The merits of using “worldview” in religious education

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Introduction

The concept of “worldview,” generally defined as a view on life, the world, and humanity, is regularly used in religious education (RE). The Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2004), the Religious Education in English Schools: Non-Statutory Guidance (2010), for instance, both use “worldview.”8 The American Academy of Religions uses it in their Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K–12 Public Schools in the United States (2010). They do this to refer to a more personal and broader (i.e., secular) interpretation of views on life than “religion.” The need in RE for a more encompassing concept than religion is caused by a growing part of the European and U.S. population ceasing to participate in traditional, institutionalized religious practices on a regular basis, while still maintaining a relatively high level of private individual belief (Davie 2000; Casanova 2007).

This article argues that worldview is a useful concept in thinking about RE and that “worldview” should be used instead of “religion” in some religious educational discourses because the encompassing character of the concept fits these discourses best.9 The specific contribution of this article in the discourse of RE and worldview education is to demonstrate the need of a structured and precise use of the concept “worldview.”

In our previous article in this journal entitled “Worldview’: The Meaning of the Concept and the Impact on Religious Education” (Van der Kooij, De Ruyter, and Miedema, 2013) we analyzed the concept of “worldview.” In the first part of this article, we briefly present the three essential characteristics we introduced for the conceptually appropriate use of “worldview.”

In the remainder of the article, we analyze two articles that use Grimmitt’s well-known distinction between learning about and learning from. First the article “Is it Learning About and From Religions, Religion or Religious Education? And Is It Any Wonder Some Teachers Don’t Get It?” by Teece (2010). Second, “Learning ‘About’ and ‘From’ Religion: Phenomenography, the Variation Theory of Learning and Religious Education in Finland and the UK” written by

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8 The context this is written from is the European and especially the UK context. In the United Kingdom both state schools and denominational schools teach RE. State schools do this in an open and liberal manner and some denomination schools teach RE in this manner as well (McKenna, Neill, and Jackson, 2009). Other denominational schools aim to transmit specific religious views.

9 We do not advocate that “religion” should always be replaced by “worldview” but that “worldview” expresses the point being made in some discourses better than “religion” and, thus, benefits the discourse.
Hella and Wright (2009). After a short description of Grimmitt’s distinction, we demonstrate how these articles may benefit from the use of “worldview” and how the authors can address their points more clearly and effectively by using this concept consistently.

Worldview described

The first essential characteristic of worldview is that it can be used for religious and secular views on life. Thus, the concept “religion” is a subcategory of the concept “worldview.” A religion or a religious worldview acknowledges grounds for being that cannot be known in our “ordinary” experiences or through scientific research. Secular worldviews do not acknowledge such grounds (Vroom 2006). In the last few decades, when secular beliefs became more prevalent in society and education, the concept of “worldview” has been used in RE to emphasize that not all views on life are necessarily religious (see for instance Valk, 2007 or Watson, 2008; 2010).

The second essential characteristic of “worldview” is that it can refer to a more organized as well as a personal view on life, the world, and humanity. So, for the correct use of “worldview,” a distinction should be made between organized worldview and personal worldview. By “organized worldview” we mean a view on life that has developed over time into a more or less coherent and established system with certain (written and unwritten) sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals, or dogmas. An organized worldview has a group of believers who adhere to this particular view on life (Van der Kooij, De Ruyter, and Miedema 2013). Christianity and Islam, or secular movements such as humanism, are examples of this meaning of worldview. It has become more common to use the concept “worldview” to refer to individual, personal views on life and the nature of reality as well (cf. De Jong, 1998; Hijmans, 1994; McKenzie, 1991; Van der Kooij, De Ruyter, and Miedema, 2013). These views can be, but are not necessarily, based on or inspired by (religious) organized views on life. If persons call themselves Christian, their personal worldview will be more or less based on the organized worldview of Christianity. A personal worldview can be more eclectic and idiosyncratic than an organized worldview (compare, e.g., Aadnanaas 1992 in Sandsmark, 2000; Hartman, 1986; Van der Kooij, De Ruyter, and Miedema, 2013). Society has become more individualistic
over the past 40 years and the views of many people regarding the nature of reality fall under what Davie (2000) called “believing without belonging.” The phenomenon of *bricolage* for instance, is the use of aspects, such as words and symbols of different traditions, to construct a personal view on the nature of reality (Hervieu-Léger, 2006).

