

## The subject "Religious Knowledge"

### – RE in the current Swedish School and Curriculum –

Religious education has a long history in Swedish schools. Religious Education, currently named "Religious Knowledge" in the Swedish curriculum is a compulsory school subject through all grades from the year one in primary school to upper secondary school. It can be described as an "integrative model", where education "about" and learning "from" different religions, worldviews and ethics take place in religiously mixed classrooms. There is no opt-out possibilities as the subject is regarded as any other school subject within the curriculum (Lgr 11 and Lgy 11) and is grounded in a religious study tradition. Since 1965 the subject is described as non-denominational and neutral in the curriculum. Thus, the Protestant faith is no longer central to the program, which now deals with religions of the world as well as existential life issues.

In the present Syllabus for RE in the Swedish National Curriculum for compulsory school (Lgr 11) the aim of the subject is described as follows:

Teaching in religion should aim at helping the pupils to develop knowledge of religions and other outlooks on life in their own society and in other parts of the world. By means of teaching, pupils should become sensitive to how people with different religious traditions live with and express their religion and belief in different ways. Teaching should in a balanced way illuminate the role that religions can play in society, both in the pursuit of peace and resolving conflicts, in order to promote social cohesion and as a cause of segregation (Lgr 11: 176).

Furthermore, it is stated that teaching in religion should essentially give pupils the opportunities to develop their ability to:

- analyse Christianity, other religions and other outlooks on life, as well as different interpretations and use of these,
- analyse how religions affect and are affected by conditions and events in society,
- reflect over life issues and their own and other's identity,
- reason and discuss moral issues and values based on ethical concepts and models, and
- search for information about religions and other outlooks on life and evaluate the relevance and credibility of sources. (Lgr 11).

In the first and obligatory course for all students in upper secondary school, the core content is described as follows:

- Christianity, other world religions and different philosophies, their characteristics and how they are manifested for individuals and groups in our time, in Sweden and abroad.

- Different humanity and god concepts within and between religions.
- Religion in relation to gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity and sexuality.
- Individual and group identities and how they can be formed with respect to religion and beliefs based on such written sources, traditions and historical and contemporary events.
- Different perceptions of the relationship between religion and science in the current public debate.
- Interpretation and analysis of the different theories and models in normative ethics and how these can be applied. Ethical and moral beliefs about what a good life and a good society can be.
- Analysis of the arguments on ethical issues on the basis of Christianity, other world religions, philosophies, and students' own positions (Lgy 11, my own translation).

It is up to the teacher to plan how much time there will be allocated to different content in RE, but teaching hours for RE are few in the Swedish system. After nine years of compulsory schooling, students will have had about 220 lessons in RE which means about one hour of RE every fortnight (The Swedish National Agency for Education 2011). In the upper secondary school about 30-35 hours are usually allocated to RE in the compulsory course.

When it comes to the Swedish pupils' views and knowledge in the subject RE it is known from earlier studies that RE is one of the least appreciated subjects in the Swedish compulsory school and that pupil's knowledge is quite fragmentary. Research also show that pupils are not given the possibility to discuss worldviews and ethics as much as they would like to do, or as the curriculum stipulates and that teachers fail to connect to the current religious diverse situation in society. Some researchers point out that RE in the Swedish schools is an example of how secularization has become increasingly widespread in a country, and perhaps even contributed to it. Sweden is often mentioned as one of the most secularized countries today. According to the World Values Survey, a recurring international survey on human values, God is important only for every fifth Swedish (17 percent) and religion is important for only every third (35 percent).

### **Training to become a teacher in Religious Education in Sweden**

Teacher education for teachers in Religious Education is located in universities and university college departments in Sweden like all teacher training. How such teacher education courses are constructed differs as universities are free to develop courses out from goals in central policies for teacher education. However, teacher training courses always include general educational studies, subject studies and didactics of the subject as well as in service training.

Primary teachers (grade 1-3, 7-9 years old pupils) and middle school teachers (grade 4-6, 10-12 years old pupils) teach a range of subjects and therefore their time for each subject is limited. Religion as a subject is often combined within teacher education courses with studies in geography, history and civics and can be taught separately, or in inter-disciplinary courses. Currently teacher students study for four years to become this kind of teacher in Sweden and within these four years the subject of RE is studied for about six weeks.

See:

<https://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/andra-sprak/in-english>

<https://sweden.se/society/education-in-sweden/>

[https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/40808/1/gupea\\_2077\\_40808\\_1.pdf](https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/40808/1/gupea_2077_40808_1.pdf)

<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>



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