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“What Are We Going to Do?”

- Teachers’ voices concerning Steering Documents, Pupils and Colleagues when it comes to planning Religious Education
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An Introduction

Background

As a teacher of Religious Education (RE) in the upper secondary school one is every so often required to sit down at one’s desk and plan a future course or term. How is this accomplished? What influences a teacher and how does a teacher decide on how to plan courses? There is of course no perfect method on how to plan your teaching; rather you are left with completing the task yourself. Also, there are many ways to go about this: teachers can plan alone or together with colleagues or pupils, one can use the course literature available for the course, there is always the curriculum and the syllabus to use as reference and, of course, your own knowledge of the subject and your imagination will set some limits for what you want your pupils to learn.

Throughout this essay, we will focus on how teachers in RE plan their teaching and how certain aspects in their environment affect this planning. The three aspects we have chosen are steering documents, pupils and colleagues. We have chosen these because we consider them to be three interesting and influential aspects which should affect teachers in their planning in some way or another to a certain degree, some more and some less.

There are of course other aspects available for consideration besides these three, there is the aspect of time, the importance of the physical frames (classroom, size of the pupil groups, school economy etc.), the course material available to each teacher and the background and education of teachers. All of these aspects concern and affect teacher planning and we were sorry to leave them outside of our research as a study of these would also be interesting to read, as well as conduct.

Purpose with Study

There are many aspects affecting the teacher of RE in his/her choice of topics when planning a term or course. Our purpose with this essay is to show how three of these aspects – steering documents, pupils, and colleagues – affect this planning and whether or not they affect the planning to different degrees. We wish to investigate in what way these different aspects affect teachers and whether or not there is a recognizable difference in the degree that teachers relate to the three different aspects.

Methods of Study

Our research for this essay has been based on interviews with RE teachers working in upper secondary schools in order for us to collect empirical source material to represent some of the everyday images found in Swedish schools. In this manner, we have carried out an inductive study with our three aspects as primary focus points in order to narrow down our research.
For this essay, we have chosen to interview a number of teachers in order to collect material that represents real school work. These interviews have been semi-structured signified by open questions (see appendix 1 or 2) and a flexible interview approach (more on this issue under Interviews below), and our research as a whole has been what Alan Bryman (2002, our trans.) calls qualitative, which means that the focus is on the thoughts and attitudes of our informants, rather than a number of statistic data. Our purpose with these interviews was to find out what teachers thoughts were on the topics of our study and how they related to these ideas. We are aware that this method comes with a high amount of subjective interpretation and that we, as researchers, have chosen what factors should be relevant in our study. However, as stated earlier, we do not claim to present a normative study or present a general view on how teachers should plan their lessons. Instead we wish to give a descriptive view on how a number of teachers plan their lessons, considering these three factors. However, since this type of inductive study merely shows what is already there, our analysis and reflections of these interviews becomes what Lars Pålsson Syll (2001) calls an “abduktiv” study, where contextual reasoning gives us the opportunity to come to conclusions regarding the results we have found. We do not claim to provide evidence of some sort, or new knowledge, but perhaps these interviews can result in a deeper knowledge of these factors and the discussions around them (111).

This study could of course have been carried out in different ways than through interviews; one of the methods we discussed while preparing the study was observation. Both classroom work and teacher team meetings would have been of interest as it would have given us other perspectives on our material, and, if nothing else, it would have been a complementing perspective to our interviews (Bryman, 175). By itself, observation would not have been sufficient to perceive teachers thoughts and, for example, the aspect of teachers’ views of pupils’ interest.

We are aware that our study is limited to a number of teachers giving their opinions at a certain point in time, and that research conducted at other schools might give other results. Furthermore this is not a study of what teachers should do, and we do not claim to make normative suggestions in this essay. This study is descriptive and qualitative and, as Staffan Larsson (2005) puts it, it is intended to “fill a ‘hole’ in the whole”; we wish to add this study to those who have previously studied similar aspects of the teacher profession (Larsson, 4). As an inductive study, our research could be used for making statements of how teachers in general plan their lessons, but we do not intend to make such generalisations.
However, we consider this study to be reliable and valid, as it is meant to cast a light on RE teachers’ situations. We think that many teachers of RE can recognise some of the conclusions and arguments throughout this essay. The teachers we have interviewed have had many different opinions on the matters discussed, even though their primary methods might not differ. Therefore, with the width that we have seen in our group of teachers, this study could be considered reliable in a general forum as well.

**Interviews**

The interviews have been carried out with ten teachers (named A - J) in Religious Education in five different upper secondary schools, three male and seven female, at various ages and with different levels of experience (see appendix 3). No consideration was made to the age factor since teachers of the same ages can have a different amount of experience in the teacher field. Therefore, we instead were more interested in the experience level of the teachers and wanted this to be varied, since we considered this experience to be an important influence on how teachers plan their courses. We considered the distribution between men and women to be representative of the actual ratio of male and female RE teachers in the schools that these teachers work and, as it was considered not to be an influence on the reliability of our study, we have made no effort in trying to adjust this ratio (Rolf Ejvegård, 2003, 70f). It was considered to be neither a major factor in our study, nor an influence on the answers given. Likewise, one of the teachers has not yet graduated, but has still worked as a teacher for eight years. We considered this teacher’s lack of a degree to be of little importance for our study, and that this issue instead only increased the width of our study and that we also recognised a voice representing teachers in Swedish upper secondary schools who have not graduated.

We carried out interviews over a period of one month between April and May in 2009. The interviews were done with only one interviewer present at the time and in private surroundings. The practical arrangements were somewhat different from one another and the different interviews took everything between thirty minutes and two hours depending on the amount of pondering the teachers needed and how much they had to say. Five of the interviews were recorded, four were merely written down and not recorded, and the last one was done via email. The interviews were done in different ways depending on that one of us had access to a recording device, and the other did not. We discussed the results of the different interviews and argued that the recording was not essential. It appeared to add little value, and therefore we did not go to any great lengths in order to record all the interviews. The last interview was conducted via email due to the teacher living further away than what was feasibly possible to travel. We are aware that this interview could also
have been conducted via telephone, however, email was considered to be the best alternative as it gave the teacher the opportunity to ponder questions prior to answering, which we considered to be advantageous.

All the interviews were transcribed and summarized, and then emailed to the teachers along with any follow-up questions in order for them to correct or add anything if they so wished, a method Bryman (2002) calls respondent validation (259). These follow-up questions were typically to develop earlier answers, in order for us to be certain that we had received all the information that our informants had to give on the specific issues and to make sure as little vital information as possible was left out. We are aware that answers given rely on the informant’s interpretation of the question and that there is always the possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpretation (Larsson, 1986, 27). Thus, the follow-up questions were an attempt to minimise this risk. Few changes occurred in the responses to these questions, mostly the teachers had added things they wanted to express and in one case one teacher claimed that we had misunderstood her and we were therefore able to rectify this mistake.

As previously mentioned, our interviews have been semi-structured, made up of a series of prepared questions based on our topics of interest, with the option of adding questions if the opportunity presented itself. We chose this method since, more than any other method, it allows us the flexibility to add questions and follow different patterns of thought that an informant presents, without worrying about following a specific questionnaire. At the same time, since we were two researchers carrying out interviews separately, we had to make sure that we both followed the same structure, that the interviews gave results that were relevant to our study, and that the specific topics of interest were covered (Bryman, 301ff).

**Previous Research**

During our study we have found some sources to be of particular interest since they bring up aspects that concern our field: teacher planning, steering documents, pupils and collegiality. We will here present work that accounts for these aspects, both theoretical literature presenting the three subjects, and previous studies that investigate the use of steering documents, pupil influence, and colleague collaboration in schools. We will not present all of our references, but a selection of the most significant ones.