The third essential characteristic is that existential questions are a conceptually necessary part of “worldview”; they distinguish a worldview from other views on life, the world, and humanity such as the views of political parties. These views do not answer existential questions; they do not reach the essence of a person’s life—and do not surpass situations and actions in the here and now (Hartman, 1986; Tillich, 1965). Existential questions are matters of ultimate concern by which persons are grasped and which are taken with unconditional seriousness in their life (Tillich 1965, 7 ff). In an analysis we conducted on literature about the concept “worldview” we were able to distinguish six types of existential questions that were part of almost every description of “worldview” (Van der Kooij, De Ruyter, and Miedema, 2016b). Ontological questions refer to the nature of existence (e.g., Why is there something rather than nothing?) and to the nature of human beings (e.g., What is a human being?). Cosmological questions are concerned with the origin and nature of the universe and the place of human beings in it (e.g., Is the cosmos a divine creation?). Theological questions refer to the existence of a deity (e.g., Is there a God?). Teleological questions involve the meaning and purpose of the universe and human beings (e.g., What is the purpose of life?) or the personal interpretation of what makes life meaningful and what gives an individual’s life purpose or sense (e.g., What makes my life meaningful?). Eschatological questions concern the end of life (e.g., Is there life after death?). Finally, there are ethical questions. These refer to the broad themes of good and bad, and right and wrong (e.g., On what basis is something considered good or bad?) (Van der Kooij, De Ruyter, and Miedema, 2013, 2016b).

**The value of worldview in thinking about RE**

In this part we will demonstrate the conceptual necessity and benefits of using “worldview” and the three essential characteristics in some religious educational discussions. This will be done by analyzing Teece’s (2010) and Hella and Wright’s (2009) articles that are part of one specific debate in the theory of
RE: Grimmitt’s (1987) wellknown distinction between *learning about* religion and learning *from* religion. Grimmitt (1987) described *learning about* as that which

... pupils learn about the beliefs, teachings and practices of the great religious traditions of the world. It also refers to what pupils learn about the nature and demands of ultimate questions, about the nature of a “faith” response to ultimate questions, about the normative views of the human condition and what it means to be human as expressed in an through *Traditional Belief Systems* or *Stances for Living* of a naturalistic kind, about the discernment and interpretation of *Core Values*, about the shaping influence of religious beliefs and values on cultural and personal histories, and so on. This type of learning might be said to be initiating pupils into “an impersonal or public mode of understanding. (p. 225)

Grimmitt (1987) spoke about learning *from* religion when pupils are

... learning from their studies in religion about themselves—about discerning ultimate questions and “signals of transcendence” in their own experience and considering how they might respond to them, about discerning *Core Values* and learning to interpret them, about recognizing the shaping influence of their own beliefs and values on their development as persons; about the unavoidability of their holding beliefs and values and making faith responses, about the possibility of their being able to discern a spiritual dimension in their own experience, about the need for them to take responsibility for their own decision-making, especially in matters of personal belief and conduct, and so on. This type of learning might be said to result in self-awareness and personal knowledge. (p. 225)

Grimmitt (1987) uses “religion” and not “worldview.” This is not because non-religious views cannot be part of the model. On the contrary, Grimmitt (1987)
refers to both religious and non-religious views in his explanation of the terms using “stances for living of a naturalistic kind” and “core values.” Furthermore, Grimmitt (1987) stated that

all young people, whether or not they are practising members of a religious faith community, have their own beliefs and values, which consciously or otherwise, exert a considerable influence on their way of looking at the world, their adoption of particular life-styles and, most important of all, their development of human beings. (p. 141)

Overall, Grimmitt’s (1987) ideas are close to our conceptualization of worldview in reference to religious as well as non-religious views on life (p. 225–26) and our distinction between personal and organized worldviews.

