

Worldview education in Finnish public education. The whys and wherefores... and the quandaries

Martin Ubani

University of Eastern Finland, Finland

Kontakt: martin.ubani@uef.fi

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4877-4094>

submitted: 31.01.2025; revised: 01.03.2025; accepted: 27.03.2025

Abstract: The aim of this article is to discuss the question of worldviews in religious education from a Nordic perspective and with a focus on Finland in particular. I will first elaborate the conceptual history and background of worldviews in Finnish literature and religious education in Finland. After that I will discuss societal and curricular aspects that in my view have added to the appeal of the use of “worldviews” in public education. After that I will focus on four key conceptual questions to be solved for good worldviews and religious education in Finland and elsewhere. These are: 1) What is the relationship between the concepts “Religion” and “Worldviews”? 2) What are the roles of “Religion” and “Worldviews” in learning? 3) What is the disciplinary basis for Worldviews in learning and instruction? And 4) What learning concerning worldviews actually is? In the discussion I will resolve with the fifth question: What are the dynamics of religion and worldviews in the integrated instruction?. The article concludes that there certainly are merits and complications related to the conceptual shift to “worldviews” and proposes that not only the challenges are shared in different countries but probably the solutions, too.

Keywords: religious education, worldviews, Finland, Nordic countries, public education.

Zusammenfassung: Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, die Frage der Weltanschauungen in der Religionspädagogik aus nordischer Perspektive und mit besonderem Schwerpunkt auf Finnland zu diskutieren. Zunächst werde ich die Begriffsgeschichte und den Hintergrund von Weltanschauungen in der finnischen Literatur und Religionspädagogik erläutern. Danach werde ich gesellschaftliche und lehrplanbezogene Aspekte diskutieren, die meiner Meinung nach zur Attraktivität der Verwendung von „Weltanschauungen“ in der öffentlichen Bildung beigetragen haben. Anschließend werde ich mich auf vier zentrale konzeptionelle Fragen konzentrieren, die für eine gute Weltanschauung und Religionsunterricht in Finnland und anderswo gelöst werden müssen. Diese sind: 1) In welcher Beziehung stehen die Begriffe „Religion“ und „Weltanschauungen“ zueinander? 2) Welche Rolle spielen „Religion“ und „Weltanschauungen“ beim Lernen? 3) Was ist die disziplinäre Grundlage für Weltanschauungen im Lernen und Unterrichten? und 4) Was ist eigentlich Lernen in Bezug auf Weltanschauungen? In der Diskussion werde ich mit der fünften Frage abschließen: Wie sieht die Dynamik von Religion und Weltanschauungen im integrierten Unterricht aus? Der Artikel kommt zu dem Schluss, dass der konzeptionelle Wandel hin zu „Weltanschauungen“ sicherlich Vorzüge und Komplikationen mit sich bringt, und schlägt vor, dass nicht nur die Herausforderungen in verschiedenen Ländern gemeinsam sind, sondern wahrscheinlich auch die Lösungen.

Schlagwörter: Religionsunterricht, Weltanschauungen, Finnland, nordische Länder, öffentliches Bildungswesen.

I. Introduction

In this article I focus on the question of worldviews in religious education from a Nordic perspective and with a focus on Finland in particular. If there is one issue most scholars of religious education would agree on it is that ‘worldviews’ has become the hot concept in Europe during the past decade or so. It is arguably the key concept today being applied in religious education with regard to (non-)religion(s), (un-)belief(s) and values, identity and personality development in religious education. This holds true also when debating the merits of integrated instruction in countries with a ‘separative model’ (Åhs, 2020; Alberts, 2007), as in Finland. It is not that the term was not on the radar of scholars of religious education previously (Erricker, Sullivan, Ota, Erricker & Logan 1994; Erricker & Erricker, 2000), rather it is its current re-emergence in policy consciousness and the research literature (Benoit, Hutchings & Shillitoe 2018; Biesta, Aldridge, Hannam & Whittle, 2019; Bråten, 2022) that is the important development here. At the same time, there are several open questions surrounding the application of the term and, for example, its relationship to religion (Benoit et al., 2018). In Finland, many of these open questions can be narrated as a story of disconnect, discontinuity and disintegration on many levels.

As said, this article will focus on the Finnish context. Similarly to other Nordic countries, the Finnish religious education model was first developed on the basis of a majority Lutheran population. Despite having a similar context and shared history and all countries having state-run religious education, the model of religious education in these countries varies and developments have diverged (Rothgangel, Skeie, Jäggle, Klutz & Solymar, 2014). Finland is the only Nordic country that has implemented a separative model for religious education. In Finland, religious education is given according to one’s religious affiliation: in this sense, the model has similarities with the Austrian model. Arguably, of the Nordic countries, Sweden and Iceland have the strongest grounding in existential questions in their curricula and also in research (Osbeck, Kärnebro, Lilja & Sporre, 2024). This holds true to some extent for worldviews, too, but the other Nordic countries also acknowledge these topics as an important issue (Bråten, 2022).

