, it is pointless to expect the realization of the aims set in some formal Religious Education Curricula or the Rights of the Child Documents to be reached. Pluralism and the negotiations of worldviews have come to stay, besides among the staff, also both in the everyday running of the kindergartens and in the educational partnership with the homes.

Open discussion on worldviews and demonstrating positive appreciation towards these is a vital part of meaningful Early Years' Education in all kindergartens. In practice, developing these among the teachers would demand good educational leadership: something that is not self-evident in the kindergartens that are already facing a multitude of pressures and challenges in the present societal situation [55]. The worldview sensitive educational approach would at its best involve recognising every individual's particular needs and supporting his or her development with special attention to these. Worldview sensitive approach is also culturally sensitive; by acknowledging the different needs of the individual, also the cultural elements present in each individual's life are recognized. Furthermore, these sensitivities also involve respect to the diversity more generally, which works as a foundation of the educational approach [34].

As illustrated above data, it seems evident that religious diversity challenges the kindergarten staff stronger than cultural diversity does. Although, to some level, the domains of teacher's moral reflection [22] are utilized in the staff discourse, the personal meaning of worldviews to the children are often not realized, and the worldviews in general are still often seen through the perceived limitations to the everyday running of the kindergarten. This is why developing worldview sensitivity merely through the increase of knowledge on worldview traditions is not enough; rather, the teachers need opportunities for pondering their own values and attitudes in relation to these [26]. Gradually, through the development of teachers' worldview sensitivity it is possible to increase their courage in answering the children's worldview-related questions [4, 5]. This need for worldview sensitive educational approach also challenges the teacher education; the students should be offered possibilities to start to develop their sensitivities and practice their intercultural and interreligious skills already at the very beginning and throughout their studies.

Kindergarten teacher needs worldview sensitivity as a part of her educational approach also in order to be able to support each child's holistic wellbeing and not to discriminate against anyone. The teacher can support each child's identity construction by actively and positively acknowledging the cultures and worldviews present in the child group. This kind of cultural democracy [19] and worldview democracy would increase the minority background children's membership in the kindergarten community. Furthermore, the more democratic presence of worldviews would enlarge the common space shared by all the children of the group, as this space would then come to reflect the aspects of more and more of the members [19].

Our data illustrates that pluralism is still often seen merely as a challenge and constraint, and thereby it remains difficult for many kindergarten teachers to appreciate children's diverse worldview backgrounds. Inevitably, these difficulties in their part influence the educational approach in planning and implementing educational activities, in particular when it comes to religious and worldview education. Worldview sensitive educational approach recognizes the diversity of worldviews and gives space to it in the discussions and the everyday activities in the kindergarten. Every encounter in the kindergarten holds an opportunity for positive recognition: between staff and parents, between the teachers, with the children, and in the children's peer groups. In a pluralistic society, a central educational aim is to build the child's competences and literacy as a part of becoming a functioning citizen in the globalizing worlds. Teacher as a moral educator holds a central role in determining the direction into which the children grow. Teacher's role is crucial in how the children learn to encounter cultures and worldviews; and difference more generally. After all, the foundation to acceptance and positive encounters between people can, to a significant part, be constructed in the kindergarten.

8. Conclusions

The empirical data presented above illustrates the moral challenges that teachers face in their everyday work. The day-to-day work of the kindergarten teacher is typically hectic and the pace of the incidents with small children, with their immediate reactions and endless curiosity about life, is so hasty that it leaves very little time and space for teacher's moral self-reflection before the answers are already given and educational choices made. As for the children, they will interpret the adults' silence or hesitation as a reply, too, and they incorporate the educator responses and reactions as a part of how they see the world around them. If the teacher has not had time to process and accept the increased presence of diverse worldviews in the educational setting, the children are very fast in noticing her reserved, hesitant position towards what she sees as "otherness."

Although being sensitive about another person's worldview is quite a task—many people may not be very conscious of their own to begin with—and thereby the grasping of or even gaining some surface level understanding of the worldview diversity present in the group of children may be difficult or even impossible. However, as is true with many other theoretical level goals, *employing an educational approach that consciously aims towards worldview sensitivity* should be in use as a part of every teacher's moral competence for functioning in the present-day pluralistic educational context. This involves the teacher's values and ethics, but also the practical level abilities for implementing instruction. Worldview sensitivity as an educational approach does not silence worldviews as taboos but preserves a position for them in the everyday life of the kindergarten or school. Although the most direct influences of this may often be visible in the religious or worldview education, sensitivity also reaches wider than this. It influences the teacher's approach towards openness and appreciation towards the diverse worldviews, both religious and nonreligious. In the kindergarten, worldview sensitive educational approach at its best includes aiming to detect and to support the needs of each individual child and their family.

The presented working models of Bennett and Abu-Nimer illustrate how cultural encounters and intercultural communication differ from the encountering of religions and worldviews and interfaith dialogue. According to these, it is easier for people to accept differences relating to cultures than those related to religions and cultures. It is easier for the individual to develop positive attitude towards someone's culture and to support the maintenance of a culture or language that is unfamiliar to oneself, than to support a religion in the same situation. Thereby, when it comes to encountering religions and other worldviews, there are more defined special challenges than in the encounters of cultures. Although the moral foundation of teachers may be strongly anchored in the ideal of equality—such as that every child is equally important—this ideal is not implemented in the everyday work if the teacher is not conscious of her own presumptions and prejudices towards worldviews regarded as "the other." Thus, if worldview sensitivity does not form a part in the teacher's professional "tool kit," the lack of it will show in her day-to-day work for example as exclusive practices. The working models presented above demonstrate two examples of how supported self-reflection could facilitate the educators' response to pluralism, thereby gradually reaching influences to the moral foundation of the teachers' educational approach.

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