In his article, Teece (2010) explored the question regarding the object of study that students learn about and from in RE. He argued that a second-order explanatory framework, a theoretical framework that indicates what is meant by “religion” in the context of RE, is needed to organize the RE curriculum (Teece, 2010). Such a framework enables teachers and syllabi compilers to select content from religions for the RE curriculum that students can learn about and from.

The framework he proposed interprets religion as “a distinctive phenomenon with its overriding characteristic being its spiritual dimension as understood as the human transformation in the context of responses to the transcendent” (Teece, 2010, p.102). The framework interprets specific religions in the context of what it means to be human for the adherents of these religions (100). The key factor in this is human experience (Teece, 2010, p. 96) explained by Teece as questions concerning order, meaning, and purpose in the universe, individual self-fulfillment, ethics and the nature of community, and values. Learning about and from religion interpreted in this manner enables students to widen and deepen their understanding of religious traditions and their interpretation of the human conditions; it is a dialogue between the students’ life world and the world of the religions (Teece, 2010, p. 101).

Hella and Wright (2009) explored the relationship between learning about and from religion from a didactic–pedagogical perspective. They identified a tension between learning about and from religion outside a “confessional
education.” In “liberal education,” students are required to engage with a plurality of different worldviews in the curriculum (Hella and Wright, p. 2009, 56). The authors argued that in liberal education, students might be able to learn about these worldviews, but not always from these worldviews in a way that enables them to see the value or relevance of these worldviews for their personal development (Hella and Wright 2009). Hella and Wright (2009) offered a solution for this by presenting The Variation Theory of Learning, which is based on views from phenomenography, and critical religious education as a pedagogical connection between learning about and from religion. Using these theories, Hella and Wright stated that learning about and from religion is an interactive process. Students make informed judgments about their own beliefs and values (learning from religion) by engaging with the truth claims of various religious and secular traditions (learning about religion) and students can only achieve a deep understanding of religion (learning about religion) by relating such understanding to their own belief system (learning from religion) (Hella and Wright, 2009).

These two articles were chosen for three reasons: First, both articles are good examples of arguments in this discourse that could be expressed more effectively when “worldview” is used in a conceptually consistent manner. Second, each article addresses the distinction between learning about and from religion from a different angle: Hella and Wright (2009) take a pedagogical–didactical approach, taking the students as a focal point. Teece (2010) focuses on the content of RE. This gives us the opportunity to demonstrate the need for and use of “worldview” from both angles. Third, in the theory of RE, there are two problems with the use of “worldview.” In the first place, the term “religion” is sometimes used to indicate the concept “worldview.” This is problematic because it is likely that not all three essential characteristics of “worldview” could be taken into account. In the second place “worldview” is sometimes used without paying attention to the three essential characteristics. These characteristics not only determine the adequate conceptual use of the concept, but they also direct our thinking about the concept and the use of the concept in RE. They open up new perspectives for thinking about “worldview” in RE that would otherwise have been overlooked. The distinction between organized

10 “Any form of religious education in which the learners and the curriculum share a common worldview” (Hella and Wright, 2009, p. 56).

11 Phenomenography is a research specialization that seeks to describe the qualitative different ways in which a group experiences religion and discerns or constitutes its meaning (Hella and Wright, 2009, p. 58).
and personal worldviews, for instance, requires users of “worldview” to be clear to which “worldview” they are actually referring. Teece’s (2010) article is an example of the former. We will see that the emphasis Teece (2010) is putting on “human experience” in his explanatory framework is reason to consider using “worldview” instead of “religion.” The article by Hella and Wright (2009) is an example of the latter. Hella and Wright (2009) used the concept of “worldview” in their article because they explicitly placed the discussion in a context of “liberal education,” where both religious and secular traditions are present. We will see, however, that their use of “worldview” is not always conceptually consistent and that the distinction of our three essential characteristics can shed new light on some of their claims.

