Voices and Perspectives in Norwegian Pupils' Work on Religions and World Views: A Diachronic Study Applying Sociocultural Learning Theory

Elisabet Haakedal (Email: elisabet.haakedal@uia.no)

Faculty of Humanities and Education, University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway

This article researches work by four pupils in a diachronic collection of Norwegian primary school workbooks. Given signs of a variety of voices and perspectives in chosen representations of central tenets and/or practices in religions and philosophical traditions, how can an analysis and discussion of a few chosen texts shed light on their authors', i.e. the pupils', (self-) formative modes of encountering the diverse voices and perspectives? The pupils' expressions are discussed by staging an interaction between inductively analysed elements in the source material and theoretical points from sociocultural learning theory. The theoretical concepts of 'mediated action', 'voice', 'multivoicedness', 'dialogicality', 'speech genre' and 'privileging' are particularly suitable. Interpretive results: Two pupils, working in the 1980s and early 1990s, have been engaged in inner dialogue with authoritative texts and voices, including teachers' decisions for the learning situations. One pupil's work (the mid 1990s) shows grappling with the many diverse insider voices in her textbook. Another pupil's work (2008/2009) has traces of a structural privileging of the perspective of the 'objective outsider' while also signalling inner dialogic reflection.

Keywords: Pupils' work in religious education; Authoritative voices and dialogic reflection; Multivoicedness in pupils' religious education texts.

Introduction and research issue

The main object of this research is four pupils' individual work found in a diachronic collection of Norwegian religious education (RE) workbooks. Such books are used primarily for solving tasks given by the teacher. The task wording is often traceable in a textbook. The criteria for the selection of solved tasks are closely related to the research question: Given signs of a variety of voices and perspectives in chosen representations of central tenets and/or practices in religions and philosophical traditions, how can an analysis and discussion of a few chosen texts shed light on their authors', i.e. the pupils', (self-) formative modes of

encountering the diverse voices and perspectives? Sociocultural learning theory (in contrast e.g. to developmental stage theory) seems promising for this issue which involves a discussion of traces of 'authoritative texts'. The notion of (self-) formative modes indicates a view of pupils both as reflective agents and as learners formed by institutional structures.

The concepts of voice and perspective partly overlap regarding communication (e.g. Wertsch 1998, 115). Both may refer to individual and collective utterances. Both signal that meaning is transmitted from a certain point of view. However, the concept of voice carries more connotations of a reflective consciousness while perspective communicates some commonly held basic views. In figure 1, the question of voices and perspectives arises not least because there are two different representations of "the Messiah". In this article, 'sign' and 'trace' will convey a similar meaning, signalling that (parts of) texts may be quotations of other texts.

The Norwegian national curriculum of 1997 introduced a non-confessional RE for all the pupils in the compulsory school, replacing two parallel previous subjects: a Lutheran (ecumenically open) Christian education and an alternative subject called Philosophies of life. In 2008 the name of the new cultural and diverse RE was changed from KRL (a Norwegian acronym of 'Christianity, Religion and Philosophy of life') to RLE ('Religion, Philosophy of life and Ethics'), signalling a change of perspective in a more "objective, critical and diverse"[1] direction. A main reason for this was that the Norwegian state in 2007 had received a verdict against KRL from the European Court of Human Rights (Lied 2009).

Related research, source material, methodology, theory and method of analysis

While there is extensive research on pupils' work related to religion and philosophy of life (e.g. Hartman & Torstenson-Ed 2007), I do not know of any research on pupils' expressions chosen from a diachronic workbook collection. Sidsel Lied's thesis (2004) is partly built on contemporary workbook material.

The collection of workbooks used in this study (44 books made approx. from 1985 to 2009 by 15 pupils ages 7 to 12) is the latter part of a collection which was gathered mainly in 2006 and 2007. A few more workbooks were added later to increase examples of work produced after 1997. The method of collection, resulting in averagely eight books per decade, probably means that many of the pupils have a family background with active Christian

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[1] All the translations from Norwegian to English in this article are mine.

socialisation (less so for the last 15 pupils, though). Many, and not only those with an active religious socialisation, have been/are 'clever' at school.

Figure 1. Dennis' (age nine) two RE representations of the Messiah (the 1980s).

The most important criterion for the choice of expressions for a closer study here is that a pupil's work represents signs of voices and perspectives on central tenets and/or practices of a world religion or basic ideas of a philosophical tradition. The second criterion is that the pupil's work will have traces of texts found in the pupil's textbook or the teacher's handbook.