While this article emphasises aspects related to Lutheranism and religious education as the context of the study, for the interest of the reader it should be noted that Catholic religious education in Finland comes under the same system as Lutheran religious education. This means that it is state-run and weak confessional in the sense that it lacks devotional practices and faith formation aims, and teachers are not expected to be adherents or members of the Catholic Church – their qualification is academic only (Ubani & Tirri, 2014). I will not further elaborate here this question of the connection between the Finnish perception of teacher qualification and teaching as being separate from the task of the Church (derived from Lutheranism into public education) and the ease of shifting to a vocabulary of ‘worldviews’ instead of ‘religiosity’ of students in the curricula. These peculiarities are connected through or epitomised by the legislative change that took place in the early 2000s in the last stage of deconfessionalisation of religious education. Furthermore, it should be added that the main developments with regard to religion in public education, especially secularisation, are closely connected with the role of Lutheranism and the Lutheran Church in Finland, and that the whole model for religious education was originally built on this majority assumption. While in the curriculum for basic education in 2004 (FNAE, 2004) ‘minority religions’ had more of an identity formation emphasis than Lutheran Religious Education, the 2016 curriculum (FNAE, 2016) emphasised more the uniformity

of syllabi for each religion taught in Finnish schools. All religions share the same aims, objectives and assessment criteria in basic education (*ibid.*).¹

2. The origins of 'worldviews' in Finland

The history of 'worldview' in education and in literature in general is essentially framed by the cultural impact of German literature as the key point of departure. At face value, 'worldview' is a relatively simple term. In Merriam-Webster (2024) 'worldview' is described as 'a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world especially from a specific standpoint; called also *Weltanschauung*', revealing the German connection with the term (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2024). In the Cambridge Dictionary 'world view' is defined as 'a way of thinking about the world' (*Cambridge Dictionary*, 2024). In the philosophical and educational literature the concept of 'worldview' can be seen to include different nuances: a systemic, rationalistic world conception (objective), experiential lifeworld (subjective), and socially shared ideology (intersubjective) (Vidal, 2012, pp. 314–315). The said '*Weltanschauung*' from German literature, most often associated with 'worldview', has been acknowledged to originate from Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in the 1790s (Kant, 1986) and to have been later taken up by Hegel. In early 1911, William Dilthey presented this concept when describing the endeavour of understanding the world as a whole instead of the focus of the new sciences on one aspect at a time. Philosophy, art and religion were different ways to describe a *Weltanschauung* (Vidal, 2012).

Various equivalents to 'worldview' exist across different languages, such as in German as noted above, and in the Nordic languages. In addition, often these languages also have a number of terms referring to some aspect related to, overlapping with or derived from worldview, such as the alternative prefix or suffix 'life' (i. e., view of life), just as parallel related, overlapping and derived terms for 'view' in 'worldview' also exist in these languages. In German, for example, there is '*Weltanschauung*', '*Weltauffassung*', '*Weltbild*' and '*Weltansicht*', each with a different meaning and connotation. Without claiming to understand all the nuances, meanings and trajectories in the definitions of these, all of these could broadly represent what in current international use may be referred to as 'worldview' (Vidal, 2012). That being said, perhaps in future in the international literature more attention to the German nuances should be given when theorising 'worldviews' in religious and values education.

In Finnish, the history of 'worldview' begins in the 1800s, mainly through the cultural impact of German literature. One of the earliest mentions of 'worldview' ('*katsomustapa*'), roughly the 'the way things are perceived', can be found in literature from 1869 (Kirjallinen kuukauslehti 1869, nr 2, 1.2.1869, p. 4). It was used to translate parts of German Professor Heyman Steinthal's work 'Das Epos' (1868) on the Finnish national epic 'Kalevala' (Steinthal, 1868). The 1800s and especially the last decades were integral in the development of Finnish nationhood, modern language and terminology for education. In the same year, the same word was used in a periodical to refer to individuals and their morality (Uusi Suometar, 8.11.1869, p 1). A few years later, in 1876, the religious 'overtly Catholic "worldview"' ('*katsomustapa*') of a French political magazine is criticised (Kirjallinen kuukauslehti, 1876, nr 10, p. 244). 'Theological world view' ('*teologinen maailman katsomus*') is mentioned in 1904 (Työmies 1904, nr 1, 7.7.1904, p. 154) and in the same year ('view of life') ('*elämän katsomus*') (Uusimaa, 1904, nr 126, 4.11.1904). In the 1950s on the didactics of religious education, T.P. Virkkunen uses the concept in the plural form 'religious worldviews' ('*uskonnolliset katsomukset*') and in a diminutive sense that an individual may obtain several religious views (concerning the world) as part of their overall worldview (Virkkunen, 1956, p. 60), that is, thoughts, ideas and conceptions derived from religion (Virkkunen, 1956). By the 1990s worldview ('*katsomus*') had become a constant in Finnish literature on religious

¹ The article is based on the keynote presentation of same name by the author at the "Jahrestagung der AKRK". Leitershofen b. Augsburg, Germany 19.9.–21.9.2024.

education, which, it should be noted, has always characteristically represented the outlook of Lutheran, secular-Lutheran or secular hegemony.

One difficulty in examining the history of the concept in Finland is that a longer (*'maailmankatsomus'*) and shorter (*'katsomus'*) term for 'worldview' have both been used, although these have originally referred to the same thing. In Finland, arguably the staple description of worldview comes from the philosopher and mathematician Niiniluoto (1984), who developed his conception of 'worldview' in the 1970s and published an influential collection of essays on the topic in the mid-1980s (Niiniluoto, 1984). His description has been widely used in education, textbooks and research alike in Finland. It clarifies how worldview has been understood in Finland and how it aligns with continental philosophy, for example. In his foreword, Niiniluoto adheres to the thoughts of Wilhelm Jerusalem (Jerusalem, 1926) when talking about philosophy as having a significant role in worldview (*Weltanschauung*)² as philosophy aims at 'conceptualising, justifying and evaluating approaches to different things' (Niiniluoto, 1984, p. 6). First, to Niiniluoto, *'Weltanschauung'* has three parts: a) 'theory of knowledge': how knowledge about the world is obtained and handled, b) *'Weltbild'*: propositions concerning the world, which are obtained through the means of becoming knowledgeable, i. e. through 'a', and c) 'value theory': conceptions of good and bad, right and wrong, and the purpose of humans in world (Niiniluoto, 1984, p. 87).

