

# **TEACHING RELIGION IN A SECULAR SWEDISH SCHOOL SYSTEM: Rationale, Challenges and Recommendations**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Following my two-month research as an international Ugandan researcher in Sweden, I present an argument that the introduction of a non-confessional Religious Education in Sweden in 1919 and an objective and neutral education since 1962 had a key intention of de-linking teaching of religion from religious foundation bodies, in particular, the dominant Church of Sweden (Lutheran) and rendering it educational instead of confessional. In this paper, I will argue that, despite the subsequent birth of a secular Swedish society and the onset of a multicultural society, there was - and there continues to be a justification for the teaching of religion in schools. In my interview with two experts on Religious Education from the National Agency of Education, two teachers of Religious Education and eight students, they all responded positively to the question of the continued teaching of religion in secular Swedish society.

However, in the paper, I will argue that there was or there is an inability of the curriculum and the teachers in some respects to do justice to the integrity of different religions. Based on earlier research and interviews, I'll argue that despite the good intentions of having a neutral and objective multi-faith Religious Education (RE) curriculum in place, some text-books and teachers' approaches raise questions on fairness to all religions. In particular,

the interviews indicate that there are signs of “Immigrophobia” among some students, teachers and sections of the community. Notwithstanding, I will argue that since the findings reveal an overwhelming support for multi-faith RE by a secular population and being mindful of the increased multi-cultural society and signs of Immigrophobia<sup>6</sup>, it is imperative that a careful choice of text-books, especially on religions, other than Christianity, is done and special attention given to RE teachers to address the concept of fairness to all religions.

## **Purpose of Research**

The main purpose of the article is to show the rationale of making and maintaining Religious Education as a compulsory subject in secondary schools and as a core subject in upper secondary schools in a secular society.

I will do this by firstly presenting a brief historical background of the Swedish model of a multi-faith religious education. Secondly, I will present arguments in support of the Swedish model, given from mainly teachers and students who have been interviewed. Thirdly I will show threats and weaknesses of the Swedish model that have appeared primarily through the conducted interviews. Finally, I will give some recommendations for improvements of the current RE praxis in Sweden.

## **Methodology**

In view of the limited time for research (only two months in Sweden) I read some books and unpublished articles in the English Language on the subject of Religious Education in Sweden and this

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<sup>6</sup> This is not a conventional academic term but I have used it to denote fear and uneasiness that some Swedish citizens have of the increased (real or perceived) immigration of people of different races.

was helpful in establishing the context of my research. The major challenge though was that most books were written in the Swedish language and I was only able to get summaries at the end of the books.

I employed a qualitative method of enquiry whereby my main source of data was interviews with key informants including two historical experts on the subject of religion in schools, to be referred to as HE 1 and HE 2, two current National Education Agency experts on the Religious Education curriculum, to be referred to as NEA 1 and 2, as well as two teachers of Religious Education. Focus group discussions were held for two sets of students totaling eight and these were invaluable in eliciting views of students on pertinent issues concerning the rationale of religious education in a secular society.

The advantage of focus groups in augmenting interviews and observations cannot be overemphasized (Morgan, 1997). The major challenge was that since English is the second language to most Swedes, they do not easily express their views in English and in one case a teacher of religious education had to get a colleague to do the translation.

In addition to interviews, I interacted with different members of the community such as clergy in formal and informal settings and these were resourceful in assisting me to appreciate certain issues concerning the religious life of the Swedes and the Church and community relationship. The observation through visits to schools and churches was also important in enabling me to record events and draw some conclusions.

***Table of Interviewees and their fictitious names***

<b>Fictitious Names of Swedish Interviewees</b>	<b>Agency Represented</b>
Ann	National Agency Education (NAE), 1
Shaun	National Agency Education (NAE), 2
Martin	Teacher of RE, 1
Sharon	Teacher of RE, 2
Anthony	Historical expert (HE) on RE, 1
Viola	Historical expert (HE) on RE, 2
Fred	Student, 1
Tom	Student, 2
Nancy	Student, 3
Agnes	Student, 4
Ken	Student, 5
Judith	Student, 6
Kate	Student, 7
Alice	Student, 8
NB Average age of students is 14	

### **Brief Historical Context of Swedish Model of a Multi-Faith Religious Education**

Similar to other European countries, there was a close relationship between church and schools (Almén & Øster, 2000). The teaching of religion in Swedish schools initially followed a confessional model of religious education whereby the catechism of Luther was the main textbook in public schools before 1919. This approach to the teaching of religion in schools implied that school teaching was more or less extensions of church work. Students were to be affirmed in the dominant Lutheran Evangelical Church. The

challenge to a confessional model of religious education came as a result of the protest from the minority religious denominations who wanted to start their own schools and disagreed with teaching the doctrines of the Lutheran Church in public schools (Almén & Oster, 2000; Osbeck & Petterson, 2009).