I have chosen four pupils to present a variety of 'pictures of the period'. I shall comment in detail on expressions by 'Dennis' (the 1980s), 'Eivind' and 'Erna' (the 1990s), and 'Fiona' (2008 / 2009). All the names are invented. Dennis and Eivind used the same textbook (Alfsen/ Bakken/ Jørgensen 1974), Erna and Fiona used textbooks by the same authors (Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug 1991 and 1997a). The pupils, except Fiona, grew up in the Norwegian coastal 'Bible-belt' culture, meaning that they lived or live in regions which for a century (until the 1970s) were strongly influenced by a pietistic type of Christianity (Haakedal 2010).

Methodologically I lean on 'social constructivism', however, not as a theory of reality (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009, 15-52). I acknowledge an emphasis on empirical source material and aim at a reasonable understanding of the pupils' voices in dialogue with formative and educational voices. Since the chosen solved tasks appear as texts surrounded by and encompassing a diversity of contextual voices and perspectives, I also rely on hermeneutical approaches (pp. 97-105).

The aim of this article is to analyse and interpret signs of interaction between pupil, subject matter (as in textbooks) and teacher (through texts deriving from handbooks). For a discussion of traces of multivoiced learning situations I will apply theoretical concepts from the writings of the cultural psychologist James V. Wertsch who acknowledges obvious influence from the Soviet Russian scholars, Lev S. Vygotsky and Mikhail M. Bakhtin. Both have elucidated concepts which are central to Wertsch's sociocultural learning theory (Wertsch 1991/1997 and 1998). With Vygotsky, Wertsch asserts that human speech and thinking represent 'mediated action', i.e. action which is influenced by, and influences, the cultural context it is part of (1998, 25-72). Mediated action involves "an irreducible tension" between agent and "meditational means", e.g. language (p. 26). 'Mediation' thus points to the conditions of human communication. The meditational means (cultural tools), which we use because of internalisation (including a distinction between mastery and appropriation), influence us but do not determine our actions. With Bakhtin, Wertsch applies the concepts of 'voice', 'utterance' and 'meaning'. Voice refers to the speaking consciousness. "It applies to written as well as spoken communication, and it is concerned with the broader issues of a speaking subject's perspective, conceptual horizon, intention, and world view." (Wertsch

1991/1997, 51). Human speech is per se dialogic, both as an external, relational phenomenon, and as inner speech (pp. 51-56). An understanding of 'dialogicality' and 'multivoicedness' as functions of the mind seems particularly relevant for analyses of pupils' verbal and textual utterances (pp. 90-91).

As for my method of analysis, rather than applying interpretive tools created by others (e.g. the scheme for analysis of pupils' work developed by Sidsel Lied, combining Bakhtin-inspired analytical concepts with socialisation theory, Lied 2004), I started by grappling with the traces of 'authoritative voices' (syllabuses and textbooks, Haakedal 2010) in the pupils' workbook expressions. Unlike Lied, I had no contact with the teachers of the pupils (of the diachronic collection). Lied asked her co-operating teachers to recognise two guiding principles, first, that stories of the religious traditions should be presented with a reference to the context "to which they primarily belong" (Lied 2004, 47), second, that "the teachers should ask the pupils to express their own thoughts and opinions while drawing and writing in RE" (p. 48). She also authored some of the final tasks which the pupils solved (pp. 52-53). The different methods of obtaining source material are linked to different research questions and different foci while interpreting the pupils' work.

In my analysis of the chosen work by four pupils, I first describe inductively the traces of other textual and educational voices and the signs of the pupils' dialogue with such voices. Then, in the discussion that follows, I highlight some relevant theoretical points, searching for a fruitful interpretive interaction between analytical results and theoretical meaning. The four pupils' work to a high degree covers the typical voices and perspectives in the relevant part of the workbook collection. Because of the type of source material I have used, I draw no general conclusions with regard to theoretical adjustments or developments. However, I still claim that my conclusions are relevant for RE as a field of practice, particularly when compared with Lied's research results.

Two pupils in dialogue with Christian formational voices from the 1970s

The question of voices and perspectives appears in Dennis' work (age 9) with 'the Messiah' (figure 1), from the mid 1980s. The title of his top drawing is: "The Messiah such as the Jews thought he was". Below he has written: "The Messiah as he was". The title of one of the lessons in his textbook is called "Jesus comes to the world" (Alfsen/ Bakken/ Jørgensen 1974, 44-45). The first page of this textual unit starts with a photo showing three contemporary children listening in anticipation outside a closed door. The experience of anticipation is a link between the children in the photo (with whom the pupils may identify) and a following

narrative, called "Messiah, the king the Jewish people were waiting for". The narrative may be characterised as a dramatised historical account of how "the Jews" read "the old Scriptures in the Bible" and anticipated the Messiah as "A mighty king who would free them from the foreign soldiers". While most of the Jews did not recognise it, "some people understood that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, as God had promised the world. […] For in the Scriptures it was written: 'The people who walk in darkness will see a great light.'" (p. 45). This reference to the Old Testament (Isaiah 9, 2) functions as a bridge to the last part of the lesson in the textbook, i.e. four illustrations of Advent candles, each with a summarized text for recollection. The text accompanying the third illustration is: "The three candles remind us of the time when many of the Jews knew about this king. He was to be called the Messiah and have great power." (p. 45)