He begins his description with a direct translation of *'Weltbild'*, in Finnish *'maailmankuva'*. He describes how *'Weltbilds'* (*'maailmankuvat'*) can be called 'systematic entities consisting of in one way or another argued claims concerning the world... [these]... can be supported by individual people or groups' (Niiniluoto, 1984, p. 79). By 'world' he denotes 'all facts related to nature, humans and society' (ibid.). He then goes on to describe how a *Weltbild* could be religious if it includes 'claims that are solely supported by vetoing on the basis of some religious value authorities such as the Bible or personal religious experiences' (ibid., p. 81). Such a religious *Weltbild* 'is unscientific if it includes claims that are in conflict with scientific evidence' (ibid.). On the other hand, 'In a scientific *Weltbild* all its claims/propositions are obtained and argued for through scientific methods and accepted by the scientific community' (ibid., pp. 79–80). To him a *'metaphysical Weltbild'* then includes 'claims/propositions that are argued/justified not through empirical scientific methods but through philosophical arguments' (ibid., p. 82). According to Niiniluoto, a religious *Weltbild* and scientific *Weltbild* can be compatible if 'religion does not force itself into the area of science' and 'science does not take a stand on the existence of God' (ibid., p. 88).

Niiniluoto also claims that whereas religious and scientific *Weltbilds* may in some situations be compatible, a scientific *Weltanschauung* and religious *Weltanschauung* cannot. This relates essentially to personal commitments to knowledge claims versus how knowledge is validated: science is in this sense seen as undogmatic and to have a different epistemology. Thus, according to Niiniluoto, with *Weltanschauung* a potential compatibility between 'religious' and 'scientific' is not conceivable. This is because at the level of epistemology, i. e. theory of knowledge, religious and scientific *Weltanschauungs* are in conflict because the first uses and accepts only the 'scientific method for obtaining knowledge', whereas religious *Weltanschauungs* use also methods or sources that 'do not meet the criteria of science' (p. 88). Niiniluoto uses here the Finnish *'maailmankatsomus'* (*Weltanschauung*) and a shorter version *'katsomus'* synonymously.

What is integral for the purposes of this article is the conception of Niiniluoto that *Weltbild* is not itself enough to be a *Weltanschauung*, because the latter's 'justification and application requires one to go

² I henceforth use the German equivalent for the purpose of clarity when discussing the views of Niiniluoto. As the excerpt indicates, he is well versed in the German school of thought. Therefore: *'Maailmankuva'* = *'Weltbild'*, *'Maailmankatsomus'* = *'Weltanschauung'*. All the Italics added by the author.

beyond its description “b”, it requires “philosophical decision making” (Niiniluoto, 1984, p. 86). As said previously: a *Weltanschauung* includes a philosophical endeavour of ‘conceptualising, justifying and evaluating approaches to different phenomena’ (ibid., p. 6). Therefore, a scientific *Weltanschauung*, for example, includes a scientific *Weltbild*, but may also include ‘science-based philosophical generalisations’ (ibid., p. 88). Finally, he argues that scientific studies should include also philosophical investigation to reach understanding of a, b and c, in order that one might also understand the meaning of scientific results for one’s worldview (ibid., p. 91). Indeed, in this sense, Helena Helve, who has focused her empirical studies on worldviews for over 40 years, has consistently shared a similar perception to Niiniluoto (Helve, 1993; 2015). To her, a ‘worldview’ is essentially a philosophical conception and an art and does not equate with ‘religion’, even if the contemporary use in Finland has seemed to blur these concepts. Helve further argues that worldview has affective, social, conative, cognitive and cultural dimensions (Helve, 2015). In sum, this can be considered as describing the traditional way that ‘worldview’ has been perceived in Finland.

At the same time as Niiniluoto’s conception of *Weltanschauung* gained traction, in Finland an alternative subject for religion for students who are not religiously affiliated was devised. In 1985 Finnish a subject traditionally translated as Secular Ethics (*‘Elämäkatsomustieto’*) was developed (the translation in German would perhaps be *‘Kenntniss der Lebensanschauung’*). This subject established in the curriculum has been referred to in English by several names: ‘Ethics’, ‘Secular Ethics’, ‘Life Stance Education’, and recently and officially ‘Culture, Worldview and Ethics’ (Salmenkivi, Kasa, Putkonen & Kallioniemi, 2022). The foundations of the subject are (secular) humanism, philosophy and human rights. In connection with this development since the 1990s, the prefix *‘katsomus’* (*‘Anschauung’*, but not in the meaning of intuition) was used in Finnish when indicating the subjects of Religion and Ethics in Finland. To be exact, these subjects, along with the subject of Philosophy – taught in upper secondary school – constituted since the early 1990s a subject group called *‘(Welt)anschauung subjects’* (*‘Katsomusaineet’*). While this grouping aligned with Niiniluoto’s definition, in the curriculum of 2003 (FNAE, 2003) Philosophy was dropped from this group (Salmenkivi, 2014). However, already in the 1950s the subject of Religion and the predecessor for ‘Secular Ethics’, ‘History of Religion(s) and Ethics’ (*‘Uskontojen historia ja siveysoppi’*), had been referred to in educational policy as ‘Instruction aiming at a *Lebensanschauung’* (*‘elämäkatsomukseen tähtäävä opetus’*) (KM 1952; 3, 64; Salmenkivi, 2013, 2014; Saxell, 2013), although this predates the comprehensive school and upper secondary education reform that occurred in the 1970s. In short, that reform made basic education uniform throughout Finland and reinstated both subjects in the curricula.