From 1919 there was a shift from a confessional Lutheran oriented Christian religious education to a non-confessional Christian religious education that centered on the study of the Bible, especially the New Testament, and the commonality of the Christian tradition and the history of Christianity. It is interesting to note that it was not until 1951 that Non-Church of Sweden teachers were able to teach Christianity (Osbeck & Petterson, 2009). This development would suggest that the minority Christian denominations were not considered to be on equal footing with the Church of Sweden till 1951.

The 1960's saw the initiation of an approach to teaching religion in schools that stressed neutrality and objectivity with respect to different religions and philosophies of life. Petterson (2006) argues that since the 1960s there was an emergence of a more religiously neutral state that promoted the teaching of Christendom in a more objective way as religious knowledge. In my interview of Anthony (HE, 1) at Malmö, he said: In 1962 in the teaching of Christianity, the content was centered on biblical studies and church history with a world perspective. Ethics was also taught. At the time, some students asked to know about other religions, there was little I had in terms of materials but I tried. Malmö was already secularized<sup>7</sup>.

The historical expert expresses the attempts to be neutral in outlook in early 1960's to an extent of having dialogue with students about religions, other than Christianity.

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<sup>7</sup> This is not a conventional academic term but I have used it to denote fear and uneasiness that some Swedish citizens have of the increased (real or perceived) immigration of people of different races.

The approach to teaching religion changed from viewing religious education as an ideological agent of churches and religious communities and instead as a school system of the Swedish model (Almén & Øster, 2000). This new approach stressed the importance of religion in personal development and independence of mind as a path to maturity and eventual development of good interpersonal relationships. According to Orlenius, (2004), since 1962 up until 1994, all curricular syllabuses for religious education prescribed for the theme of individuality and it has become even more explicit and conspicuous since then.

On the other hand, Viola (HE 2) inferred to the challenge to independence of mind and/or neutrality in teaching the Christian religious tradition in the early 1960s as follows: *In 1964 I was a candidate and the new curriculum had been introduced in 1962, the stress was on Christianity and Moral Education was attached to the Ten Commandments, it was more or less a confirmation class.*

While reference to Christianity and Moral Education is an affirmation of a neutral Christian religious tradition, the study of the Ten Commandments and the insinuation of the classes being more or less confirmation classes, suggest the inter-linkage of the school and the Christian tradition. The influence of the church of Sweden on the school system and thereby the challenge on neutrality is a matter that was not fully addressed at the time, in fact even to-date there is an informal close relationship between church and many schools (Osbeck & Petterson, 2000, p. 212) confirmed in my interview of experts, teachers, students, clergy and community.

One such example cited by all interviewees is the end of term assemblies where religious leaders are invited to speak to school assemblies. Two priests of the Church of Sweden said that they always had occasion to preach the gospel on end of term assemblies and also during Easter season visits by students to local churches.<sup>8</sup> The interviewees - especially the vicars and Head-teachers - were aware of the expected neutrality of the schools but in practice the

church and school relationship is only taken naturally and not questioned. The close relationship between school, church and society is reflected in the argument advanced by Erik Amnå (2010) that the present secular rational identity of Swedes actually covers up for a strong Lutheran influence and heritage.

The year 1969 was another milestone in the developments concerning religious education in Sweden following a survey that was conducted by the National Board of Education to gauge the attitudes and views of teenagers on religion and values issues. The findings stressed the need for students to explore questions of life through a study of Christianity, other religions and non-religious philosophies and the inter-linkage of such fundamental questions of life to current social and cultural issues (Almen & Øster, 2000, p. 69). This approach which addresses the felt needs of students became the cornerstone of religious education curriculum since it transcends religious views of life. The major challenge to this perspective is that it makes it difficult for students associated with strong religious beliefs to adopt religious culture from their parents and instead encourage a ‘supermarket’ or eclectic method of adopting ‘opinions.’