In the accompanying handbook, the teacher is guided step by step in a suggested double lesson including story telling, classroom dialogue, the learning of Christmas carols and tasks of dramatisation and drawing. The task Dennis has solved is formulated as follows (Alfsen et al 1974, 64): "The pupils draw the Messiah in the way that many people expected him to look like. Afterwards, they draw the Messiah (Jesus) as he actually was."

When we know the context of the textbook and the teacher's manual, it makes sense that Dennis has not drawn any background sceneries for the two figures. His drawings probably indicate a learning situation where the teacher, in agreement with textbook and handbook, has emphasised the historical background of the stories of Jesus. We notice that the titles given to the drawings are abbreviated and a little changed compared with the task-wording. This change probably represents the voice of the teacher, sharpening the distinction between the two representations of 'the Messiah' compared with the textbook and handbook authors: The "many" are identified as "the Jews" whose attributed voice is represented as misguided. The voice giving us the true Messiah, "as he was", is not identified. It is the voice of the textbook authors, mediated, simplified and sharpened by the teacher.

Through the drawings Dennis has given an insight into his learning process. He may have been influenced by the textbook illustrator who has drawn several sketches of Jesus (bare-headed and in white garments) standing among people. Dennis, however, has depicted "the Messiah as he was" with the headgear as used by some of the men surrounding Jesus in the sketches. His genuine Messiah appears smaller and humbler than his representation of the Messiah in the imagined eyes of the Jews. The upper image evokes associations of medieval warriors or a Viking king in his royal robe. His strong hands and arms are sharply contrasted to the stumpy arms in the lower drawing. Dennis was challenged to express what he had learnt

about a mistaken expectation and the genuine appearance of the Messiah. According to the Christian RE of his time, his drawings may be taken as indications of successful learning. Dennis' work is a good example of what Wertsch means by the multivoicedness of meditational means.

Less than ten years later Eivind's (age 9, early 1990s) workbook includes a page with the title of "Ascension Day" (figure 2). Below he has written:

> 40 days after Easter. / "I believe in Jesus / Christ who ascended in / to heaven, is with / God and rules the world / together with him.
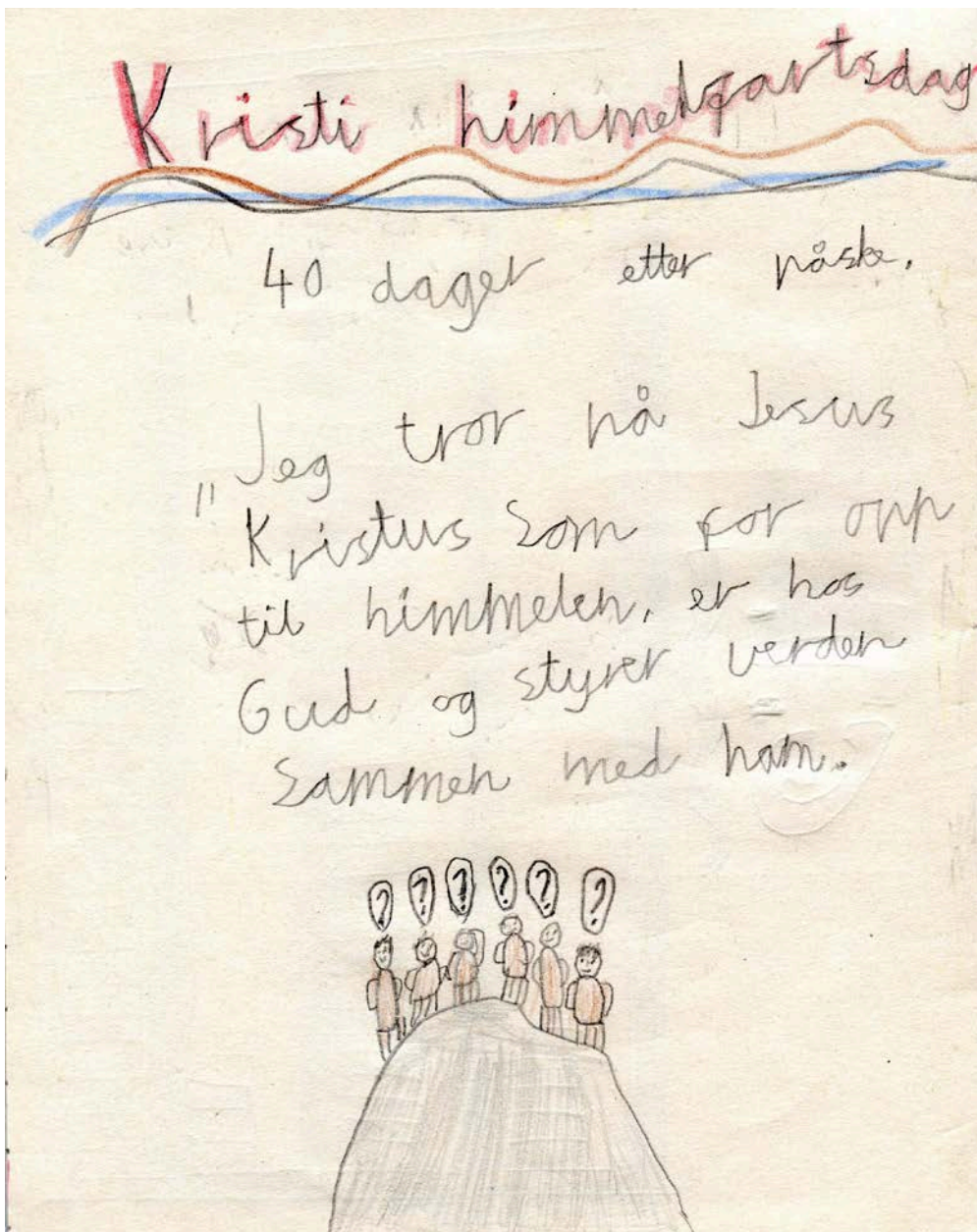