Gerhard Arfwedson has in his book *Nyare forskning om lärare* (1994) summarized several studies on how teachers plan and deliver education. From these collected studies he concludes that teachers'
planning begins from a different starting point than would traditionally be the case. The Tyler Rationale, the most famous of all models on how to put planning into practice, has been used in many countries, including Sweden, and is still a popular method. To plan according to the Tyler Rationale means starting out by 1) defining goals, 2) choosing assignments, 3) organizing these, and 4) choosing suitable evaluation methods. This method is thought of as “thought-through, systematic and rational.” Despite its popularity, however, Arfwedson argues that many studies done since then (by PH Taylor among others) have shown that teachers prefer using pupils as their starting point in planning and that starting out from the goals is less common, and they rarely take up much time in teachers' planning (65).

Regarding pupils' influence on RE planning, we have used literature both on pupil’s relation to RE teaching as well teaching in general. Helje Kringlebotn Sødal has, together with several other writers, put together a book on RE didactics called Religion- og Livssynsdidaktikk (2006). They bring up six different factors that affect RE in different ways: methods, goals and evaluation, subject, the teacher, culture and, last but not least, pupils. The writers place great emphasis on the importance of knowing ones pupils. The book contains many examples of work methods and topics and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of these. It also gives advice on how teachers should treat different aspects of RE to avoid pitfalls and stay professional.

We will also relate our results on pupils’ influence on RE to a study carried out by Ragnhild Swahn (2006), who contrasts the modern curriculum with ones previously taught. Her contention is that, nowadays, the pupil should be at the centre of education and that teachers and pupils have increased freedom in the planning of courses. Swahn has, through interviews and observations, come to the conclusion that the extent to which pupils can influence teaching is partly dependent upon teachers' interpretations of the goals in the syllabi. The openness of the goals leaves room for interpretation and this interpretation could be made solely by the teacher who can then give alternatives to the pupils on how to reach these goals, but this would likely result in a lower level of pupil influence. Another approach is that the teacher, together with his/her pupils, interprets the goals and democratically decides on how they should be reached.

Clarification of Terms

Religious Education - RE

Throughout this study we will repeatedly use the term religious education or RE, a concept common within this field of research. We use this term as synonymous to a non-confessional education in different religions, which is the aim within the national steering documents for the
Swedish upper secondary school, and not as an education in any one specific religion.

**Planning**

Our purpose with this study is not to see how teachers plan single lessons, but rather how they plan several lessons, the length of a course or the whole of a term. There are many different levels and aspects of planning, many more than the three we show in this essay. Christer Stensmo (2008) divides planning into two different cycles as well as two different strategies, the first two being discovery and design and the two latter process oriented and result oriented (31, 48). These four different views represent a multitude of different ways of talking about planning, but since our purpose is neither to study the different ways of planning, nor the theory of planning itself, we shall not consider these any further.
1. The Steering Documents: A Teacher’s Guide to Planning?

There are several steering documents concerning the Swedish upper secondary school. For this study, we have chosen to focus on the three most significant to teachers as they are the three which most directly influence teachers’ every day work.

We will start this chapter by discussing what the three different documents represent and what role they fill in Swedish teaching. We will proceed by showing how the different teachers we have interviewed relate their planning to the steering documents and how they feel that the steering documents affect the way they plan their courses. In order to attain a broader view of the steering documents’ intended effect on the subject of RE, we will then present some of the topics covered by the curriculum that corresponds in some way to the aims and goals of the criteria for certificates and/or the syllabus for either course, and present how these affect teachers’ planning. Finally, we will end this chapter by discussing the steering documents and how teachers relate these documents in regard to their pupils and their situation.

The Steering Documents for the Upper Secondary School

What is what and the Purpose of the Documents

The documents gathered within the steering documents for the Swedish upper secondary school are the curriculum, dealing with general rights and obligations of teachers and pupils within the different school forms, one or more syllabi treating a specific subject, such as Religious Education (RE) and the different courses within that subject, and the criteria for certificates concerning each course. These steering documents are national guidelines, specifying “the qualitative development desired in the school” and it is up to each school to make interpretations and adapt local courses as they consider necessary (Lpf94, 10).

The purpose of these documents is to create an equivalent national school system, based on a solid foundation of goals and means of assessment (Lpf94, 4). The documents can also be used by teachers and schools when forming local syllabi and teachers can use for example the criteria for certificates both when designing the course and when assessing the individual tasks. This freedom of interpretation must, however, be balanced against the fact that the criteria of certificates and goals of local syllabi should be equivalent to the national syllabi. As expected, this presents quite the challenge for teachers since there are often many criteria within the syllabi that the pupils are expected to reach in a limited amount of time.
The Curriculum
The curriculum for the upper secondary school presents a general view of the rights and obligations of teachers, pupils and headmasters. The document also gives teachers a view on the fundamental values that schools should represent and convey (Lpf94, 3). One example is a statement that “education in the school shall be non-denominational … school is to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals” (3).

Syllabi for the Courses A and B in Religious Education
The syllabi for the A and B courses in RE set the guidelines for what knowledge of religion the pupils should have when the courses are finished, what, if any, specific aspects of the subject should be addressed, and a general outline of the purpose of the courses (Skolverket, 2009, RE1201). The syllabi states that, amongst other things, the subject “aims at providing opportunities to reflect over existential and ethical issues from different perspectives” (ibid.).

Criteria for Certificates
The criteria for certificates determine what level of development each pupil should reach in order to obtain a specific grade for the different courses. The Swedish grading system is divided into four levels: fail (IG), pass (G), pass with distinction (VG), and pass with special distinction (MVG). Teachers are obligated to follow these criteria and set grades accordingly (Skolverket, 2009, RE1201). For instance, pupils are required to “evaluate some phenomena in society which support or conflict with fundamental values of society” (Skolverket, 2009, "Religion").

A Teacher’s Guide to Planning
When planning, a teacher can use the steering documents in many different ways. Since they present both a broad picture of rights, obligations, and values, as well as a narrower description of specific course content, some can be used by all teachers, regardless of what subject they teach, and some are more specifically aimed at specific subjects.

A useful thing to remember in this context is that teachers have to be able not only to relate the topic to the course at hand, but also to motivate to their pupils, as well as parents and other teachers, why they feel a particular topic is interesting, educational and of value for the course. Using the curriculum or the syllabi for this purpose is one way to motivate and legitimize the topic of study, and in the long run, the whole of the teaching. However, teachers have to remember that each individual teacher should be able to defend and argue for the use of a specific topic and its validity to the teaching of the course, and not just “hide behind the aims of the curriculum or syllabi”
“They’re Alpha and Omega”

We have found that the steering documents stir up mixed emotions in the teachers we have interviewed. Many of these teachers express positive thoughts on the way the documents present the criteria and the aims of the subject. They argue that the documents are open and easy to interpret in different ways and this flexibility and this openness imbedded in the phrasings increase the opportunities for teachers to interpret what is to be taught. This shows “…trust in teachers’ professionalism”¹ (G) and their ability to do their job, which is to interpret the steering documents to the benefit of their pupils’ learning. This openness “gives me the opportunity as teacher to adapt my teaching to the needs of my pupils”² (H).

However, not all teachers are satisfied with the way the documents are formed. Teachers occasionally express that the documents are “difficult to understand”, “vague” (A), “set difficult demands” (B) and are “hard to interpret” (J), signalling that the documents not only help, but can hinder planning.

These views of the steering documents might seem ambiguous and we believe this might be the result of a balance within the documents between giving an opportunity to choose subjects, and the aspect of control over what teachers teach. Furthermore, the openness in the documents seems to be a cause of confusion and not only an opportunity for interpretation. Teacher G argues both sides, that there is a positive side to the openness since it shows trust in the teachers to be able to interpret the goals and criteria fairly, while a negative aspect of the situation is that it is possible for a pupil with extreme points of view to avert certain subjects and argue his/her case through these documents. Another teacher argues that if the documents were more specific, teachers would get bored and feel restricted and there would be little room for interpretation and improvisation, while if the documents were more open, it would be too difficult to interpret them and to agree on the goals and aims of the teaching. At the same time, the teacher adds, in the current situation “the openness is both a good and a bad thing: it gives me the option of getting in depth but at the same time it is frustrating since it is difficult to interpret what the criteria asks for and to be sure that you’ve covered everything … perhaps it is the best middle way”³ (J).