Although the approach to religious education of emphasizing questions of life is meant to promote neutrality, (Thomson, 2004, p.32) argues that all forms of religious education are confessional and have underlying values including secular values. In other words, the questions of life approach can be biased towards secular philosophy of life. Cöster and Osbeck (n.d.) in their article titled “*Is ground of values a religion? About training world views in a non-confessional school,*”

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<sup>8</sup> All the interviewees indicated close affinity between the Swedish public schools and the church of Sweden and I was personally able to observe this during the pre-Easter season where students were taken on Church tours and addressed by the Vicars in some Churches in Karlstad and Uppsala.

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argue that there is a secular bias in Swedish schools despite the stressing of education of religion and promoting of ‘certain religiously neutral values.’

The 1994 curriculum is explicit about the expected values that are to be promoted in Swedish compulsory, Comprehensive and pre-school classes. The preamble reads, ‘The school has the important task of imparting, instilling and forming in pupils those fundamental values on which our society is based.’ The language used is “confessional” and since the Swedish society prides itself in promoting secular values, then it is possible that the school system will espouse these same religious values, thus compromising neutrality.

On the other hand, while discussing the values that the school should promote, the preamble specifies values grounded in ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism. The central importance given to Christian traditional values raises questions about the significance of the Christian tradition in relationship to other religions. Doesn’t this suggest that the Christian religious tradition is the privileged and preferred religious tradition? If so, where does this leave other religious traditions and the neutrality of the school system?

In an interview of Viola (HE 2), she said, ‘The current syllabus for comprehensive and upper secondary says that pupils are to gain insight into life problems and thoughts in Christianity and other world religions’. Christianity is the only religion spelled out, there is a tendency for teachers to concentrate on it and give less attention to other religions.’ The challenge in the Swedish model of religious education is that it renders Christianity a privileged religious tradition much in similar way to the British multi-faith model that expects the syllabuses to reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking into account other principle religions represented in Britain (Mannitz, 2004). The radical position of removing religion from the curriculum in France in order to ensure ‘ultimate religious neutrality’ can be



appreciated from this perspective. Nonetheless, the Swedish and British models may be commended for being mindful of the historical and current importance of religion - and specifically Christianity - to the social and cultural lives of people.

### **Views in support of multi-faith Religious Education in a Secular Swedish Society**

Although Sweden is referred to as one of the most secular countries in the world (Pettersson, 2006, p 140; Osbeck & Pettersson, 2009), there is overwhelming support for the teaching of religion in schools expressed by the two historical experts on religious education, two current experts on religious education curriculum, two teachers and eight students. Although six students out of eight said they do not believe in God or belong to any religion, all of them supported the teaching of religion in schools for different reasons but mainly citing the emergence of a multi-cultural society and the need to know what religion means to its adherents and how they can interface with them. Some of the student's responses to the question whether it is good to continue teaching religion in a secular country were hinged on the growth of a multi-cultural and multi-religious society (Jackson, 2004). Nancy, #3 said: *It is good to have knowledge about religions, know the differences and why people do certain things.*

A similar response by Ken Student #5 was: *There is a need to read about the biggest religions, you meet a lot of people, you need to understand about other people.*

One interesting response was a student who viewed the need to study about other religions in light of the role of religion in conflict in modern times, an indicator of the negative role of religion, if in a secular society, the only major association people may have of religion is conflict.

Judith, Student 6 said, 'In my opinion there have been a lot of wars because of religion, it is important to know why they started.'

Only one student out of the eight argued that the teaching of religion in schools might enable some students to choose a religion to live by.

Alice Student 8 said: *It is possible if you don't have a religion, neutral you can pick a religion you like.*'

It was interesting to note that her colleagues did not agree with Judith, Student 6, arguing that: *I don't agree, we know the Christian religion very well, but I am not a Christian, we have a good teacher but...*

The responses of the students largely indicate that religious education is viewed as an avenue of learning about religion thereby enabling them to appreciate religion as a phenomenon of human experience and not to promote Christianity, the dominant religious tradition. In this respect, the Swedish model of religious education can be described as neutral and objective. However, the research findings reveal that some text-books and some teachers' approaches seem to compromise the expected objectivity and neutrality of the curriculum and the secular nature of the school system.

### **Short-Falls in Teachers' approaches, Textbooks and recommendations**

The most challenging aspect of the Swedish non-confessional and expected objective and neutral religious education curriculum, according to interviews, is the tendency among some teachers to stick to 'the tradition' while implementing the curriculum as well as the promotion of deeply held society values such as the celebrating of Christmas festivals without due observance of non-Christian religious festivals in similar manner. In addition, through earlier research done in Sweden and interviews, some text-books used in teaching about religions, other than Christianity, portray a negative picture about such religions thereby possibly causing dislike of those religions among Swedish students.