**How the Use of “Worldview” Can Be Useful for Reflecting on Learning About and From Religion and Can Benefit the Discourse**

We agree with many aspects of the articles, but we believe that the use of “worldview,” while taking into account the three essential characteristics of the concept can express the ideas stated in the articles more accurately and shine a different light on some of the questions being raised. We will analyze the two articles by means of the three essential characteristics of “worldview”.

**Worldview: Religious and Secular Views.**

For expressing clear and comprehensible ideas, it is important to use concepts in a precise and consistent manner and to use a concept that matches the ideas that one wants to communicate. Considering the aim of Teece (2010) and Teece’s argumentation, we believe that his educational goal will be better reached when using the concept “worldview” instead of “religion.”

Teece (2010) stated that an explanatory framework for religion is necessary for selecting content from religions that pupils can learn about and from for organizing the RE curriculum. The explanatory framework he proposes interprets religion as a distinctive phenomenon with its overriding characteristic being its spiritual dimension understood as human transformation in the context of responses to the transcendent (Teece, 2010, p. 102). “Transcendent” can be explained in two manners in this context. First, it can have a religious meaning, referring to grounds in human life that cannot be known in human experience and to which human beings in some way relate (religere in Latin means “to bind”); for instance, a God as creator of the...
The merits of using “worldview”

world. Second, “transcendent” can have a more general meaning, concerning religious and non-religious worldviews. In that case, it refers to something acknowledged outside the reality that one strives after or believes in, such as the idea of humanitarianism in Humanism (Vroom, 2006, p. 33).

If Teece (2010) was referring in his framework to the second option, it would be conceptually more adequate if he spoke about “worldview” instead of “religion” because the framework would actually be referring to non-religious views as well. His focus on human experience and his attention to existential questions in relation to this framework speaks in favor of this more general interpretation of the transcendent. Human experience and existential questions are not necessarily related to religious forms of the transcendent. Teece (2010) states that existential questions are shared human experiences, and the relationship between learning about and from religions lies in these existential questions or notions as the binding factor. This encompassing view seems to be in line with a more general interpretation of “transcendent.”

If Teece meant to refer to the first option, the transcendent being specifically religious, the educational goals Teece is striving for might be jeopardized: he aims for learning about various religions to be deepened and broadened by relating religious content to human experience. Furthermore, he states in line with Grimmitt that learning about and from religion is a dialogue between the student’s life world and the world of religion (Teece, 2010, p. 101). Life world is explained as “our interior world,” the source of our motivation, a response to life, creating personal meanings by which facts, beliefs, and values are perceived and valued (Grimmitt, 1987, p. 79 and p. 196). If only religious worldviews are included in the framework that is being used to select curriculum content, establishing this dialogue can be difficult. People have a relatively high level of private beliefs and often do not adhere to organized religious traditions. This means that a student’s life world can contain religious and non-religious views. The consequence of bringing this life world into dialogue with only religious traditions could be that students have problems relating this content to their life world. We therefore recommend a framework that includes both religious and non-religious worldviews. Furthermore, as Teece (2010) put emphasis on human experience in RE and mentioned existential questions as leading questions, he already seems to propose a more encompassing view on RE. This is also in accord with Grimmitt (1987) who stated that exploring shared human experiences is, by definition, exploring what all human beings share.
and that the curriculum should relate to pupils’ own feelings, experiences, needs, and questions in such a way that they are encouraged to reflect on and express their opinions (p. 250).

Hella and Wright (2009) are using the term “worldview” in their article. They state for instance that liberal religious education is “any form of religious education in which both the learners and the curriculum engage with a plurality of different worldviews” (p. 56). They explicitly refer to “religious and secular tradition” and “religious and non-religious views.” This suggests that they aim for a wide range of beliefs and a broader interpretation of views of life to be included in RE. In the next sub section, we will see, however, that their use of “worldview” falls short in taking into account the distinction between organized and personal worldview.