¹ … tilltro till lärares professionalism – G.
² … ger möjligheter för mig som lärare att anpassa undervisningen efter mina elevers behov – H.
³ Öppenheten är både en bra och en dålig sak, det ger mig möjligheten att gå in på djupet, men samtidigt är det frustrerande eftersom det är svårt att tolka vad kriterierna frågar efter och att vara säker på att man fält med allt … kanske är det den bästa medelvägen – J.
If we look at the three parts of the steering documents separately, teachers consider the syllabi and the criteria of certificate to be the most important ones. The curriculum is by many of the teachers considered to be simply a general statement about the overall running of the school and an issue concerning general guidance, rights and obligations, not something for each teacher to consider for a specific course. None of the teachers in our interviews claimed to consider the curriculum specifically when planning “it is just not as alive [as the syllabi and criteria]”\(^4\) (A), but several of them mentioned the syllabi and the criteria for certificate. Several also show certain self-confidence towards the steering documents: “when one’s been working for [thirty]… years, one doesn’t sit and read through [the steering documents] on a daily basis, it comes by itself”\(^5\) (B).

In conclusion, the steering documents present difficulties as well as opportunities to the teachers we have interviewed. The least one can say about the issue is that nobody is unaffected by it. In general, however, most teachers are positive to the steering documents and they consider them to be a useful tool when planning their work:

> They have become a big help now that I have become used to using them … it has taken a couple of years … trial and error … [now] they’re alpha and omega\(^6\). (A)

**RE-S-P-E-C-T**

The courses in RE contain a certain theoretical level of ethics, pupils study applied ethics, descriptive ethics and such, but it is also not only a study *of* but a study *in* ethics, where the goal is to develop pupils’ tolerance to others and to strengthen their personal values and opinions. The syllabus for RE A states that in order to achieve a passing grade, pupils should be able to “discuss problem situations … from a given ethical and moral way of thinking” (Skolverket, 2009, RE1201) and the syllabus for RE B states that pupils should be able to “consider different views on religion, outlooks on life and ethics, and [be] able to understand the reasons for these” (Skolverket, 2009, RE1202).

This corresponds well with the fundamental values of the curriculum stating that pupils should be given “a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility … an understanding for others and the ability to empathise”, and that “no one should be subjected to discrimination at school based on … ethnic belonging, religion or other belief” (Lpf94, 3). The primary foci of both

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\(^4\) … den är inte lika levande – A.

\(^5\) När man har jobbat [trettio]… är så sitter man inte och läser igenom läroplanen dagligen, det kommer av sig självt – B.

\(^6\) Jag har stor hjälp av dem när jag väl har vant mig vid att jobba med dem … det har tagit några år … trial and error … [nu] är de A och O – A.
the RE courses is respect and tolerance to others when it comes to religious and ethical issues. They also encourage pupils to explore their own views and beliefs and to analyse what values they possess and how these values co-exist with the society around them.

The teachers of RE that we have interviewed all feel that ethics and morals are topics that need to be addressed and included in their teaching. They all include it as, most of them agree, it is prescribed in the syllabi. With a single exception, the teachers all agree that ethics and morals should be taught, and they include this in their courses. Several of the interviewed teachers refer specifically to the steering documents when explaining why they teach ethics and morals (F, C, B, A). Furthermore, one teacher argues that it is important for the pupils to understand why people act the way they do, and that the pupils should learn to discuss ethical problems at an early age and learn to have understanding for other ideas and religions. “It is a very easy subject for spurring discussions”\(^7\) (C). Another teacher argues that “religion is a lot about the way we relate to each other and to religion itself and … ethical and moral rules that we try to live by”\(^8\) (A). Teacher D specifically talked about having referred to the curriculum in the case of grading a pupil who had problems with showing tolerance to others. Teacher I argues in the same way that if a pupil does not show tolerance to others “it is good that the criteria requests tolerance, since it gives me the opportunity to … motivate a potentially lower grade”\(^9\) (I).

**Christianity and the Other Religions of the World**

The other major topic of the syllabi focuses on the dominating religion in Swedish society, the Lutheran Christianity, and the goal is that pupils should be familiar with “the fundamental beliefs and ideas of Christianity” but also asks that pupils study and compare this with “different religions and other outlooks on life” (Skolverket, 2009, RE1201). The difference between RE A and B is in this case the level of depth asked for in the pupils’ analysis. For RE A it is asked of the pupils to merely be “familiar” with the beliefs and ideas (Skolverket, 2009, RE1201), but in RE B they are asked to be able to “document … as well as be able to discuss” the different religions (Skolverket, 2009, RE1202).

Similarly, the curriculum asks that pupils should “have good insight into central parts of the Swedish, Nordic, and Western cultural heritage” and “knowledge about the national minorities’ cultures, languages … religions” (Lpf94, 13), which corresponds well with the aim in the syllabus,

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\(^7\) Det är ett tacksamt ämne att skapa diskussion utifrån – C.
\(^8\) Religion handlar mycket om ett förhållande till varandra och även till religionen och … etiska och moraliska regler som man ska försöka leva efter – A.
\(^9\) Det är bra att kriterierna efterfrågar tolerans då det ger mig en möjlighet att … motivera ett eventuellt lägre betyg – I.
being centred on Swedish tradition, religion and culture, but also asking for a comparison between, and an analysis of, other religions (especially in RE B). It is interesting here to point out that the syllabi does not ask specifically for any particular religion to be studied, except for Christianity. The curriculum does not ask for this either, instead it uses the same type of references when asking that pupils “understand and respect other people and cultures” (Lpf94, 14).

So what topics are actually being addressed by the teachers that we have interviewed? We have already argued that these teachers in general follow the steering documents and they plan their teaching accordingly. When asked why they addressed the topics they did, several teachers simply explained that “it is required by the steering documents”10 (F, G). Other arguments were of course also presented. Teacher G explained that she teaches Christianity and Islam “because they are topical in society”11 (G). She was not the only one referring to the pupils’ everyday society in order to justify the topics addressed. From here, we move on to take a look at what the teachers say regarding the steering documents, the pupils and RE.

**The Steering Documents vs. the Pupils**

When planning, almost all teachers express that they use the syllabi to argue what their pupils need to learn and why (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, I and J) and these teachers are positive of the documents and their use in school work. Nine out of ten teachers in our study prioritise the steering documents in their planning before the pupil influence since, as one teacher explained it “the goals and criteria are what is to be reached, so that is what I have to start with”12 (G). Several others reasoned in the same way. Only one teacher did the opposite, as she argued that “the pupils are supposed to be the centre [of the teaching], it is their level I have to start from and their views I am supposed to expand”13 (H).

In her study for her degree paper “The Guide in the Classroom” (2007), student teacher Maria Norgren shows, similarly to what most of the teachers express, that the teachers she interviewed started their planning on the basis of the goals and criteria of the steering documents (40). Quite contrary to both our and Norgren’s experiences, Stensmo (2008), by analysing and comparing different researchers work, comes to the conclusion that teachers do not start their planning with the steering documents, but that the pupils’ needs and backgrounds are the starting points of teacher planning. Planning is a circular process, and teachers continually come back to the different aspects

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10 Styrdokumenten kräver det – F, G.
11 De är mest aktuella i samhället – G.
12 Målen och kriterierna är det som ska nås, så det är det jag måste börja med – G.
13 Det är eleverna som ska vara i centrum [av lärandet], det är deras nivå jag måste utgå ifrån och deras vyer jag ska vidga – H.
again during the planning. This way, pupils’ interests from a previous course or from previously during the present course, becomes guidance for what pupils will expect and enjoy in parts to come. The steering documents, Stensmo argues, do not come in until later in the planning process (51).

Similarly, a survey from the 1960's shows that unlike the Tyler model\textsuperscript{14}, which emanates from the goals of the teaching, the tendency among teachers was rather to see the pupils as a starting point for the teaching. Teachers planned work methods, content and goals with the pupils’ interests, needs and abilities as the starting point.

Even though this type of planning has been recurrent in more recent research (e.g. Arfwedson, 1994, ibid.), it contradicts our own findings in our research of what teachers prioritize when planning. Almost all of the teachers in our study claim to prioritize the steering documents with pupil’s input a secondary concern when planning a course (figure 1). One reason for this difference in research and the informants’ answers might be the focus on steering documents in research during the last couple of years.