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In an interview with Viola (HE 2) she argued that most teachers still teach as though the non-confessional multi-faith and multi-value religious education syllabus is centered on Christianity. She said: *Not all teachers will look at the curriculum, teachers tend to say we do as we've always done it, meaning how they were taught. Many of the practices of 1930's and 1940's will be seen in Swedish schools. For example, a friend of mine had 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and told me that she taught the Bible and mainly the New Testament in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and history of Christianity and different churches in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and in 9<sup>th</sup> grade covered some other religions. The syllabus we have today is quite open, they will learn about Christianity and maybe the world religions in 9<sup>th</sup> grade Hinduism and 2 or 3 lessons and a lot about Christianity.*

The privileged position of Christianity as indicated is a result of the teacher's lack of initiative to interpret fully the syllabus that would guarantee adequate time to different religions. The reference to an open syllabus by the expert on religious education suggests that there are no proper guidelines on a syllabus coverage schedule that would ensure equity among religions. This position can be confirmed by Martin, Teacher RE 1, in a response to a question as to whether all religions are treated fairly in syllabus coverage and she said, *'I start with Christianity, our tradition, if they have Christian tradition, if they are familiar with it, you can look at other religions and compare...'* The response of this teacher expresses bias towards Christianity, 'our tradition' and this attitude can defeat the purpose of an objective and neutral Swedish multi-faith and multi-value religious education. Sharon, Teacher RE 2 expressed the difficulty of achieving the concept of fairness to all religions by arguing thus: *There are so many religions, in the little time you have to make sure we teach well but emphasis is on the big five but am aware it could be the big six otherwise you end up not finishing. You can't neglect Hinduism and Buddhism, they are too big, Judaism is the basis for Christianity and Islam.*

Sharon, Teacher RE 2, expressed the example of an objective and neutral approach to teaching about religion since she emphasized the importance and coverage of the big five. In fact, she further revealed to me that in their school, Hinduism and Buddhism is taught by a teacher from India in October and November while later Judaism, Christianity and Islam are taught plus also other secular philosophies like humanism and existentialism.

Another key area that has short-falls in addressing the expected objectivity and neutrality of the school system is the importance attached to Christian festivals in most of the public schools. There is a continued relationship between the school and church and while this shouldn't be a problem in itself, since there is an expectation of the school to interact with the community (and church is part of community) there is an extent to which it compromises the neutrality of the state school system especially in favour of the dominant Church of Sweden. Ann (NAE 1) an expert on religious education said: *It is strange, very strange in a secular country, that very often when schools are breaking off for summer the closing ceremony is held in church, may be Easter and of course most schools are Church of Sweden but in my locality there is another local Christian Church that is where they go normally. They can go to the Church to see the event (maybe Easter) but the Church has no influence on what is taught.*

Whilst it would be unrealistic to expect churches not to have a relationship with the schools, the preference of a Church to any other place of worship or hall raises questions on neutrality and yet according to my formal and informal interviews in Karlstad, Uppsala and Lund indicated that this continues to be a common practice. Another expert on religious education indicated that due to the compromise in neutrality, many schools now are trying to move away from churches to halls whenever organizing festivals or school functions.

In areas where other religions are represented it is imperative that important religious festivals are given due attention if the concept of neutrality of the school system is to be upheld. Similarly, as earlier confirmed from Swedish research on RE text-books, some of the text-books on religions, other than Christianity that are used in Swedish schools have limitations since they do not reflect objectivity and neutrality. In addition, an interview carried out with both teachers of religious education, they consented to this view. Martin, Teacher RE 1, while praising the text-book he uses on Islam said: *A colleague recommended this text-book on Islam to me. Yes this one's illustrations are really good because even a photograph can alienate people or connect people to the subject e.g In Hinduism many texts show photos of widows that are ugly and bad looking, this can cause dislike for the images and the religion.*

The reference to ugly images of Hinduism in some text-books is an indicator of the possible turn off to Hinduism as a religion among Swedish students since the writers did not exercise some sensitivity in the representation of Hinduism as a religion. A similar response from Sharon, Teacher RE 2, was elicited when asked if the text-books give fair coverage to all religions. She said: *No. No. Some parts are wrong. I don't use those materials, my pupils find update materials on religion but I want them to think about, to be aware of the sources, not only wikipedia.'*