**Worldview: A Distinction Between Organized and Personal Worldview.**

Hella and Wright (2009) suggest that “worldview” applies to both religious and secular views; however, they primarily seem to refer to organized worldviews. Their frequent use of the phrase “religious and secular traditions” confirms this observation. When only speaking about traditions, personal worldview is not explicitly acknowledged by the authors and the distinction between organized and personal worldview is not taken into account. The distinction between organized and personal worldviews is necessary to clarify that the relationship between learning about and from religion in confessional education is more complex than they seem to suggest. They wrote that in a confessional situation learning about a specific organized worldview will, at the same time, be learning from this worldview. This makes clear that they do not have a conceptually sophisticated vision on personal worldview. They stated that confessional education may contain aspects of the worldview, on which the education is based, that are “internally disputed” (Hella and Wright, 2009, p. 61) but also that there is substantial agreement between the view of the students and the curriculum content.

However, many organized worldviews have a diversity of sub-denominations that cause bigger differences than Hella and Wright seem to acknowledge (Jackson, 1997). In Christianity, for example, there are Roman Catholics, Methodists, Adventists, Greek Orthodox, and Baptists to name a few, and within these denominational frameworks there are also other forms of diversity. In Islam, there are big differences among, for example, Sunnites,
Shiites, Salafists, and Sufis. Moreover, the distinction between organized and personal worldviews makes clear that, even when people seem to adhere to the same organized worldview, the personal worldviews of people can be very diverse. Not all topics presented in RE will have the same value for or personal impact on every student. In a school with a Christian population and RE lessons that focus mainly on Christianity and on stimulating the students to learn from this worldview, students might differ in how they perceive and understand the biblical stories; what they find especially meaningful and inspirational in Christianity; their views on how to treat others, the earth, and nature; and how they relate to those with other religious backgrounds. And, of course, a personal worldview can contain ideas and beliefs that are not part of the worldview taught at a certain confessional school (e.g., Wardekker and Miedema, 2001). The consequence is that learning about religion is not necessarily identical with learning from religion within a confessional RE.

Furthermore, the use of “organized worldview” and “personal worldview” makes clear that organized worldviews are not the only subject that students can learn from and about. Learning about people’s personal worldviews can be inspirational and may stimulate learning from those worldviews as well. The personal worldviews of, for instance, Gandhi and Martin Luther King are frequently mentioned as inspirational examples in both plural and more homogeneous contexts. In other words, students learn about and from both personal and organized worldviews. This perspective is missing in Hella and Wright’s (2009) article because they failed to make the distinction that is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the various aims of RE or worldview education.

Teece (2010) seems to be paying attention to personal and organized worldviews. He speaks about religious traditions, which seem to refer to an organized worldview, as well as human experience, which seem to refer to a personal worldview. It is, however, not entirely clear how he uses these two in relation to his explanatory framework in which he emphasizes the human transformation in the context of the responses to the transcendent. If the framework focuses on the actual transformation that takes place in people’s lives in response to the transcendent, this would mean that people would change their beliefs, values, and actions in response to the transcendent. That would indicate that a transformation actually happens in the personal worldview of people. The framework could also be focusing on human transformation as
an aim of a (organized) religion. Religions prescribe certain views and beliefs to guide people to transform their lives and live accordingly. However, it is unclear whether this will happen in people’s lives (Van der Kooij, De Ruyter, and Miedema, 2013). It would have made Teece’s claim clearer if he would have explained the kind of transformation he talks about by means of the distinction between organized and personal worldview.