Teachers argued that this type of prioritization is necessary since the steering documents are the guiding and conducting element in their teaching and that “they are the controlling aspect, since they are what is to be met … they are what you have to originate from\textsuperscript{15}” (G).

Another problem that teachers express in our interviews is that they find that both they and their pupils have problems understanding the phrasings or meanings of, for example, the syllabi. Several teachers explain that they hand out the syllabus in bits and pieces during the term since, as one

\textsuperscript{14} For an explanation on the Tyler Rationale, see p. 8 – Auth.

\textsuperscript{15} … det som styr eftersom det är de som ska uppfyllas … så det blir de man måste utgå ifrån – G.
teacher explains, “at the start of the course the pupils get a whole set of documents of different kinds … one just couldn’t take it … I feel that you have to use common sense” (B). Arfwedsson (1998) quotes one teacher from her study arguing that she felt “resistance from the pupils … [that] nothing seemed to be worth while” and that she herself “had a hard time with the steering documents” (87). This teacher shows that she has tried to draw her teaching on the steering documents but that this planning has collided with the pupils’ views of the subject as well as her own understanding of it.

However, this does not mean that pupils are generally kept unaware of the documents, rather, the teachers in our study often show great enthusiasm when it comes to pupils’ awareness of the steering documents’ positive effect:

“Pupils should be aware of the steering documents, the goals to aim for and the certificates of criteria … the syllabi and the steering documents should be living so that we know what we are doing and so it does not become personal” (D).

“The pupils should be able to use the criteria and grade their own work” (D).

“You have to look at the syllabus and show the pupils what it says, and follow up on this as much as possible” (E).

“The teaching should check out with the steering documents and these legitimize the teaching and show the pupils why some things are important to go through” (I).

To summarise this chapter, we find that the steering documents play a large part in RE teachers planning. Views on the documents differ, their ambiguity is often subject to debate and many teachers claim to sometimes having trouble understanding what the documents require. The aims and goals in the documents are open to interpretation, this is established in our study where we could find two major areas of for teachers to emanate from (ethics and the world religions) and that teachers try their best to adapt to them. Teachers plan their courses with the requirements and criteria in mind and these documents have much influence on topics and methods carried out within the classroom.

16 I början av kursen får eleverna en hel lunta med styrdokument av olika slag … man orkar inte … jag känner att man får använda sunt förnuft – B.
17 Eleverna ska vara medvetna om styrdokumenten, målen och kriterierna … kursplanen och styrdokumenten ska vara levande så att vi vet vad vi gör och så att det inte blir personligt – D.
18 Eleverna ska kunna använda kriterierna för att rätta sitt eget arbete – D.
19 Du måste tätta på kursplanen och visa för eleverna vad det står, och följa upp på det så mycket som möjligt – E.
20 Undervisningen ska stämma av mot styrdokumenten och dessa legitimerar undervisningen och visar eleverna varför det är viktigt att gå igenom vissa saker – I.
The steering documents are also the connecting link between the other two factors in our study; pupils and colleagues, since the documents regulate what role these aspects will have for the aims and requirements of teachers’ work.

Interestingly enough, previous research sometimes seems to differ with the results that we have found during our interviews. In contrast with Stensmo, who also presents qualitative research where teachers have been observed and interviewed, our informants generally state that they start their planning with the steering documents as their base, while Stensmo’s results indicate that teachers generally start their planning with the pupils’ interests in mind. What this difference means and how it should be interpreted is difficult to say as many factors could result in these differences. For instance, the research that Stensmo presents stems from studies done in the late eighties and around the millennium, making it at least ten years old. The Swedish trend of discussing steering documents combined with the experience of our informants might contribute to this difference in focus. Which ever explanation one would use, this discussion takes us on to the second aspect of our study: The Pupils.
2. The Pupils: A Teacher’s Source for Demands and Expectations

Their questions also raise questions within a teacher, and thoughts, one is forced to move on, think on new lines and so on.21 (B on how pupils affect her)

Pupils are a part of creating education; they are not passive bystanders but take an active part in the process together with the teachers. Teachers often have to adjust their plans as a result of pupils' thinking and acting (Arfwedson, 1994, 110). Since RE is a subject which treats existential matters, pupil conditions such as culture, interests and needs should be considered the foundation of the subject. Education then becomes a question not only about how to teach pupils the facts about different religions, but also a question of pupils experiences, attitudes towards reality and the culture surrounding them (Kringlebotn Sødal, 13). Hence, teachers need to have this information, they need to ask themselves: ‘who are my pupils?’ Teachers have their own ideas about who their pupils are and what they should be like. Teachers' views of their pupils are based on preconceived opinions which derive from their general view of people and this affects both how teachers regard themselves as well as their pupils. Therefore, as a teacher, it is important to be aware of this since it will affect the teaching (Afdal et al, 23). This chapter will bring forward examples of how pupils can be an influencing factor in the planning of RE.

What are Pupils’ Expectations?

Pupils’ needs and interests should be the foundation on which education is formed (Lpf94, 13). Children’s and young people’s interests should be the foundation of the pedagogical sector, but teachers shall also strive to make pupils interested in what they think pupils should to learn (Ds 2003, 46, 11).

As one way of increasing this interest, Geir Afdahl et al (2001, 342f) writes about the significance of joining historical aspects of religion to contemporary ones. In RE, focus is to a great extent on facts about the origin of religions and religious history. Pupils can have problems seeing how this is relevant to them and therefore, teachers must try to bring RE to life and show pupils how the historical part of RE is significant in today's society for example through values and views on life. Several of the teachers in our study emphasize this importance of relating RE to pupils' situations in matters of culture, experience and interest and we have found that bringing religious education to life is a goal for many of these teachers and something that their pupils crave. One teacher argues that “religion can easily become abstract and therefore it is very important to include people from

21 Deras frågor väcker ju frågor även hos en lärare och tankar och man tvingas att gå vidare, fundera i andra banor och så vidare – B.
the outside, articles, TV-programs ... one must always try to connect to reality”\textsuperscript{22} (E).

To make excursions to churches and temples or to invite representatives from different religious groups seems to be an appreciated method of work both among teachers and pupils and therefore it is also part of several of the interviewed teachers' planning (A, B, D, E, H, J). Inviting representatives from different religions is a good way to give pupils the chance to see religion from a different perspective to the one the teacher can give (J). A and J stress the importance of preparing the pupils before a visit from a representative of a religion and says that it is “risky and it needs to be discussed before [the visit] so that [the pupils] are prepared for what's to come”\textsuperscript{23} (J). A argues that “it is important to take ones responsibility as a teacher and to explain what it is all about ... no one simply comes in and babbles and then we leave it there … that never turns out well”\textsuperscript{24}.

D thinks meetings between pupils and persons of different faith are of great importance since this is a way to individual development, which is one of RE's goals according to Kringlebotn Sødal (13). E says that pupils want to meet and talk to people who have different views on life to theirs but who are not condemning. With the society becoming increasingly secular, E thinks religion is considered to be exotic in a way it should not have to be. Therefore it is important to have meetings between religious people and pupils to eliminate some of the prejudice that exist, and make religion something more natural. Afdal et al (2001) says pupils should not just be taught in the classroom, they need to see reality. By given the chance to visit places where religion exists RE can become more concrete (183).