The teacher expresses dissatisfaction about the content of text-books on religions and this is a subject that was extensively investigated by Härenstam in a study whose theme was to compare the picture of Islam in Swedish text-books with Islamic self-understanding. Härenstam (1993) established that most text-books on Islam selected negative material on Islam such as portraying Islam as a fanatical religion whose spread is a result of violence and some present Islam from a historical, out-moded and not current perspective. Härenstam further argues that for text-books published after the National syllabus of 1980 for comprehensive school and after the National curriculum for upper secondary: *The interesting*

*thing is that the book which really has the most aggressive image of God in Islam is the book that is most widespread in the Swedish school, Religion och liv, högstadiet (Härenstam, 1993, p. 285).*

What Härenstam is suggesting here is that Swedish students are bound to develop an image of Islam as a religion of violence instead of a religion of peace as it is often referred to. This raises the question though of whether it is proper to selectively choose information that students are given? Perhaps the problem is with there being lack of a balance between the reality of negative representations of Islam and the positive representatives of Islam. It is important that Islam as a religion is represented positively and the negative images of Islam accruing from modern militant Islam be explained in context. In his article on the place of religion in four civil cultures, Maintz (2004) argues that it is only France that treats all religions in a value neutral manner, the major problem being presenting it from a historical perspective. Germany and Netherlands are presented by Maintz as portraying Islam in text-books as an inferior religion and/or a violent religion. The approach discussed concerning representation of other religions in text-books compromises neutrality and raises questions on the achievement of the objective of a multi-faith Swedish religious education.

### ***Immigrophobia: Challenge to Multi-Faith Swedish Religious Education***

In my interviews of experts on religious education, teachers and students, I was able to establish that there are some Swedish citizens who have a negative attitude to people of other ethnicities who come to work or settle in Sweden. However statistically insignificant this problem may be, it is an indicator of the shortcomings in fulfilling the goals of the multi-faith the Religious Education whose key objective is to enable students to appreciate the multi-religious and multi-value Swedish society. In a secular school system, which should uphold the concept of neutrality and

fairness to all religions, races or cultures, there is a need to deliberately address these possible loopholes for promoting religious or ethnic hatred.

One of the key interview observations is that both sets of students expressed their experience with acts that can be described as religious and/or ethnic intolerance. The secondary school students mainly associated such negative acts of social relations with primary school age when they were still ‘youths.’ When asked if some students are harassed for their religious beliefs in school, Tom, Student 2, said: *When you are young you are stupid and ignorant-mostly verbal when I was a kid they had a hard time, a lot of racism but when we grow we mature no longer an issue.’*

Fred, Student 1, similarly said: *When I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade I was against people of religion, even Christians.*

Fred’s statement is quite revealing since it indicates that students in Swedish schools have no strong attachment even to Christianity. In other words the majority seem to hold secular views. In another school, two girls: Judith, Student 6, and Kate, Student 7, referred to incidences that reflect intolerance of a teacher towards students of other religions and/ or ethnicities while another cited an example of her own problems since she is a self-proclaimed member of Jehovah’s witnesses. In response to the question whether some students are harassed for their religious beliefs, Kate, Student 7, said: *I haven’t seen it either but I know that older teachers have something against some people, not very obvious, people who are not from here, I can feel it, older teachers have something against foreign students. I don’t know if it is about their religion or skin colour.*

Although non-committal, Kate refers to teachers having something against ‘people who are not from here’ and this is a bold statement made in the presence of her Religious Education teacher. This is an indicator first of the independence of mind of students but second the reality of uneasiness on part of what she refers to as old teachers, a possible reference to ‘conservative attitudes’ as

opposed to the youthful teachers who may be a product of modernity and therefore more tolerant of people of other religions or races. Kate, Student 7, who is a Jehovah's Witness said: *I think it happens but it has not happened to me, it depends on who you are, if you explain, there are many prejudices against many religions, Jehovah's Witnesses, many others too, because most of the pupils don't believe in anything, they don't know anything...*

The Jehovah's Witness girl reveals how majority students hold secular views and not religious views. The Jehovah's Witness girl had a lot to complain about since even in the presence of her teacher she said the teacher normally distributes tracts which contain distorted information about her religion although she said the teacher actually teaches different things (or nice things).