Moreover, Teece is warning about two pitfalls in RE in general that can benefit from the distinction between organized and personal worldview. First, the content of RE should not only be a phenomenological approach to religion; that is, students study religious phenomena such as rituals or myths in various religions and evaluate them impersonally and personally. This phenomenological approach does not teach students about and from religions, and students do not study a religion in-depth. Instead, they learn about and from a certain religious phenomenon such as a myth in terms of how it is a part of various religions and what they think about it themselves (Teece, 2010, p. 95). On the basis of our distinction, we can add that this approach also runs the risk of only paying attention to organized worldviews. The focus of RE is, in that case, religious traditions (or worldviews) as systems made up out of certain phenomena. The personal worldview—how people actually believe and act—might be neglected because the focus is on agreements and differences of a certain phenomenon as presented in various religious traditions. The second pitfall is that RE is sometimes reduced to the experience of the learner, using religion as a manner to focus mainly on the experiences of students without paying attention to the specifics that religious and non-religious worldviews can teach. This happens, for example, when students visit a place of worship but pay little attention to the particulars of that place while the focus of the visit being the students’ experiences in other places of worship or special places. In that case, RE fails to enrich the students’ experiences (p. 98). The focus is on the development of students’ personal worldviews, asking them about their experiences, without being confronted with the specifics of that place of worship, its meaning in the religious tradition, or with the personal worldviews of regular visitors of that place of worship.

These two examples make clear that the distinction between organized and personal worldviews is helpful in thinking about problems in RE and adds the perspective of a personal worldview as content to learn about in RE. This perspective is present in Grimmitt’s (1987) original idea. He explained that
learning about religion is, among other things, paying attention to the shaping influence of religious beliefs and values on cultural and personal histories. In other words, learning about religion is also focused on how personal lives are influenced by religious beliefs (Grimmitt, 1987). We stated that in Grimmitt’s (1987) case, “religion” resembles our “worldview.” Thus, learning about refers to learning about how people’s personal lives are influenced by their personal worldviews. Furthermore, Grimmitt (1987) stated that learning from religion involves two different types of evaluation: Impersonal evaluation and Personal evaluation. Impersonal evaluation involves being able to distinguish and make critical evaluations of the truth claims, beliefs, and practices of different religious traditions and of religion itself. Impersonal evaluation is necessary for Personal evaluation, which is concerned with promoting self-knowledge and involves questions to confront religious traditions, such as: “Are these beliefs persuasive for me? If I were to adopt such a belief, what difference would it make to me? What beliefs do I hold that are different or similar to these?” (Grimmitt, 1987, p. 225–26). In other words, the issue at stake here is developing students’ personal worldview.

Worldview: Existential Questions.
Our description of existential questions closely matches Teece’s (2010) when he stated that religion clarifies questions concerned with order, meaning, and purpose in the universe; questions of truth; about human nature; about a just society; about individual self-fulfillment; ethical questions; questions about the nature of community; and about values (Teece, 2010, p. 96). Grimmitt (1987) stated that ultimate questions arise from reflection on shared human experiences, and they are “consciousness-expanding” and “self-disclosing” (p. 249). Teece (2010) and Grimmitt (1987) agree that the relationship between learning about and from religions lies in the existential questions or notions as the binding factor between certain religious phenomena or aspects of religions and the life world of students. We agree that using existential questions as a starting point for RE makes it easier for students to relate to various worldviews presented in the curriculum. We add that these questions are shared by religious and non-religious worldviews, and they are part of the lives of human beings. Talking with students about these questions and relating these questions to students’ beliefs and ideas, and to the views of organized worldviews and people’s personal worldviews will encourage them to learn about and from worldviews.
Hella and Wright (2009) stated that the relationship between *learning about* and *from* religion can be explained by their own pedagogy for RE (i.e., critical religious education). This pedagogy is based on two particular theories: The Variation Theory of Learning and critical realism. For now, we will focus on critical realism. Hella and Wright (2009) interpreted the category of existential questions mainly in a critical realistic manner. Critical realism assumes a particular view on reality: there is a tension between ontology and epistemology, and between how things actually are and how we perceive them. Are our experiences with the world “in harmony with the actual order of things”? (p. 61). In describing the relationship between *learning about* and *from* worldview Hella and Wright (2009) focus mainly on the existential matter of the tension between ontology and epistemology. They do not pay attention to the questions that we, Teece (2010), and Grimmitt (1987) mention (Hella and Wright, 2009). Their description of the relationship between *learning about* and *from* religion is too limited and also depends on the particular pedagogical approach of critical RE or on the specific views of critical realism. These views, however, are not generally agreed on. We believe that, when thinking about RE theory, it is better to start with the shared conceptual idea that existential questions are a necessary part of “worldview” than with a theory that one can disagree about. Taking the entire cluster of existential questions as a starting point for addressing the relationship between *learning about* and *from* religion provides an alternative approach.