In the 1960's life-related questions\textsuperscript{25} came to be an important part of education and this was a result of studies of children and teenagers' life interpretations. Carl E. Olivistam (2006) compares Sven G. Hartman's studies from 1991 of children and their relation to religion with Kalevi Tamminen's studies of teenagers on the same theme. He finds that the answers to what the two groups think of, are much alike since both writers conclude that children as well as young persons have a deep interest in life related questions, but he draws the conclusion that whereas children's questions are more centered around themselves and the present, teenagers relate these questions to the world that surrounds them and to the past and the future (50). Horst-Martin Barnikol & Rune Larsson's study and comparison of Swedish and German teenagers thoughts on RE has also shown that there is an interest in life related questions rather than questions concerning God or Jesus (1993, 95). Ulf

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{22}] Religion kan lätt bli abstrakt därför är det jätteviktigt att, att stoppa in studiebesök, människor utifrån, artiklar, TV-program ... man ska ju alltid anknyta till verkligheten – E.
\item[\textsuperscript{23}] Det är riskabelt och kräver att man diskuterar det i förväg så de är beredda på vad som komma skall – J.
\item[\textsuperscript{24}] ... men då gäller det att man tar sitt ansvar som lärare och förklarar vad det handlar om... Så det är aldrig någon som bara kommer in och babblar och sen lämnar man det där... och då blir det aldrig bra – A.
\item[\textsuperscript{25}] Questions which “emanate from relations which do not count as religious but which are common to all mankind and existential.... concerns life and death, guilt and suffering, fear and happiness” (Beskow, 2003, 11, our trans.).
\end{itemize}
Sjödin (1995) also concludes that pupils consider life related questions not connected to any religion to be the most important part of RE (34f, 113). To further help pupils realize and reflect upon their life interpretation is, according to Ragnar Furenhed & Sven G. Hartman (1994) the most important part of RE and doing this means that the teacher has to take pupils' life concerning questions seriously and show them respect. The teacher must keep in mind that although some pupils find it very interesting to listen to and share their views on life aloud in the class, some pupils are of the opposite opinion. To be aware of what is happening in pupils' lives can be of great importance when working with life-related questions. For instance, if someone close to a pupil has recently passed away, the RE teacher ought to take this into consideration when choosing the topic of discussion (158f). Similarly to the mentioned studies, several of the teachers in our study say that pupils show a great interest in studying life-related questions, also referred to by some of our informants as “the great” or “the deep” questions. One teacher says that “naturally, pupils want RE to relate to their situation in life, their time, their life”26 (B), and another argues that “many of the pupils are interested in reflecting upon themselves, their own religion and situation in life”27 (I).

Pupils’ interest in life related questions also affect teacher planning. Teacher B calls a segment of the B-course “Who Am I”, and the pupils appreciate this part of the course a lot. The purpose with this part of the course is to make pupils aware of their own interpretation of life and standpoints in different questions. The pupils interview a friend and an adult close to them concerning themselves. That way the pupil can become conscious of how others view him/her and compare this to the pupil’s own view on him/herself.

In our interviews, teachers mentioned questions such as those concerning love, sex and relationships to be of extra interest to the pupils (J, A). A has made use of these interests when deciding course content. One of the goals in the syllabus for the B-course concerns learning through working with religious scriptures, a goal that A has experienced pupils not to find very interesting. Teacher A is of the opinion that to be able to understand what one studies, it has to be something one can relate to. The problem with motivating pupils into fulfilling the goal was solved with the help from a colleague who had a material on the Bible and the Koran's view on matrimony. This way, pupils can fulfill the goals and at the same time find it interesting.

Another topic widely appreciated by pupils is ethics, according to the teachers in our study (G, H, B, F, E, and C). B says ethics is especially popular among pupils in the health care program. It is a good object for discussion, which is a popular work method among pupils of RE (C, H).

26 De vill naturligtvis gärna kunna relatera till sin egen livssituation, sin egen tid, sitt eget liv – B.
27 Många är intresserade av att reflektera kring sig själva, sin egen religion och situation i livet – I.
Concerning ethics, C says that “there are many pupils who are not religious but still have some kind of ethical reasoning … it’s important to separate it from religion too, one can have ethical discussions that aren’t connected to any religious belief”\(^{28}\) (C). G agrees with this saying “Ethics and moral concern everyone no matter what outlook on life one has”\(^{29}\).

Olivestam claims that there are three areas within RE that create lust for learning, interestingly enough they are what we have found to be topics pupils show extra interest in: life concerning questions, everyday religion and everyday ethics (2006, 154). Olivestam’s advice to RE teachers is to have these three topics as a starting point when planning RE. The goals in the curriculum can, as we have mentioned, be hard to interpret and perhaps even more so for the pupils so they need another “driving force” as motivation in RE and the three above mentioned topics can work as such (ibid.).

**Considering Pupils’ Interests**

![Figure 1: The six most popular topics in RE](image)

When asked about what topics they had addressed earlier during the term and where they thought that the pupils’ interests lay, the teachers in our interviews tended to respond similarly (see Figure 1). The six most common topics were Ethics (9), what teachers called “The major world religions” (7), Sects and Cults (6), Islam (when mentioned separately) (5), Hinduism and Buddhism (when mentioned separately, or as “the eastern religions”) (4), and Christianity (when mentioned separately) (4). Further topics were mentioned as well, but by less than four teachers, and thus they were not considered common.

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\(^{28}\) Det är många som inte anser sig ha någon religiös tro med men ändå naturligtvis har något slags etiskt resonemang… det är viktigt att man kan skilja det ifrån religion också, att man kan ha etiska diskussioner som inte är kopplat till någon religiös tro – C.

\(^{29}\) Etik och moral angår alla oavsett livsåskådning – G.
Among these less common topics we found what the teachers called “Pupils’ Own Conceptions of Life”, which only three teachers mentioned as something topical or interesting for the pupils. The teachers who used this topic in their teaching described it as a topic were pupils investigate their own beliefs and ideas and relate this to the beliefs of other pupils or with that of established faiths. It was interesting to see that only three of the teachers mentioned this topic, as the curriculum states that teachers shall “take as the starting point each individual pupil’s needs, preconditions, experience and thinking” (Lpf94, 13), the syllabi that pupils “develop their personal views on issues” (Skolverket, 2009, “Religion”, our emphasis) and that they “understand what their own values mean in terms of understanding themselves” (Skolverket, 2009, RE1201, our emphasis). This last quote comes from the criteria for certificate for RE A, but other than that, there is no distinct aim or goal in the criteria for certificates to support this general aim of pupils’ own personal development and, as much else in the steering documents, it is up to each teacher’s interpretation of the documents to include this or not.

Furthermore, we found an interesting difference between topics that teachers had addressed during the term (the most common in this category were Major World Religions and Ethics) and the topics they claimed that pupils were more interested in (Sects and Cults and Hinduism and Buddhism being the most popular) (see Figure 2). These two aspects do not seem to merge and teachers in our study seem to prioritise one thing whilst saying that pupils are interested in another. Thus we can see that teachers tend to prioritise the topics that the syllabi address when choosing subjects for their courses, rather than where pupils’ interest lies. This of course, mirrors the views presented by teachers in the first chapter, concerning the steering documents.

Teachers many times express that pupils have an interest in extreme religiosity throughout our interviews (see figure 1, S&C). Apparently, a fascination for fundamentalism exist among the pupils
and several of the interviewed teachers report that their pupils for example wish to study sects\(^{30}\) (B, C, E, I). E thinks this is partly a result of media’s portrayal of these movements, giving Knutby as one example. She also adds that she thinks it is a good topic to work with. When her pupils have had the chance to work with sects their presentations have often turned out very well. She thinks pupils should get a chance to work with this topic in both the A-course and B-course. Teacher I thinks sects interest pupils since it is a matter that concerns society and therefore is a topic that is close to them.

A says that at least in the beginning of the A-course, pupils tend to want to read about the “exotic religions” (it should be noted that A himself regards the word exotic as “a bit prejudiced”) – Hinduism, Buddhism and nature religions. He says that pupils consider these religions as “cute and kind” whereas Christianity and Islam often are thought of as “old and dusty” (A). D, H and F have also found Buddhism and Hinduism to be of great interest to the pupils. A and D thinks this interest is a cause of curiosity of the unknown. A says it also might be a case of “the grass being greener on the other side” and that nowadays there is a greater interest in spirituality rather than old firm outlooks (A). Both the interest in sects and the interest in eastern religions can be the effect of exoticism, which is a fascination of the unfamiliar, for example rituals, clothes and customs. Levi G. Eidhamar (2006) states that exoticism has a “pedagogical advantage” since pupils find it interesting and exciting and something they want to work with (114). Eidhamar further writes that there has to be a balance in the teachers description of a religion: to put too much weight on the exotic parts of a religion to please the pupils is not good since those parts are rarely fully representative, on the other hand there is a risk that teachers are hesitant to bring up the exotic parts because they are afraid to put the religion in an unfavourable light and that way not give pupils the full picture (115).