Figure 2. Eivind's (age nine) RE work on the 'Ascension Day' (the 1990s).

The drawing at the bottom of figure 2 seems to underline the bewilderment among the disciples after Jesus has disappeared. The question marks in the drawing may be an indication of Eivind's attitude to the biblical narrative. At least three of the disciples have smiling faces, one has raised a hand as a fare well or a watchful movement. The drawing indicates an engagement with the Ascension story.

What Eivind has written starts with some factual information: the Christian commemoration of the Ascension of Christ is celebrated "40 days after Easter". The following text is marked with an initial quotation mark. Then there are phrases reminding one of the Apostolic Creed. As in the case of Dennis, the teacher's handbook gives us the wording (and the context) of the solved task:

> One from the following quotations for memorization / remembering is to be chosen:
> 1. The blessing: "Bless us, God, the Father. Bless us, Son of God. Bless us, God, the Holy Spirit."
> 2. In church we say: "I believe in Jesus Christ who ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God, the Almighty Father, from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
> Explanations of words:
> Is seated at the right hand of God, the Almighty Father: Is with God, and rules the world together with him.
> Judge: Separate those who believe in Jesus. (Alfsen et al 1974, 116)

This text tells us something about Eivind's teacher. He/she has chosen the proclaiming, doctrinal quotation suggested, not the blessing. However, in stead of using the text verbatim, the teacher has decided that the pupils will copy a simplifying explanation also given in the handbook. He/she has focussed on Jesus, the co-ruler of the world, not Jesus, the final judge.

The chosen expressions by Dennis and Eivind give documented traces of teachers being loyal to the voices of authorised textbooks and handbooks. Both have left small signs of reflection on his/her position as mediator. The expressions also indicate reflective activity by the boys. Having met stories of central doctrinal meaning to the Christian tradition of beliefs (about Jesus), mediated through several voices, they themselves have taken part in meaning making, especially through their drawing.

Two pupils handling fictive insider voices in RE textbooks from the 1990s

Subject matter from world religions other than Christianity first appears in Norwegian RE textbooks in the early1990s. Erna's workbooks (age 10-12, the mid 1990s) show representations of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and Humanism. In the first workbook we find the following text below the title "Religions and philosophical traditions":

> There are five world religions in the world, Islam, Jew, Buddh- / ism, Hinduism and Christianity. The difference between Christianity / and Philosophy of life is that Christianity is people who believe in God / and Jesus. Philosophy of life is like one gets to know that a human / being is a human being and they do not believe in God. There are two persons / in our class who attend [the group for] Philosophy of Life, their names are [a boy's name] and [a boy's name]. A philosophy of life / will give questions [unfinished].

Erna's female teacher has probably introduced the theme of "Christianity meets other religions and philosophies of life" to the pupils partly by referring to the textbook (Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug 1991, 160-161), partly by initiating a dialogue with the whole class. She may have written key words on the blackboard, intending the pupils to use them in a (later) written task (Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug/ Skarsaune 1991, 198).