Finally, it should be noted that in the 2010s several researchers, especially from the University of Helsinki, started increasingly to use the English translations ‘worldview education’ or ‘religion and worldviews education’ (Kavonius, 2021) in their works to refer to instruction covering the subjects of both Religious Education and Ethics. Customarily, these had been referred to simply as ‘Religious Education’ or as ‘Religious Education and Ethics’ (*katsomusopetus*). Also, in 2020, the Finnish early childhood education term ‘Worldview Education’ (*katsomuskasvatus*) was used in curriculum texts to refer to education in general concerning religions, worldviews and values.

3. The appeal of worldviews today

Despite the existence and use of the concept of ‘worldview’ in Finnish educational discourse and its increase in the 1980s, it was not until the 2010s that ‘worldviews’ became a dominant concept – and perhaps the sole concept – in religious education to refer to the personal (non-)beliefs, propositions concerning reality, and sometimes even religion. There can be identified several reasons for this expanded appeal to use worldviews in Finnish religious education. Connected to these reasons are religio-demographic developments of secularisation (especially in relation to Lutheranism) that became

evident since the 1960s and diversification related to and within different religions and non-religious worldviews that became apparent in the 2000s. Many of these tie with the struggle of religious education to remain a school subject, which peaked in the early 2000s with the ‘de-confessionalisation reform’ that transformed the provision of religious education from a confessional basis to being given ‘according to one’s own religion’ (FNAE, 2004): the respective religious tradition was to be shown in instruction mainly as an emphasis in content. However, many intertwined changes occurred that, on the one hand, gave rise to ‘worldviews discourse’ in religious education today, yet, on the other hand, left it without a proper theoretical awareness.

One such development is the ‘secularist framework’ (Ubani, 2019), an ideological hegemony through which issues related to religion and learning have become problematic in public education in Finland. Since the 1960s, secularism and secularisation have increasingly influenced Finnish society and subsequently the role of the Lutheran Church and religion in Finland (Sihvo, 1988). It can be argued that ‘secularism’ has been integral to thought since the 1960s, against which the subject of religious education and religion in general in public education in Finland has evolved (Ubani, 2019; Ubani, Poulter & Rissanen, 2021). Such developments have included less contact between the (Lutheran) Church and public education, omitting daily morning devotions (1960s), changing the aims of RE from the confessional (1970s), differentiation of the aims of public education (RE) and the mission of the Church (1970s), termination of pre-screening of text books by the Lutheran Church (1980s), and the cessation of Church membership as a prerequisite for teacher qualification (2000s) (Ubani, 2017). This secularist framework has subsequently served as the sole lens through which religion in public education has been viewed and addressed. The culturalisation of Lutheranism when describing school festivities (Niemi, 2017) is a case example of this. Another is the question of learning in religious education. Namely, it would be normal to expect learning related to the main topic (religion) to occur when such instruction is given. Furthermore, if the subject includes aims related to personality and values development one could expect such development to occur in relation to religion, especially as the instruction is named after a respective religion. However, this aspect has been weak for past decades in public education awareness, primarily to duck concerns about indoctrination.

Second, and connected with the above, are the developments in educational policy and curricula in how the student is perceived. A study of curricula in basic education (Ubani, 2017) indicates that notions of ‘religiosity’ or a ‘religious view of life’ were gradually dissolved, as became evident in the 1990s religious education curriculum. While terminology such as ‘obtaining a Christian view of life’ and ‘conviction’ were still used in the 1985 curriculum (FNAE, 1985), ‘worldview’ and ‘view of life’ started to become the concepts employed since 1994 to refer to the area previously considered somewhat ‘religious’. The dissolution of confessional religious education that happened at the turn of the millennium and the introduction of constructivist educational theory as the prevalent theory in curricula, educational sciences and teacher education in the 1990s created a space where a ‘closed’ or ‘religiously predetermined’ development of a given religious outlook on life did not fit in. Not only for justifying religious education in a secularist framework, but also in order to compliment the educational trends, an open structure to personal learning about religion and religions was perhaps even a necessity. Consequently, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s in the didactical literature and curricula students started to be theorised to be outside of religious tradition, instead of inside it. In short, in the 1970s the student was assumed to be a Christian; in the 1980s the student was treated as a Christian but one who did not realise it yet, so their experiences and thoughts needed to be helped to be contextualised within the language and sphere of religion; and in the 1990s the student was positioned outside of religion and drawing elements from it according to his or her choice as part of his or her worldview (Ubani, 2017). In the educational literature of the 1980s there was also a strong input, exemplified by the work of Niemi, into the didactics of religious education, teacher education and curricula drawing from humanistic psychology and humanistic education, such as the works of Viktor Frankl, Rollo May and

Carl Rogers that perhaps unintentionally ushered a foundation suitable for later de-confessionalised religious education in the 2000s through an emphasis on the existential search for meaning as the core of child development also in relation to religion (Ubani, 2017). In Sweden, this emphasis was more strongly exemplified already decades earlier, for example in the works of Sven Hartman (Osbeck et al., 2024). Nevertheless, it could be said this saw the emergence of the humanist, instead of religious, child in Finnish religious education, although, of course, the seeds were sown already in the previous basic education reform of the 1970s when the tasks of religious education in public education were acknowledged to differ from those of the (Lutheran) Church.

Following the dissolution of confessionalism, the outsider positioning of students from religious tradition in some ways rendered the religious student as an alien in the RE classroom of the 2000s. It should be acknowledged, however, that since the 2010s there has been a somewhat increased recognition of personal commitment to religion in the religious education in curricula. Finally, it can be argued that the discussion and literature on integrated instruction in the content area related to subjects of religion and secular ethics has hastened the spread of a shared concept of the personal (non-)belief space. Arguably, this has amplified the commonality of the content areas between the two subjects with respect to freedom of religion, for example, and de-amplified and perhaps even mitigated the differences between the subjects to support integration. This is also supported by the historical grouping of the subjects as *'Weltanschauung/worldview subjects'* and the existence of integrated worldview education (also termed as such) in public early childhood education.