**Pupil Influence**

**“Happy Pupils Makes a Good Course”**

The Swedish school system should be permeated with democracy. Every pupil, no matter what gender, ethnicity, religious views or social background, should have a say in how their education is formed (Lpf 94, 15). Influence and participation is a human right and in upper secondary school pupils’ influence on how education is shaped is not just an option, but is expressly referred to in the Swedish Education Act (Regeringskansliet, ch. 5, §2). The school’s two missions – to work for democracy and to further pupils’ influence – are closely intertwined (Ds 2003, 46, 9). Pupils shall take responsibility over their learning and together with the teacher form their education by making

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\(^{30}\) It is not wholly clear what the interviewed teachers read into the word sect. According to the Swedish National Encyclopedia, a sect is a “religious group which deviates from a society's religious principal lines” (2009, our trans.).
choices as to what work methods to use, by what means and in what form tasks should be completed: group work or individually; in written form, in discussion groups or setting up a play etc. Both the work methods and the contents of the course should be discussed (Lpf 94, 5). One of the goals to attain in upper secondary school is for pupils to acquire the ability to make decisions which they can make use of as citizens and in their future professions. It is teachers’ responsibility to encourage pupils to make their voices heard and actively take part in the decision making in the classroom (Lpf 94, 15). Pupil influence is closely correlated with pupils’ achievements. Silvia Edling argues why pupil influence is important: “It is only if the pupils feel that an assignment is meaningful and that they have influence over the assignment that one can expect them to do their best” (2006, 151, our trans.).

The National Swedish Agency for Education (Skolverket) has carried out investigations as to how pupils feel about their ability to influence their own education in regards to course content, work methods etc. A survey from 2000 shows that pupils' ability to influence their school work has improved in comparison to the years 1993-1994. Pupils state that the fields in which they have the most influence is primarily work methods, what content is presented within a course, how much and in what form homework will be given and what type of examinations are given, in the given order (Ds 2003:46, 28f). The interviewed teachers give similar answers. It would seem that work methods and examinations are areas where the pupils have a say but they can also to an extent affect what contents should be treated. To F, pupil influence is important since “happy pupils makes a good course”\textsuperscript{31}. He gives examples on how his pupils are a part of the planning of a course:

In general, pupils get to choose how different areas should be prioritized, how much time should be spent on each segment ... [they choose] examination forms and lesson structure as much as possible\textsuperscript{32}. (F)

However, nine of the teachers say that pupils' influence is limited by the goals in the syllabi. Several of the teachers refer to these as the frames within which pupils can express opinions on what to study and how to work. One teacher says that “I welcome pupils’ opinions ... but there isn't time to do exactly everything, if you follow the steering documents and criteria there are certain things that have to be addressed”\textsuperscript{33} (E). B continues by stating that neither the pupils nor she have “total freedom, we have frames to stick to, one must make clear to them 'Here are the frames, this is what
you could do, what are your wishes, thoughts”\textsuperscript{34}. The exception to this was H who says she prioritizes pupils’ wishes over the goals of the syllabi when she is planning her courses. In her case the pupils decide what to study, with the motivation that they are “the centre of education, it is their level on which education is based and it is their views I have to expand”\textsuperscript{35}.

As we have come to understand in the first chapter, the goals in the syllabi are wide and leave a lot of room for interpretation. Gunnar Berg & Erik Wallin (1983) argues that steering documents are sent out to schools from state authorities, interpretations of these are then made by local teachers and it is this interpretation that will make up an inner limit for how the education will be shaped. This means that there is a divergence between what the goals in the syllabi say and what teachers interpret them to say (41ff). Ragnhild Swahn (2006) considers this a factor that could either limit pupil influence or increase it depending on how the teacher regards the goals. Either the teacher makes an interpretation of the goals and makes up a plan for the course or he/she presents the goals to the pupils, interprets the goals together with them and then makes a plan (140f). Two of the informants see the open goals as a chance to increase pupil influence:

There are both pros and cons with the somewhat wide formulations that can occur in [the steering documents]. One pro is for example that there is room for pupils’ requirements\textsuperscript{36}.

(G)

Of course one interprets the goals. I can choose to interpret them from what I and what the pupils have chosen or what we want\textsuperscript{37}. (C)

There is one obstacle when it comes to pupil influence on how courses are formed that several of the interviewed teachers bring forward and that is the pupils’ lack of knowledge of religion (A, B C, G). B questions how democratic she really is since the course often ends up the way she wants it to be. She explains this by arguing that the pupils do not know anything at the beginning of the course and she also adds “we think the same, the pupils and I”. D says that pupil influence over the structure of courses is somewhat overrated. She says that pupils think that it is less of an effort to let an experienced teacher make the decisions instead. G, too, sees the problem of pupils’ lack of knowledge, but says that there is a difference in pupils’ initiative to take part in decision making

\textsuperscript{34} Varken de eller jag har ju total valfrihet utan vi har ju ramar att hålla oss inom, det gäller ju då att göra klart för dem ’Här har ni ramarna, det här kan man tänkas göra, vad har ni för önskemål, funderingar’ – B.

\textsuperscript{35} Det är ju de som ska vara i centrum, det är deras nivå jag fär utgå ifrån och det är deras vyer jag ska vidga – H.

\textsuperscript{36} Det finns både för- och nackdelar med de något ”vida” formuleringarna som kan förekomma i dessa. En fördel är t.ex. utrymme för elevers önskemål – G.

\textsuperscript{37} … sen tolkar man dem förstås, och då kan jag välja att tolka det utifrån vad jag och eleverna har valt eller vill – C.
between the A and B-course. Since the B-course is often optional, most pupils have chosen the course out of interest and want to learn more about it. The lack of familiarity with the subject as a hindrance of influence also recurs in Ragnhild Swahn's study. Her case demonstrates the argument brought up by our informants. The pupils in her study express a lack of knowledge themselves and from that, teachers come to the conclusion that the pupils do not have any interest in taking part in the planning either (142).

Kringlebotn Sødal says there are many factors which affects RE and which teachers should be aware of when planning. The pupils are one of those factors. A class consists of many individuals; teachers must take every individual into consideration when planning but also make the class work as a unit in spite of the fact that there can be a big difference in how motivated pupils are and the levels of knowledge they have. This requires that the teacher knows every pupil's “level of maturity, attitudes, experiences, knowledge, cultural and religious background” (20). How then do teachers get to know their pupils and how do they adjust the education accordingly? One way is simply being attentive, A says he tries to listen to his pupils a lot especially at the start of a course, “there is always some subordinate clause that one can pick up on and develop.”

D says she lets the pupils fill in a questionnaire concerning pupils' beliefs and standpoints. The purpose of this is partly for the pupils to start reflecting upon their own views on life and relation to religion but also for her own sake. She wants to know what she is “dealing with”. She wants to know what their thoughts are and if anyone is religiously active. That way she can for example be prepared for discussions that may occur between different religious groups in the classroom. C has thought about asking pupils about their religious standpoints (this is her first term of working as a teacher) but say she does not think knowing this would affect her planning other than that she might ask them if they want to talk to the class about their religion. E says she rarely asks her pupils what they believe in but that it sometimes is obvious because of certain religious symbols some pupils wear and it has occurred that she has asked pupils who are actively religious if she can use them as “references” when treating that specific religion.

Several of the interviewed teachers (A, C, D, I, G) try to vary examination forms and work methods to accommodate to different requirements from different pupils. By doing so, pupils who are not very strong writers have a chance to prove their knowledge by orally presenting an assignment and vice versa. This answers to the demand in the curriculum stating that teachers should adapt the education based on pupils' needs (Lpf 94, 18). D says she do not pressure any of her pupils to aim

38 Det är alltid någon bisats som man kan ta upp och utveckla – A.
for a higher grade than they themselves aim for. If the goal of one of her pupils is simply to pass the course, then she will give this pupil chances to write assignments that correspond to the criteria for G. She says one must accept the fact that RE is not the main subject for every pupil.