In informal conversation with students, I was told that Jehovah's Witness is regarded as a dangerous cult and school administration makes attempts to warn students about it and other cults. While it is true that the teachings of Jehovah's Witness present some unpatriotic teachings (not serving in the army etc) and what is described as anti-social beliefs (say of cutting ties with whoever leaves the church), in a secular country that exercises neutrality to religion, there is a need to listen more to Jehovah's Witness than is the case today. Apparently the Jehovah's Witness girl is the single most self-proclaimed believer in God and religion among the eight students I interviewed.

Religious tensions were expressed in interviews, especially in relationship with the growing Muslim community that is apt to promote its Islamic and Arabic cultural values such as women's *burqa*. While the students expressed worry about the increased numbers of immigrants and the four experts admitted religious and/or racial tensions mainly in some cities, all the four experts on religious education, the two teachers of Religious Education and the eight students did not support Moslem wearing of the *burqa*, in their view for practical reasons and not as a sign of religious intolerance. Agnes, Student 4, in the interview painted a grim



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picture of the disproportionate increase in foreigners by saying: *We talked about it a few weeks ago (for me I am fifteen years older than these three colleagues of mine (in folkhögskolan) when I was young we had a few people from different countries in 1980's but now a friend of mine said for every 600 students there were 3 foreign students but now 19 of 22 students are from different cultures!*

Although the statistics of the students were out of the blue, they make a point of the worry about 'excessive' increase in immigrants and this can be a recipe for religious and ethnic intolerance or even discrimination. It is important that religious education curriculum addresses itself to such aspects since students may need to appreciate the real statistics and the realities of globalization whereby even Swedish citizens may be found in big numbers in other foreign countries. It is possible that some of these negative attitudes perhaps even based on un-researched information may be responsible for cases cited by experts of religious education and students of religious and/or racial discrimination.

While responding to the question, do you think there is religious discrimination in Sweden? One student said: *We have a lot of discrimination getting a job, religion does not matter-veil is not religion, it doesn't fit in Sweden, what matters is the colour of your skin and how good you are looking is what matters. If you are good looking, pretty, attractive it is easier to get a job, it is not religion.*

The student fails to acknowledge that Islam is a way of life and not restricted to Islam the religion. In other words, he thinks the matter of the veil is not a religious issue and yet the Muslim women greatly view it so. In this respect, there is a clash of cultures and civilizations and it is a test of the values of multi-faith and value religious education that stresses promotion of understanding, sensitivity, and empathy with the other (Watson, 1993; Jackson, 1997). On the other hand, the practical realities of a veiled woman school teacher or shopkeeper in a secular public enterprise does not seem rational. Nonetheless, it is these areas that the curriculum and

teachers need to engage with in a growing multi-cultural and multi-religious society.

## Conclusion

The discussion has shown that a non-confessional multi-faith religious education is supported by all the interviewees despite the majority indicating that they do not believe in God, attend regular worship or strictly observe religious festivals. This seems to confirm a generally accepted view that Sweden is a highly secular society. The main reason why the multi-faith religious education is supported is that it enables students without religious background (since for the majority their parents do not introduce them to religion) to study about what it means for people who believe in God and belong to different religions and in the process, they can empathize with them and relate to them well.

The interviews reveal that there is no expectation on the part of teachers to affirm students within the Christian Religious Tradition, nor, the dominant Lutheran church, an indicator of the concept of neutrality and objectivity. On the other hand, earlier research mainly by Härenstam and interviews with teachers revealed that some text-books in use portray other religions in bad light thus possibly causing dislike to the Swedish learners. In addition, the interview of students expressed the problem of some teachers who exhibit traits of religious and/or ethnic intolerance.

Interviews of secondary school students revealed that they mistreated pupils (mainly immigrant children) who belonged to religious faith traditions while in primary schools and this shows that in lower primary schools there seems to be some experience of anti-religious and/ or ethnic tensions.

The challenge of signs of *immigrophobia* in the community as expressed by some secondary school students, teachers and experts on religious education curriculum is an indicator of possible challenge to the goals of a multi-faith religious education

curriculum. Cognizant of the aforementioned challenges and mindful of the overwhelming support for a multi-faith religious education curriculum whose goals would address the shortcomings, I recommend that teachers should take great care in choosing text-books on other religions and perhaps the Education Agencies could recommend key text-books that meet the concept of fairness to the integrity of the religions.

The government can also be charged with the task of heightening different programmes that are meant to address facts about immigration, attitudes to ethnicity and religion through mass media and other forum that can ensure the growth of a harmonious multi-cultural and multi-religious society.

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