We will make this more concrete by an example of how existential questions can function as a bridge between *learning about* and *from* in the classroom. A student might not believe that *learning about* fasting in Christianity has any meaning for him or her personally. But in thinking about the questions and notions that lie behind this act (e.g., solidarity with poor people, being grateful [to God]), the student can begin to realize that some aspects of this practice form a part of his or her worldview as well. Reflection on these matters might teach students about their views and give them new insights into their beliefs, allowing them to decide whether they agree or disagree with the existential matters that are the subject of reflection. The element of existential

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12 The paradigm of critical realism is based on three principles: ontological realism (reality exists independently of human perception), epistemic relativism (we have no absolute certain knowledge about the world and the ontological order of things, but our knowledge is not completely arbitrary), and judgmental rationality (the relationship between ontology and epistemology is necessarily a critical one, and knowledge is not based on absolute proof or arbitrary construction but on informed judgment) (p. 61).
The merits of using “worldview”

In conclusion, the contribution of our discussion to RE

In this article we have shown that the use of “worldview” can deepen our understanding of theories in RE.

Three essential characteristics were applied to Grimmitt’s (1987) well-known model of learning about and from religion. Although it is widespread in the theory of RE, Grimmitt’s model and how it has been described in literature, raises certain questions. We demonstrated that using the concept “worldview” combined with the three essential characteristics is helpful in naming these questions, clarifying them, and for shining new light on the model. For instance, we argued that, for the goal of RE as formulated by Grimmitt (1987) and Teece (2010), using the notion of “worldview” as encompassing both religious and non-religious views might be more adequate than speaking about “religion.” It might stimulate students to reflect on or relate it to their life worlds that consist out of many non-religious worldview elements.

The distinction between organized and personal worldviews makes clear that, even when people seem to adhere to the same organized worldview, their personal worldviews can differ. Therefore, students differ in how they give
personal meaning to topics that they learn about. A sophisticated theory of RE should pay attention to learning about people’s organized worldviews and personal worldviews. It should also pay attention to the development of students’ personal worldviews. Only then is it a comprehensive theory of RE.

We also found that taking existential questions as a starting point for worldview education makes it possible to link “learning about” worldview to “learning from” worldview. This is in line with general conceptual agreement that existential questions are necessary for “worldview.” It is not necessary to describe the relationship between these two aims of RE in terms of a theory that one can disagree about as Hella and Wright (2009) do with their preference for critical realism.

Our study of the relationship between learning about and from religion was just one example of how “worldview” and the three essential characteristics in RE can be used. We are convinced that other issues in the theory formation of RE can benefit from this as well; for instance, the question whether state schools should teach RE. Our results are relevant as well to the context of the classroom and teacher education. Clearly explaining the differences between organized and personal worldviews can help teachers ensure that they involve all students in classroom discussions about worldviews and not just students that adhere to a dominant organized worldview or just some organized worldviews.

In addition, paying attention to existential matters that all students can relate to instead of focusing on questions that are specific to one organized worldview gives all students the possibility to reflect on these questions and develop their own views on matters that are important to a person’s life. Furthermore, empirical research demonstrates that students who get the possibility to develop their own views on meaning-giving and religious matters are more secure in their own position and are better able to appreciate the position and views of others. This supports the idea that in education attention should be paid to these personal views of students and that the focus should not only be on religions or organized worldviews (McKanna, Neill, and Jackson, 2009).

Finally, we found that Grimmitt’s (1987) original ideas are in line with our own ideas about “worldview” and RE. His encompassing conceptualization of learning about and from religion focusing on shared human experiences relates to our emphasis on existential questions and his idea of the life world of students is closely related to our idea of personal worldview. In times of ceased participation of institutionalized religion and increased personal believe, these ideas are of great value in religious and worldview education.
References