Erna has started her text by stating 'a fact' about five world religions. Then she concentrates on a comparison between Christianity and 'philosophy of life'. Her language shows that she is grappling with the issue. She has not copied the script of her textbook but used elements from it. She has grasped the anthropocentric perspective of secular philosophies. When she writes that "they do not believe in God", this may partly refer to an objective language used by the teacher (whom Erna thought was a secular Humanist but loyal to the Christian RE syllabus), and partly it indicates that 'they' represent a minority compared with the 'normal' Norwegian majority who are (passive) members of the established Lutheran church. Erna's reference to her two classmates, who attend the subject called Philosophies of life, may mean that the classroom dialogue has been quite specific and detailed, or that Erna herself has found it relevant. Her unfinished final sentence is another sign of an attempt to use phrases from the textbook. On the whole Erna (with her teacher) has been concerned with composing a meaningful text.

On the two last pages of the same workbook, Erna has solved three tasks, given in her textbook (Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug 1991, 175). She has chosen to study Judaism:

This religion I will tell about: / Judaism: More than 600 millions of Jews / were killed during the 2nd world war. The Jewish people / live all over the world. All together we are 15 m- / illions. A little more than 1000 Jews live in Norway. They regard / Israel as our homeland. They believe that God their god in is [the] / same god as we have but their God is called / Messiah. They say the Lord is one. They have the rules of the ten commandments / but not all. The Sabbath is their holy day. The synagogue / is their holy church. / I think there is no difference between the two religions. / Their rules and laws are a little different.

Erna does not master very large numbers (not mentioned in her textbook). The use of both 'we'/'our', 'they' and 'their' when representing Judaism, and 'we' representing the Norwegian cultural majority (with whom Erna identifies), is a sign of Erna's grappling with the representations in her textbook. It has a short general introduction before multimodal text units (of three pages each) where the narrator is a fictive child giving an insider voice to the world religion represented. E.g. 'Miriam' tells about Judaism (Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug 1991, 165-167). This pedagogical model is but briefly explained in the teacher's handbook (Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug/ Skarsaune 1991, 109). In her text, Erna does neither represent one particular voice, nor use an explicit perspective. Mainly she gives an objective, outsider account, mixed with changes to first person plural utterances. As asked for, she has suggested some similarities and differences between Christianity and her chosen 'other' religion.

In Erna's final textbook (Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug 1993, 164-167), there is first a short repetition of the voices of the fictive children, encountered in the two previous textbooks. Erna (age 12) has worked with their represented traditions, her short texts show traces of the script found in her textbook. (The handbook suggests: "The teacher may write notes on each religion on the blackboard during class discussion and the pupils copy these notes in their workbooks." Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug/ Skarsaune 1993, 148.) Writing summarily on Buddhism, for example, Erna uses a mixture of pronouns, but her changes are not as abrupt as those found in her earlier text on Judaism (see above). There is a slight difference when she is writing on Christianity, though:

Christianity / Trinity. God's son is Christ, [the] Messiah, / the saviour: Jesus. Love of one's neighbour, forgiveness and no revenge. / Jesus died on the cross to save the Christian people. / Through faith you will be saved and [you] are God's child.

Here Erna seems to be a little less influenced by the script of the textbook. Its passage on Christianity is voiced by a fictive Vietnamese-Norwegian boy. Erna has handled the doctrine of the Trinity by drawing a triangle with an eye in the centre and one word at each corner: "God", "Jesus" and "The Holy Spirit". She has represented Jesus' death on the cross with its 'saving' intention, and combined the doctrine of salvation by faith with the 'result', i.e. a believer becomes a child of God. Erna is familiar with typical Christian religious language (despite her religiously passive family upbringing). Thus her work shows signs of Christian cultural mediation. However, she has used what may be called an 'in between' solution with regard to perspective. She does not apply the distanced, 'objective' pronoun 'they' in her representation, nor the 'we' of the 'insiders'. By using the pronoun 'you', she is drawing the reader's attention. The Christian boy in the textbook (p. 167) does not use 'you'. His language could still be characterised as 'directing'. He says that "God showed his love for us humans when Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead. Then Jesus opened up a pathway to God for everyone." He also refers to the voice of Jesus (""Love the Lord God and your neighbour as yourself", Jesus said to the people.") and of the New Testament (""Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16)"), adding the biblical reference. This indicates that the textbook authors' voice is also present unless we are to believe in the fictive boy as a 'teacher of doctrine'. The voice of Erna in her text about Christianity is culturally mediated, both multivoiced and uniquely her own.