A third key development has been in the research on religious education in public education (Ubani et al., 2021). Since the 2000s, research on religiosity in RE has been curiously almost absent in the Finnish literature related to religious education in public schools (Ikonen & Ubani, 2014; Keränen-Pantsu & Ubani, 2018), except perhaps for a few studies by German protestant scholars of religious education (Häkkinen, 2017; M. L. Virolainen, 2006; R. Virolainen, 2013), although these latter works had no impact in the field as they were rather isolated examinations from a different context than Finland. Whereas in the 1990s there was strong sociology/psychology of religion research on *'worldviews'* (Helve, 1993) and *'religiosity'* (Tamminen, 1991) and in the early 2000s on *'spirituality'* (Tirri & Ubani, 2013), little work was done to implement this in classrooms and in didactics. Instead, the didactics of religious education was headed by the educational sciences rather than, for example, theology, which arguably had dominion over the didactics of the subject at least until the 1980s. Furthermore, drawing from societal realities, it can be argued that societal pluralisation and multiculturalisation have been the constant themes of research concerning religious education in the 2000s (Ubani et al., 2021; Ubani, 2017). Moreover, interaction between religious education and developments in the academic study of religion has been quite scarce. Arguably, the connection between research on religious education and theology and religious studies – which has been weak for several decades – has only recently been re-established. In the meantime, in the curricula *'religiosity'* has given way not to *'spirituality'* (Tirri & Ubani, 2013) but to *'worldviews'*. Although, admittedly, in the literature in Finland of the past decade the use of term worldview in religious education has not always been very sophisticated or cultured.

Finally, there is also other appeal to using *'worldviews'* to refer to the personal belief space of an individual in public education in Finland that also fits with the conceptions of the individual, religion, and values in the secularist framework. The usage meets the public education ideals of the West. Arguably, *'worldview'* has an individualistic, rationalistic Enlightenment connotation similar to and fitting with basic tenets of Western public education: humanism, criticality, and knowledge (Thalén, 2021). It is a concept born in Europe through a certain historical and conceptual process, the common denominators of which are, arguably, humanism and the Enlightenment. While it should be noted that it is indefinite whether humanism originally included much of a *'common philosophical doctrine, except a belief in the value of man and the humanities and in the revival of ancient learning'* (Kristeller,

1961, p. 22), its ideals have nonetheless without question fashioned education and its philosophy throughout the West (Peters, 2015). Scholars such as Mann (2004) have attributed the emergence of ‘humanism’ as a substantive practice as late as the early 1800s in Germany, referring to a ‘devotion to the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, and the humane values that may be derived from them’ (Mann, 2004, p. 2; Peters, 2015, p. 1130). It was then used to refer to ‘classical education in general’ and ‘classical learning’ (Giustiniani, 1985, p. 173; Peters, 2015). It was this German meaning that spread to many countries (Giustiniani, 1985), also to Finland and its educational thought (Harva, 1983). In Finland, this humanism, although in different actualisations, has continued to be part of the value base and conception of the human throughout basic education since the educational reform of the 1970s, but was already present in the 1800s when establishing the Finnish state-based educational system (Hakaste, 1993; Kuikka, 1999). Essentially, moving to a worldview paradigm in religious education in Finland means giving in to the humanistic conceptions of what it is to be human and of human knowledge of the ‘West’ and of Western public education. In essence, religious education has adopted the foundations of its parallel secular subject, Ethics.

4. Contextual reflections on current problems with regard to worldviews in religious and worldviews education

Acclimatisation to the use of worldviews has been quite swift in Finnish educational policy and literature during the past decades due to the aforementioned historical and contextual developments that enabled the demand for and emergence of worldviews as a pinnacle concept in religious education in Finland. Yet there still remain several open questions with regard to the nature of worldview education in public education in Finland. Instead of dividing these questions here contextually into educational practice, teacher education and curricula, my approach is topical. I regard the following four key questions as fundamental issues to be solved first. In my view, educational practice, teacher education and curricula are mere contexts in which key issues can be solved in alignment with the foundational positions taken in these four questions. Moreover, I consider the four key questions presented to be generally applicable and not unique to the Finnish context.

4.1 What is the relationship between the concepts ‘religion’ and ‘worldview’?

The first question concerns how the relationship between religion and worldview (or worldviews in the plural) is perceived. Currently, in the Finnish educational literature on religion and worldviews the concepts of ‘religion’ and ‘worldviews’ are used in different ways, relationally: sometimes the latter is used to indicate non-religious worldviews, sometimes ‘religion’ is understood as content against which ‘individual’ worldview development takes place, and sometimes worldviews is even meant to include religion. These relational meanings of the terms may be a necessity, but they make the term ‘worldview(s)’ fuzzy (Freathy & Davis, 2019). In their comment report to the CoRE document in the UK, Benoit, Hutchings, and Shillitoe (2018) listed several questions with regard to the relationship between ‘religion’ and ‘worldview’ that highlight the need for further elaboration:

- Is worldview used as inclusive of religion and non-religion, or as alternative to religion referring to non-religion only?
- Should a clear distinction between religious and non-religious worldviews be made and how to account for the dialectic relationship between them?
- To what extent is religion informing the concept of worldview?
- To what extent is worldview a Western and Christian construct?
- Are worldviews constructed as static, fixed and unitary entities or fluid, changing processes?
- Does worldview refer to institutional/organised/systematic ‘isms’ or to the personal/individual, or both?