According to the curriculum, teachers shall plan education together with the pupils (Lpf 94, 15). All of the teachers interviewed plan education in RE more or less together with their pupils. The most common way to plan a course among the teachers is either having pupils write down their requirements on topics, work methods, examination forms etc. and hand it in to the teacher (A, C, D) or that the teacher through talking to his/her pupils find out how they want to study and what work methods they prefer (B, E, G). The second step for several of these teachers is to make a preliminary plan for the term. When teacher C did her planning for the term she left one part of the course schedule unplanned and that way her pupils were given a chance to suggest different areas of interest that they wanted to learn more about. They did this by filling out an anonymous questionnaire and the area which the majority had chosen was the one the class would study for that period of time.39

**Pupil Influence through Evaluations**

The use of evaluations is a necessity since it contributes to self awareness of teachers’ practice and to raise the pupils’ level of perception regarding their own education. Pupils' experiences of and opinions on their own education can be of great importance not only for improvements of this education but also to have the pupils see their own responsibility for their education (Afdal et al, 33). Sødal (2006) thinks parents and colleagues should be involved in the work with evaluations as well (183). In our study none of the teachers brought up parents as a factor in their work with evaluations, however a few of the teachers brought up the value of having a colleague giving feedback on their work (this will be further discussed in the third chapter). Jan Anders Hedenquist (1999) claims that improvement of the level of the education is not the only purpose of having pupils evaluate the education, it is also to “develop pupils’ ability to exercise influence and take responsibility” (52).

The curriculum states that teachers together with their pupils shall evaluate the education (Lpf 94, 15). All of the interviewed teachers say that they in one way or another let their pupils evaluate their courses. Some of the teachers also add that the evaluations make a change as to how they plan their courses for the future. Teacher A claims evaluations to be one of the most important ways for pupils

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39 Teachers not mentioned in this paragraph also plan courses together with their pupils, however they did not say if they did so by discussing this with their pupils or by having pupils write down what and how they want to study.
to contribute to the shaping of RE. The most obvious example he recalls is when he got back an evaluation where a pupil had stated that he did not understand what ethics and morals had to do with RE.

That pupil had not understood a thing of what we had been doing, and I wondered why. Either it could have been because of the pupil him/herself or it could have been because of the teaching. Since then I've always started each term with ethics and morals so that my pupils will understand their place within RE\(^40\). (A)

Teacher E further states that she uses evaluations for her own edification and tries to make time to do midterm evaluations as well. It gives her a chance to “make some corrections, if something should have gone wrong”\(^41\) (E). Such corrections could concern examination forms or if the pupils think she has put too much weight on a certain topic or if pupils are not pleased with a lecturer. She says that although her pupils are mostly satisfied “there are always things that can be improved”\(^42\).

Teacher B shows an example of evaluations that are to be filled in by the pupils. By answering questions such as “have you experienced the education as meaningful … have you had the chance to influence structure” and “has education helped you to reach the goals” pupils have a chance to change things.

However, a problem can be that since most of the evaluations are carried out at the end of a course, changes urged by pupils will not come in effect until the next course (J). Because of this, Johan Dovelius (1999) argues that it can be a good idea to work with evaluations throughout the course as changes could then have effect right away (59). Teachers B and C say that they continually ask pupils how they feel about the course and if there is something which can be done differently. They then try to adjust what can be changed. Teacher I says that if the pupils mention missing something or if they are not pleased with how things are, he adjusts his planning accordingly. Similarly F says he tries to “modify course structure as to what responses pupils give.”\(^43\) G sees the evaluations as something that can motivate pupils, especially if they are done throughout the course and not just at the end of the term, that way he can make corrections in an ongoing course.

As most evaluations are to be filled in at the end of the course, they also coincide with pupils’ grades. This might have the effect that pupils are not as honest as they could have been, if they are

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40 Den eleven hade ju inte fattat någonting, och då funderade jag över varför eleven inte hade fattat, då kan det antingen bero på eleven eller på undervisningen … efter det så la jag etik och moral avsnittet först i kursen … så man har den grunden – A.
41 … rätta till lite granna om det skulle ha gått snett – E.
42 … men allt kan göras bättre – E.
43 Jag försöker modifera kursupplägg och lektionsplaneringar utifrån elevernas responsen – F.
concerned it would affect their grades. Hence, it is important that teachers encourage their pupils to give honest criticism in spite of this, even if it is not the positive kind. Teachers must express that there is their interest to improve the teaching (Dovelius, 1999, 59). Although several of the interviewed teachers say that their pupils hand in anonymous evaluations, Dovelius argues that pupils might still not give their honest thoughts on education since teachers can probably tell who wrote the evaluations by looking at the handwriting. As solutions to this problem, he argues that either pupils could sit in groups together and discuss the course while writing their comments down, resulting in that the teacher will not know who said what, or teachers can have a colleague read through the evaluations and put together the answers. The third solution that Dovelius suggests is having pupils do the evaluations on a computer (ibid.).
3. Colleagues: What to Expect and What to Deliver

The third factor that we have taken into consideration when investigating teachers’ planning, is that of teacher cooperation and the influence of colleagues. This research was initially narrowed down to the influence of other RE teachers, but as the study proceeded, we realised that we had to widen our area of study to include teachers of other subjects as well, since much interdisciplinary cooperation was occurring. Because of this, we gathered that the influence that colleagues have on an RE teacher’s planning must come not only from RE colleagues, but others as well. Thus, throughout this chapter we will take a look at RE teachers’ colleagues, both other RE teachers and other subject teachers, and the influence they have on RE teachers’ planning.

We will begin this chapter by looking at what teacher cooperation consists of and in what different ways different teachers in our study cooperate and what previous research has discovered about teacher cooperation when it comes to planning. This research has many times been focused on teachers at all stages, not only in the upper secondary school, but where this is the case, we have found that the tendencies are the same; that teachers in primary schools and grade schools tend to view cooperation and talk about it much in the same way as the teachers we have interviewed.

Furthermore, we will take a look at how our interviewed teachers consider cooperation and collaboration\footnote{Throughout this chapter, we will frequently use the terms cooperation and collaboration. These terms will be used synonymously for the sake of variation with no difference between them.} firstly from the a negative perspective and secondly from a positive perspective.

What is Teacher Cooperation and How Do We Collaborate?

According to the curriculum, teacher cooperation is a thing of importance. The curriculum states that everyone within the school system shall “cooperate to make the school a good learning environment” (Lpf94, 12) and further, that teachers shall “cooperate with other teachers in the work of achieving the goals of education” (13).

What cooperation is can be viewed in many different ways and cooperation can have many different shapes since teachers interact and cooperate differently. Per Lindqvist (1999) says that collaboration in school is often organized in teams or units, but it can also be spontaneous, meeting in the hall or on the way to work (15). Furthermore, opinions also differ concerning what value teacher cooperation has and how much cooperation is really going on in schools, not only in Sweden but also in other countries. Gunnel Colnerud & Kjell Granström (2002) claims that “the pedagogical planning … in western school tradition is by all means a private affair for the single teacher”. They
further state that, in general, teachers both in the US and in the UK have similar relations to their colleagues. “Teachers”, they say, “avoid cooperative planning” (87).

By nationally organising school work into units and teams, teachers in Sweden have been given the opportunity to plan and conduct part of their work collectively, but experience shows that the content and work methods of lessons still is pretty much a private matter (Colnerud & Granström, 2002, 88). As an explanation for this, Lindqvist states that “cooperation between teachers has during the eighties and nineties been considered the solution to all problems … teams and units have been formed in order for teachers to be able to cooperate and discuss common and individual issues” (125). He argues that these actions have had little result, because of the top down approach that has been taken. The change in teachers’ work has been suggested and introduced by the school boards or the headmasters and Lindqvist believes that this is the reason that teachers in general have had a hard time accepting it. In order to get desirable results, there has to be a will among all teachers to make this change. (125)

The cooperation that exists in schools today is most often centred around schedule-breaking activities such as theme days, internships, field days etc. where the administration of the activities require the cooperation of several teachers (Colnerud & Granström, 88). Elisabeth Ahlstrand’s (1995) study shows that teacher conferences most often “regard the conditions for teaching rather than the contents and work methods” and “when pedagogical issues are treated, they are concerning activities that interrupt the normal routine … the ordinary lessons are almost never discussed neither regarding the short nor long term planning” (129). Teacher B perfectly illustrates this theory when saying that RE teachers at B’s school: “don’t plan collectively … [they] make field trips with pupils … and [they] have common training45 and they collaborate in planning for “visits to the school by representatives of different religions”46 (B). Similarly, teachers at D’s school also arrange for visitors from different religious communities. For these visits, the teacher responsible for the visit alerts other teachers who can then make their own plans to have their class take part in the seminar. Several other teachers express similar views on cooperative work methods when it comes to visiting lecturers and field trips (A, E, G and H). Norgren also comes to this conclusion as the teachers in her study express the rarity of cooperation. They “talk to each other” and “exchange material” (49) but “it is not common among the informants to exchange material … or plan … together” (51).