Later in the textbook (Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug 1993, 167-76) there are passages encouraging work on themes like tolerance, time and death. Such themes are echoed in Erna's final workbook. She writes about "tolerance", "the meaning of life" and about Buddhist and Hindu understanding of time (figure 3). She has drawn a broad line and a zigzag between the two first themes and the third.

Tolerance: / Tolerance means to tolerate: it is to accept that others have / other meanings, that others have a different faith, that others live / and think differently. / Tolerance will come when we learn, listen and try to understand others / without being prejudiced. / Tolerance is to show respect. /

The meaning of life / The meaning of life is to live happily, with joys, not so / many sorrows ..

In this text we may distinguish between 'others' who have a 'different' faith, and 'we' who are learning about tolerance. The distinction may represent the moral voice of the teacher and the textbook authors (p. 167). The textbook emphasises that there is tolerance among the five fictive children representing different views on many things, because they dare to be friends and to learn from each other. Erna's (teacher's) voice is more focussed on accepting differences and learning through listening while setting aside prejudgements. Erna's voice is heard through her statement that happiness is important to her.
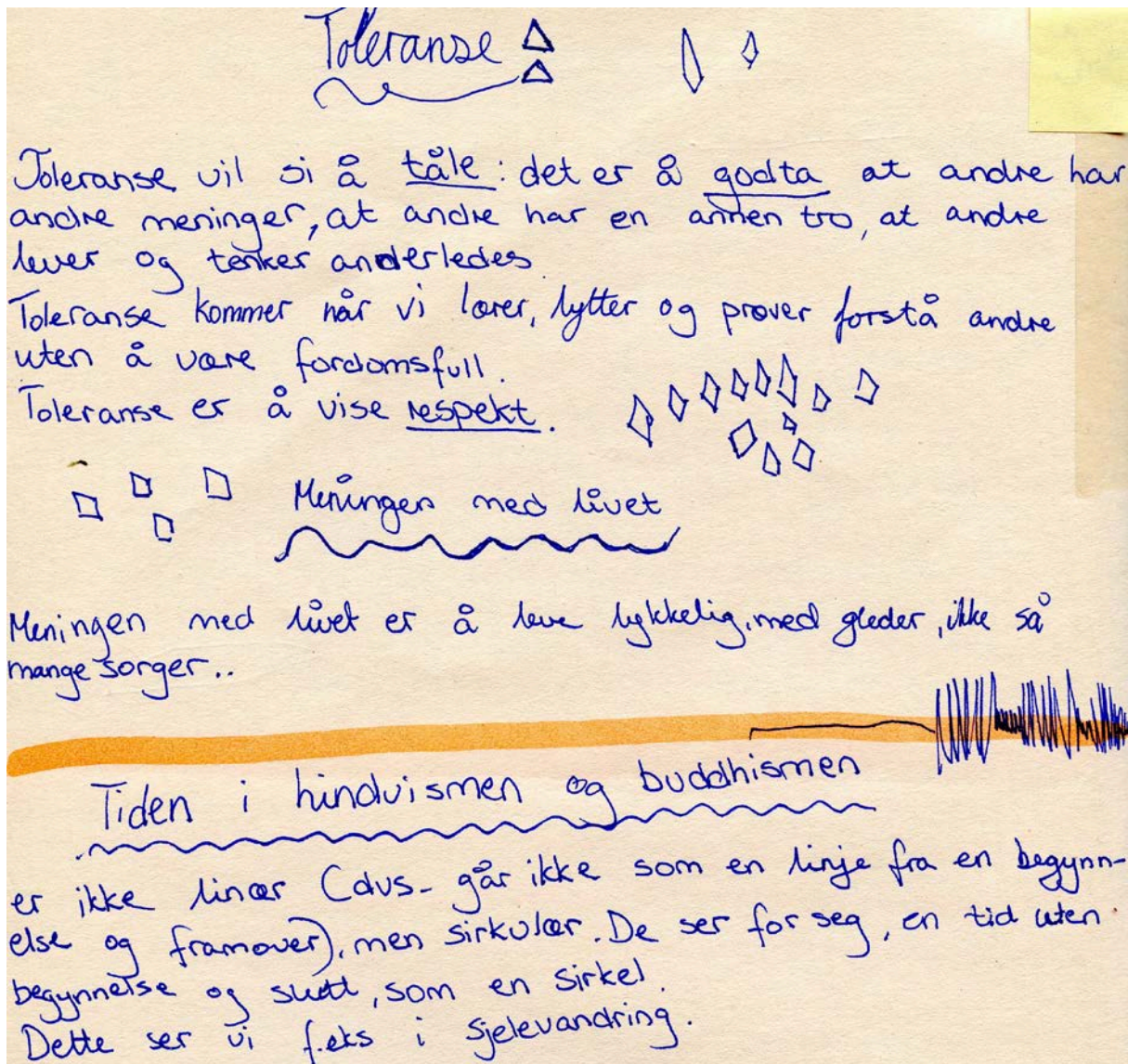

Figure 3. Erna's (age 12) RE writings on existential themes (the mid 1990s).