- Does worldview refer to cognitive/belief/truth side or the existential/experiential/emotional aspects or both? Does it include un-reflected aspects? (Benoit et al., 2018)

These questions by Benoit, Hutchings, and Shillitoe are fundamental and cross-culturally relevant questions to be addressed when discussing worldviews in religious education. These questions also show how potentially ambiguous the use of 'worldviews' in the literature can be. However, without solving the relationship between the concepts, their use and application to pedagogical practice will remain inconsistent.

4.2 What are the roles of 'religion' and 'worldviews' in learning?

The second question concerns the role of religion and worldviews in learning. Connected with the first question, how we are to regard the student and the content matter in relation to religion is still an open question in Finland. How the 'religiosity' of one's personal (non-)belief space is looked at will differ depending on the context. However, if one is to accept a Western individualistic and rationalistic conception of the human being deriving from the Enlightenment (Thalén, 2021), as most Western educational contexts to some extent do, then emphasising 'personal worldview' (van der Kooij, de Ruyter & Miedema, 2013) when depicting this personal and conscious (non-)belief space concerning reality would seem plausible. This is the route Finnish religious education has embarked upon by placing the student outside of religion, fostering personalised worldviews, and studying religion often as an object. For example, in public education one should question whether it is rather a dialogue of worldviews that the student engages with rather than inter-religious dialogue (which easily assumes one to be a representative or typical example of a given religion). Students (as do assumedly most, if not all, people) use various sources and materials as part of their worldviews, including 'religious' sources that are understood to have a transcendental or institutional reference point, for example. In instruction, this shift would mean relinquishing religion in favour of worldviews on one hand, but on the other hand implementing and examining the category of religion as an object of study both 'outside of me' but also 'in me' for the students. Perhaps individualised religion would not be lost? However, in Finland, as this religion 'in me' aspect has been lacking especially in the first decade of the 2000s, at worst, 'worldview' may amplify this problem concerning individualised personal religiosity through conceptual reductionism.

4.3 What is the disciplinary basis for worldviews in learning and instruction?

The third question focuses on the disciplinary basis for worldviews. Without a careful distinction between the concepts of religion and worldview, there is a danger that a weak and incoherent disciplinary basis for education about religion will emerge. This will translate to weak education. With religion as an object or category to be studied there exists a clear disciplinary basis in the academic study of religion in theology, religious studies, contemporary study of religion, and interdisciplinary study of religion (Freathy & Davis, 2019; Ubani, 2023). However, with worldviews the tradition is different. The disciplinary basis for worldviews can be identified as philosophy and (soft) psychology (and admittedly perhaps systematic theology). This is also why 'worldviews' is insufficient for understanding 'religion' as a phenomenon and a category: it is unable to identify aspects of religion from and conceptualise religion in terms of those disciplines, if its disciplinary basis is even identified! After all, is not 'worldviews' often associated with philosophy of life or personal conceptions? If we are indeed to study religion as worldviews, this surely is possible, but it lacks the sensitivity to nuances and aspects of religion cultivated through centuries in academic institutions – the institutions with the very mandate to do so in the Western context regarding a phenomenon identified in a Western context. Therefore, the disciplinary basis provides more of a reason to use 'worldview' to refer to the personal (non-)belief space (in a Western sense) and some aspects of religion (through Western categories), instead of using

it as an overarching concept in religious education. However, in Finland discussion on the disciplinary basis of worldviews has not even started and the memory and significance of Niiniluoto's universally accepted conceptualisation seems to have waned.

4.4 What actually is learning concerning worldviews?

The fourth question concerns our understanding of learning and of worldviews. The question of 'education' and religion/worldviews is in itself an integral question (Biesta & Hannam, 2020). But if narrowed to the descriptions of worldview education, there are some conceptual discrepancies in how 'worldview education' is being understood in Finland and internationally. At present, it can refer to many things. Essentially, worldview education can refer to a model for giving instruction, instruction focusing on content related to worldviews, or an object of learning and education that somehow aims to develop the person's worldview. However, first of all, learning concerning worldviews faces a need for similar distinctions to the conceptualisations of learning concerning religion: namely whether it is learning into a worldview, learning about worldview(s), or learning from the worldview(s) we are focusing on.

worldview education form of instruction	model	school subject	topic	(all education in general)
worldview and religion	worldview(s) as a part of religion	worldview(s) equal with religion/religiosity	worldview(s) overarch religion	worldview(s) exclude religion
learning in worldview education	learning into	learning about	learning from	
worldview assumptions	closed-open	static-dynamic	inclusive-exclusive	

Table 1. Sketch of aspects to review regarding worldview education conceptions.

Further, to foster a common understanding of worldview education in religious education, at minimum four aspects should be clarified (Table 1). It should be clear whether one is talking about: a) worldview education as a form of instruction (model, school subject, topic, education in general), b) the relationship of worldview with religion (is it part of religion, equivalent to religion, or overarching religion) or c) its objective (learning into, learning about, learning from). Moreover, even in the assumptions regarding worldview development there are important nuances: whether the student is considered to have a 'closed' worldview (of one religion) or an 'open' one (from many sources) and whether it is 'static' so that the development occurs within the identified worldview or 'dynamic' so that changes and movement in one's positionality are assumed rather than a fixed, although cultivating, position. In addition it should, of course, be clarified whether worldviews are developed inclusively (supporting different kinds of worldviews) or exclusively (supporting one worldview). These could be considered as: d) the worldview assumptions underpinning educational policy and practice. In Finland, current usage of the concept is too vague for education concerning worldviews (and religion) to be aligned and coherent.

5. Concluding remarks

The emergence of ‘worldviews’ as a central concept in religious education in Europe, the Nordic countries and in Finland during the last decades seems to indicate similar societal developments with regard to religion, individualisation and secularisation. The tradition in the educational system of each country has a distinctive trajectory and legislative basis. These countries also differ in terms of their curricular spaces for religious education, the characteristics of the subject, and what topics the development of worldview is related to. While the conditions in each country differ to some extent, the adoption of ‘worldviews’ as a central concept and perhaps even paradigm bears resemblance across contexts. This is likely connected to similar developments in religious demography and secularisation – developments that are also present in the arguments for worldview education instead of religious education in other countries.

One such development is the pressing question of integrated religious education in countries that have had up until now a separative system. This can be seen as a fifth question subsuming all of the other key questions addressed here. Laying aside the political rhetoric, safeguarding of privileges and demands for recognition often surrounding and overwhelming the public debates on religious education, the starting point of such discussion should always be the projected aims of such instruction. The key questions of ‘What is the relationship between the concepts “religion” and “worldview”, ‘What are the roles of “religion” and “worldviews” in learning?’, ‘What is the disciplinary basis for worldviews in learning and instruction?’, and ‘What actually is learning concerning worldviews?’ are to be addressed first, as the solutions to these questions will, in principle, offer the means to solve the fifth question. This fifth question I would narrow down to ‘What are the dynamics of religion and worldviews in integrated instruction?’ In Finland, we are still working on finding an informed consensus on this question, for a large part due to the historical and contextual developments described above that contribute to the current conceptual confusion and theoretical imprecision with regard to religion and worldviews in education.

There are certainly both merits and complications related to the conceptual shift to ‘worldviews’, and it would be farfetched to assume that similar problems and challenges with regard to the concept of worldviews would not be present across many countries. The elements of disconnect, discontinuity and disintegration in the Finnish context will thus likely resonate with many others. Thus, if the problems are shared, perhaps similar solutions could be searched for, found and applied collaboratively across a variety of contexts.

References

- Åhs, Vesa (2020). *Worldviews and Integrative Education: A Case Study of Partially Integrative Religious Education and Secular Ethics Education in a Finnish Lower Secondary School Context*. <http://hdl.handle.net/10138/318126>
- Alberts, Wanda (2007). *Integrative Religious Education in Europe: A Study-of-Religions Approach*. De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110971347>
- Benoit, Céline; Hutchings, Tim & Shillitoe, Rachael (2018). *Worldview. A multidisciplinary report*. Religious Education Council of England and Wales. <https://religioueducationcouncil.org.uk/rec/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/5-REC-Worldview-Report.pdf>
- Biesta, Gert; Aldridge, David; Hannam, Patricia & Whittle, Sean (2019). *Religious Literacy: The way forward for religious education? A Report Submitted to the Culham St Gabriel's Trust*.

- <https://www.reonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Religious-Literacy-Biesta-Aldridge-Hannam-Whittle-June-2019.pdf>
- Biesta, Gert & Hannam, Patricia (2020). *Religion and Education: The Forgotten Dimensions of Religious Education?* Brill.
- Bråten, Oddrun M. H. (2022). Non-binary worldviews in education. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 44(3), 325–335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1901653>
- Cambridge Dictionary. (2024, October 2). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
- Erricker, Clive & Erricker, Jane (2000). *Reconstructing Religious, Spiritual and Moral Education*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203349724>
- Erricker, Clive; Sullivan, Danny; Ota, Cathie; Erricker, Jane & Logan, John (1994). The Development of Children's Worldviews. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 15(2), 3–6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361767940150201>
- FNAE. (1985). *National core curriculum for basic education 1985*. Finnish National Agency for Education.
- FNAE. (2003). *National core curriculum for upper secondary education 2003*. Finnish National Agency for Education.
- FNAE. (2004). *National core curriculum for basic education 2004*. Finnish National Agency for Education.
- FNAE. (2016). *National core curriculum for basic education 2014*. Finnish National Agency for Education.
- Freathy, Rob & Davis, Anna (2019). Theology in multi-faith Religious Education: a taboo to be broken? *Research Papers in Education*, 34(6), 749–768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2018.1550802>
- Giustiniani, Vito R. (1985). Homo, Humanus, and the Meanings of "Humanism." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 46(2), 167–195. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2709633>
- Hakaste, Saara (1993). The Development of Co-Education in Finland during the 19th Century and Some Points of Comparison in Neighboring Countries. *Koulu Ja Menneisyys*, 31, 122–136.
- Häkkinen, Martti (2017). *Symbolit uskonnonopetuksessa*. Peter.
- Harva, Urpo (with Werner Söderström osakeyhtiö) (1983). *Inhimillinen ihminen Homo humanus: Humanistisia tarkasteluja*. WSOY.
- Helve, Helena (1993). *The world view of young people: A longitudinal study of Finnish youth living in a suburb of metropolitan Helsinki*. Suomalainen tiedeakatemia.
- Helve, Helena (2015). A longitudinal perspective on worldviews, values and identities. *Journal of Religious Education*, 63(2), 95–115. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-016-0021-5>
- Ikonen, Essi & Ubani, Martin (2014). Spiritual sensitivity in the classroom: a teaching experiment in Finnish upper secondary religious education. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 19(2), 69–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2014.909387>
- Jerusalem, Wilhelm (1926). *Filosofian alkeet*. WSOY.
- Kansakoulun opetussuunnitelmakomitean mietintö. II: Varsinaisen kansakoulun opetussuunnitelma*. (1952). Valtioneuvosto.
- Kant, Immanuel (1986). *The critique of judgement* (Repr.). Clarendon.
- Kavonius, Marjaana (2021). *Young people's perceptions of the significance of worldview education in the changing Finnish society*. University of Helsinki.
- Keränen-Pantsu, Raili & Ubani, Martin (2018). The holistic and spiritual relevance of Bible stories among Finnish 10-year-old pupils: a classroom case study. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 23(2), 136–151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2018.1449736>
- Kristeller, Paul O. (1961). *Renaissance thought: The classic, scholastic, and humanistic strains*. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb01279.0001.001>
- Kuikka, Martti T. (1999). Humanism in Schoolpolicy in Finland after 1945. *Koulu Ja Menneisyys*, 37, 26–31.
- Mann, Nicholas (2004). The origins of humanism. In Jill Kraye (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (pp. 1–19). Cambridge University Press.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. (2024, October 2). <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