Erna's text on Hindu and Buddhist understanding of time (figure 3) is a mixture of sticking to the script of her textbook (p. 173: "… time has no beginning and no end") and using what she has learnt from an earlier passage in the same textbook (p. 166).

> Time in Hinduism and Buddhism / is not linear (i.e. it does not appear as a line from a begin- / ning and forwards), but circular. They imagine a time without / beginning and end, like a circle. / This we see e.g. in transmigration of souls.

Probably Erna's teacher has supplied the concepts of 'linear' and 'circular' and the recalling of the concept of 'transmigration of souls' which was italicized in the textbook (p. 166). Here we notice textbook authors' dilemma between making general summarising statements about a tradition (which could more or less 'hit the spot') and presenting a variety of voices within the same tradition.

Fiona (age 10) is the youngest informant with expressions from 2008-2009. She has written briefly about the tenets of Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Humanism as a secular philosophy of life, using one page for each tradition. The texts all start with the name of the tradition, then, on a new line, she has written the word "Facts:" Her following sentences about Islam are:

> Muslims know that God – Allah – are [or: is] holy. / Muslims pray to Allah five times a day. / The Quran is the Muslims' holy book. / They do not have priests but Imams. / Islam's most holy place is called [the] Kaba which is in Mecca. / When Muslims come to Mecca they feel that they are very near Allah.

Fiona has learnt at home that 'God' and 'Allah' is (refer to) the same. So, when her Norwegian word for 'holy' is written in plural, it is probably a grammatical error, due to the fact that she speaks three languages. Beneath the script Fiona has drawn a big book with the name *Quran* (not *Koran*, the Norwegian spelling) written on it. I have chosen to compare Fiona's text about Islam with what she has written about Christianity:

> God is near us when we pray. Christians say that they are 'god's children'. / They believe that God is near oneself when they feel good and bad. / Christians call the church God's house. / The church belongs to God in a special way. Therefore the church is a holy place for Christians. / The Bible is the word of God to human beings.

Fiona's teacher may have told the pupils to write 'fact sentences' (a phrase from contemporary Norwegian school culture). The pupils have probably worked on their own with their textbooks, as most of what Fiona has written may be traced to her textbook (Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug 1997a, 95-96). The fact that she has written sentences and not key words may be a sign that a pedagogy of classroom dialogue and blackboard notes (as suggested in the teacher's handbook, Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug 1997b, 86-89) has not been an integrated element of the learning situation. Fiona's textbook is a later version of the one which Erna used, though the title is changed and more content deals with world religions, particularly Islam, and ethics.

Fiona's 'fact sentences' show that she has used a short textbook chapter which presents the world religions and philosophical traditions from the insiders' position, through the voices of children who as a rule use the first person plural ('we') in their utterances, e.g. "We Christians say that we are 'God's children'. We believe that God is near us both when we feel good and when we feel bad." (Bakken/ Bakken/ Haug 1997a, 95). The dialogicality of Fiona's inner speech may be seen where she has rewritten some of the sentences from her textbook by simple means. Generally she has avoided the use of 'we' or changed it to 'they', thus privileging an 'outsider perspective'. The one time Fiona has used 'we', she has written a statement which Muslims, Christians and Jews all will affirm. In the textbook, a Christian child talks about his two friends, a Muslim and a Jew, and says that "We know, all the three of us, that God is near us when we pray" (p. 95). Fiona has also shown her voice when spelling the name *Quran* in her drawing. When I talked with Fiona, less than a year after she had made these texts, she told that she had thought about how she could change the sentences so that they suited her.

Discussion

I will now combine theoretical points and inductive analytical results. The four pupils were engaged in RE situations that resulted in workbook texts. How may sociocultural learning theory shed more light on the pupils' (self-) formative modes (see introduction) while encountering and working with the textual voices and perspectives? Below I will treat the pupils' encounters with the voices / texts in RE as examples of mediated action.