- Niemi, Pia-Maria (2017). Students' experiences of social integration in schoolwide activities—an investigation in the Finnish context. *Education Inquiry*, 8(1), 68–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2016.1275184>
- Niiniluoto, Ilkka (1984). *Tiede, filosofia ja maailmankatsomus: Filosofisia esseitä tiedosta ja sen arvosta / Ilkka Niiniluoto*. Otava.
- Osbeck, Christina; Kärnebro, Katarina; Lilja, Annika & Sporre, Karin (2024). Children's existential questions and worldviews: possible RE responses to performance anxiety and an increasing risk of exclusion. *Journal of Religious Education*, 72(1), 51–72. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-023-00219-8>
- Peters, Michael A. (2015). The Humanist Bias in Western Philosophy and Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 47(11), 1128–1135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2014.991497>
- Rothgangel, Martin; Skeie, Geir; Jäggle, Martin; Klutz, Philipp & Solymar, Mónica (2014). *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 3: Northern Europe*. V&R Unipress. <https://doi.org/10.14220/9783737002738>
- Salmenkivi, Eero (2013). Elämäkatsomustieto ja katsomusaineiden opetus. *Humanisti*, 3–4, 10–14.
- Salmenkivi, Eero; Kasa, Tuija; Putkonen, Niina & Kallioniemi, Arto (2022). Human rights and children's rights in worldview education in Finland. *Human Rights Education Review*, 5(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.4456>
- Saxell, Heta (2013). Uskonnonhistoriasta ja siveysopista elämäkatsomustiedon opetukseen. *Humanisti*, 1, 11.
- Sihvo, Jouko (1988). Religion and Secularization in Finland. *Social Compass*, 35(1), 67–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003776868803500106>
- Steinthal, Heymann (1868). Das Epos. *Zeitschrift Für Völkerpsychologie Und Sprachwissenschaft*, 5, 1–57.
- Tamminen, Kalevi (1991). *Religious development in childhood and youth: an empirical study*. Suomalainen tiedeakatemia.
- Thálen, Peder (2021). World View Instead of Religion? In Olof Franck & Peder Thálen (Eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age: Case Studies from Europe* (pp. 157–178). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tirri, Kirsi & Ubani, Martin (2013). Spirituality and Education in Finland: Meeting the Socio-Demographic Changes with Empirical Research. In *Global Perspectives on Spirituality and Education*. Routledge.
- Ubani, Martin (2017). Contextualising the contribution of RE scholarly communities to the development of RE didactics in Finland over recent decades. *Nordidactica*, 1, 87–.
- Ubani, Martin (2019). Religion and multiculturalism in Finnish public schools. The secularist – culturalist transition. In Martin Ubani, Inkeri Rissanen, & Saila Poulter (Eds.), *Contextualising dialogue, pluralism and secularisation. Religion in Finnish public education* (pp. 105–126). Waxmann.
- Ubani, Martin (2023). Theologies, Religion and Literacy. Towards Socially Sustainable Religious Education? In Liam Gearon, Arniika Kuusisto, Saila Poulter, Auli Toom & Martin Ubani (Eds.), *Religion and Worldviews in Education – The New Watershed* (pp. 134–148). Routledge.
- Ubani, Martin; Poulter, Saila & Rissanen, Inkeri (2021). Transition in RE in Finland. In Olof Franck & Peder Thalén (Eds.), *Religious Education in a Post-Secular Age: Case Studies from Europe* (pp. 99–122). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47503-1_6
- Ubani, Martin & Tirri, Kirsi (2014). Religious Education in Finnish Schools. In Martin Rothgangel, Martin Jäggle & Geir Skeie (Eds.), *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 3: Northern Europe* (pp. 99–120). Waxmann.
- van der Kooij, Jacomijn C.; de Ruyter, Doret J. & Miedema, Siebren (2013). “Worldview”: The Meaning of the Concept and the Impact on Religious Education. *Religious Education*, 108(2), 210–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2013.767685>
- Vidal, Clément (2012). Metaphilosophical Criteria for Worldview Comparison. *Metaphilosophy*, 43(3), 306–347. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9973.2012.01749.x>

- Virkkunen, T. P. (1956). *Uskonnonopetuksen perusongelmia*. Suomalainen teologinen kirjallisuusseura.
<https://www.martinkirja.fi/p/virkkunen-1956-uskonnonopetuksen-perusongelmia/>
- Virolainen, Marja L. (2006). *Yksilöllisyys ja yhteisöllisyys K. E. Nipkowiin uskonnonpedagogisen teorian kehityksessä 1960-1990*. Marja Leena Virolainen.
- Virolainen, Reijo (2013). *Kurt Frörin käsitys evankelisesta kasvatuksesta Saksassa 1930-luvulta 1960-luvulle uskonnonpedagogiikan näkökulmasta*. Joensuun yliopisto.

Newspapers

- Kirjallinen kuukauslehti* 1869, nr 2, 1.2.1869.
- Kirjallinen kuukauslehti*, nr 10, 1876.
- Työmies* 1904, nr 1, 7.7.1904.
- Uusi Suometar*, nr 92. 8.11.1869.
- Uusimaa*, 1904, nr 126, 7.11.1904.