Joining Vygotsky and Bakhtin, Wertsch asserts that inner speech (I understand the pupils' traces of reflections and (selv-) formative modes as exemplifying such speech) derives from social, dialogical speech processes (Wertsch 1991/1997, 34, 53-54). Bakhtin particularly

underlined the social aspects of language ("social speech types" and "speech genres", pp. 57, 60-61). Solving tasks given in textbooks and mediated by teachers is an example of a speech genre. Through my analysis above of Dennis' and Eivind's texts, I have underlined the instructional texts of a teacher's handbook, which closely directs the sequences and interaction between teacher and pupils during lessons, focusing on textbook content. I have demonstrated traces of teacher loyalty towards the religious educational agenda in Norway at the time, interpreting the two boys' texts as indicators of successful learning. Mastering the Christian perspective, Dennis has depicted the humble Messiah dressed in white as embodying the true meaning of the biblical concept of 'the Messiah'. To what degree and in what ways Dennis has appropriated the Christian image and understanding of Jesus as the Messiah is another matter. Other workbook expressions by Dennis include aspects of comic and casually creative dialogue with themes from the Christian tradition.

In his exploration of sociocultural communication, Wertsch discusses Bakhtin's distinction between "authoritative" and "internally persuasive" discourse, the first (e.g. religious language or the word of a teacher) will either be totally accepted or rejected, while the second invites responses and dialogue, thus allowing changes in meaning (Wertsch 1998, 65-66). In fact, in his elaboration of Bakhtin's thinking and while referring to concepts and discussions by other scholars, Wertsch has contributed to a less distinct dichotomy between the two categories of discourse. Introducing the metaphor of "a tool kit" (expanding the concept of cultural tools), and (with Y. M. Lotman) distinguishing between a "univocal" and a "dialogic" function of texts, Wertsch seems to claim that human beings in diverse contexts and situations are through practice able to simultaneously handle the complex relationship between univocal transmissions of textual meaning and discourses where "one is invited to take the internally persuasive word as a 'thinking device' […]." (pp. 65-66, 111-117). We have seen how Eivind, through his multimodal combination of the teacher's deliberate simplification of a religious authoritative text and his own unique drawing, has communicated both a (nearly) univocal textual loyalty and his own dialogical reflection.

While Dennis and Eivind had encountered authoritative formative voices, Erna and Fiona were involved in less authoritative learning situations, encountering several fictive insider voices in their textbooks. In her textual solutions to the given tasks, Fiona most often used an 'outsider perspective'. Erna's texts often showed abrupt changes from an insider voice to the perspective of an 'objective outsider'. While discussing Bakhtin's concepts of social language and speech genres, Wertsch introduces the notion of "privileging", i.e. "the fact that one meditational means, such as a social language, is viewed as being more

appropriate or efficacious than others in a particular sociocultural setting." (Wertsch 1991/1997, 124). He gives examples from empirical research on classroom discourses where the teacher's tendency is to ignore the pupils' practical, experiential remarks and repeat their conceptually categorizing answers, promotes a decontextualized, abstract language (pp. 127-139). In Erna's textbook, the fictive insider voices are slight exceptions to the main norm of the authors' representational (narrative and simplifying) voice, cf. the ecumenically open but formative Christian curriculum in force at the time. I would expect that Erna's class had had little practice in writing dialogical texts where individual voices at the same time were to represent the normative tradition they belonged to and their own subjective experience of the tradition. I regard the introduction of fictive children's voices in RE textbooks during the 1990s as an attempt at introducing a dialogue between the narrative and doctrinal language of Christian mono-cultural formation and the similar insider voices of the 'other religions and world views'. However, the privileged norm of most modern school subjects is the decontextualized language of abstract generic concepts, the language of objective outsiders. The work by Fiona analysed above signals the privileging language of schooling. The writing of 'fact sentences' allows for little use of a dialogical style involving several insider voices and perspectives, but promotes distancing, introductory phrases like "The Christians (or Muslims or Jews …) believe that …".

Concluding remarks

In her research Lied (2004) asked her co-operating teachers, when introducing RE tasks for the pupils, to comply with the principle of privileging reflections. I obtained (former) pupils' work either from themselves or their close relatives. In this article I have inductively analysed four pupils' answers while emphasising traces of authoritative texts. Consulting a teacher's handbook from the 1970s, I have traced two teachers' reflective decisions for learning situations in the 1980s and 1990s while they were loyal to the RE syllabus used at that time. Applying sociocultural learning theory as discussed by Wertsch, I have examined educational structures, for example the promotion of the perspective of the 'objective outsider' in textbooks and pupils' writings from the 1990s. Intermingled with the traces of authoritative texts in the pupils' work, they have left signs of dialogical reflections during their encounter with the subject matter. There is no contradiction between Lied's and my interpretations of pupils' expressions: our different research approaches have thus produced partly overlapping results.

Notes on contributor

Elisabet Haakedal is a professor at the Institute of Religion, Philosophy and History in the Faculty of Humanities and Education at the University of Agder, Postboks 422 Lundsiden, N-4604 Kristiansand, Norway. She has previously done research on school rituals and religious education teachers' practices and philosophies of life.

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