45 … planerar inte tillsammans … [de] åker på studieresor med eleverna … och [de] har gemensam fortbildning – B.
46 … besök på skolorna av representanter från olika religioner – B.
Furthermore, teachers seem to experience a different amount of collaboration, as can be seen in Ahlstrand’s study where “there are … teachers who, during the week of study, do not consider themselves to have had a single meeting with colleagues where school work has been considered … [and some] who report up to thirteen such spontaneous meetings” (132). Ahlstrand says that there is much variation between teachers when it comes to using the opportunity of their peer contacts. A good example of this that we found in our study are teachers I and J who, despite working at the same school, have very different views on working collaboratively. I considers himself to have little collaboration with other teachers, while J tells us that cooperative planning is a common thing at the school.

Even if the teachers do not plan or work together per se, Arfwedson & Arfwedson (2002) argue that saying that teaching is a lonely profession is “an opinion that has little to do with reality”. They claim that teachers’ collective duties, their team work and the effects that pupils have on teachers are grounds enough to state that teachers do not work in isolation. With this last argument they state that teachers influence their pupils who in turn influence other teachers, and because of this, a teacher and his/her class are never completely isolated (187). Hargreaves (1998) similarly argues that even if the teacher is physically alone with the pupils in the classroom, the teacher is never mentally alone since:

What a teacher does in the classroom in the shape of teaching methods and teaching strategies is highly influenced by the views and attitudes of the colleagues, both present and previous colleagues. In this aspect, the teacher culture; the relationship between teacher colleagues, is one of the parts of a teacher’s life and work that has the highest importance. (176)

Hargreaves continues by arguing that the culture of the classroom cannot be separated from the outside world, and that total isolation is not possible (ibid).

One field that several of our interviewed teachers mention as one in which they do cooperate is assessment of tests and the interpretation of criteria and goals. How to assess and grade tests is something that most teachers want to discuss with others. Collaborative assessment becomes an important factor not only in the post-stages of the course, but also in the planning stages when interpreting criteria and goals, therefore this can be a contributing factor when creating tests, not only when assessing them (J). Teacher D has experienced that not only is cooperative assessment a request from teachers themselves but that there are also demands from the school administration on teachers to collaborate concerning assessments. The equality of assessments is something that is
“increasing … they’re pushing for … cooperation … equal assessment … common work …
discussions and comparisons … to make things fairer [for the pupils]” (D).

Note that, as Lindqvist mentions above, these demands from the administration for teacher collaboration does not necessarily mean that teachers will consider this a good idea, as will be shown below.

“Why should I?”

Teachers naturally have different views of the value of cooperation and in the way it should be performed. Concerning working together with other RE teachers, many of our informants express a certain amount of scepticism, and some of them consider themselves not to cooperate at all when it comes to planning. In the introduction to her thesis, Ahlstrand (1995) states that she has experienced similar opinions from teachers who feel that working in teams is “burdensome” and that they often question the importance of teams for the development of teaching and their own work (6).

There are many arguments from the interviewed teachers why cooperation is a difficult thing to achieve. Firstly, several teachers mention the pupils as a reason for the lack of cooperation:

Most often, what a colleague does in his/her teaching doesn’t concern me … the pupils are my co-workers rather than my colleagues. (G)

It is difficult to plan together with other RE teachers when we don’t have the same pupils … we are supposed to individualise our teaching, which is not possible to combine with collective planning. (H)

Teacher D similarly expresses that since groups of pupils differ in interest and opinion, and the pupils and their interests have to be the centre of the teaching, the result is often that the opinions of the team becomes less prioritised. Another teacher argues that despite the team producing collective material constructed to suit the goals and criteria, the ways of reaching each pupil differs and therefore teachers cannot plan each course together. The basic foundation of subjects and goals look the same, but each teacher varies his/her methods and topics of interest within this structure (A).

Furthermore, with regard to the pupils, if a course has only one teacher, that teacher becomes totalitarian when it comes to exam dates, how to assess, what is to be done, change in plans etc.

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47 ... mer och mer ... de börjar driva på det här med ... likvärdig bedömning ... gemensamma saker ... prata och jämföra ... för att det inte ska vara orättvist [mot eleverna] – D.
48 Vad en kollega gör i sin undervisning rör oftast inte mig, det är snarare eleverna som är mina arbetskamrater än mina kollegor – G.
49 Det är svårt att planera tillsammans med andra [religions]lärare när vi inte har samma elever … vi ska ju individualisera så mycket som möjligt och då gör det inte att planera ihop – H.
which could be points of conflict if the two or more teachers cannot come to a unified decision.

With only one teacher “there is more structure and there is no risk of two teachers saying different things to the pupils”\(^{50}\) (J).

The second obstacle for teacher cooperation seems in some instances to be the physical distance between teachers. It is not a given fact that all teachers of RE sit in one place, which may have the effect that they do not have the time to visit their colleagues for conversations regarding their teaching.

I mostly meet my colleagues when we are on a break or when we pass each other by….My room is in the other end of the school building so it is pretty far to walk, but it isn't as hard for me to visit [my colleagues] as for them to visit me since that is where the RE institution is….but them coming down to my room is very rare\(^{51}\). (A)

There is only one other [RE] teacher in my room … the others are in another room, so we don't co-operate very much\(^{52}\). (B)

Thirdly, some teachers experience problems with collaboration not only with pupil groups’ interests, but also when it comes to each individual teacher’s interests. Teacher A argues that his interest in Gnostic sects\(^{53}\) is not shared by the rest of the teachers, which makes it harder for the team to cooperate and unite on common topics to teach. Similarly, teacher H says that being interested in things that the other teachers are not, and having different work methods, results in her being seen as “different”, but she is uncertain whether or not this affects the teacher cooperation. Either way, she does express that pupils have at times switched between her and other teachers classes, indicating that their methods are different and that this has an effect on the pupils. She does stress, however, that this is a rare occurrence.

In addition to the three arguments given above, there is a forth issue that arises as both a problem and an asset to teacher cooperation. As mentioned in the second part of this essay, two of the teachers would like to see their colleagues as potential assessors of their work. D says that although there is a tendency among teachers to keep to themselves, she often asks colleagues for feedback on tests she has made for the pupils and asks them “‘could you have a look at my test? Are the

\(^{50}\) … det blir mer struktur och det finns ingen risk att två lärare säger olika saker till eleverna – J.

\(^{51}\) … oftast är det ju när vi sitter i fikarummet eller att man går förblir varandra... Jag sitter i andra änden av huset, så att det är ganska långt att gå bort dit. För mig är det inte så svårt att gå bort dit, det är svårare för dem att gå bort till mig, eftersom institutionen ligger där. Men de tillfällen som kollegor har varit borta hos mig de är lättäcknade – A.

\(^{52}\) Det finns bara en annan lärare i mitt rum som har religion. De andra är i ett annat rum så vi samarbetar inte så mycket – B.

\(^{53}\) This has been changed for the sake of confidentiality – Auth.
questions good? Could I put it this way?"54. She says that she has noticed that "if I go to a
colleague and ask … it won't take long before she/he comes to me and asks me 'What do you think
about this test?'"55 (D). Our interpretation of this is that there is shyness and cautiousness towards
asking your colleagues for help. In order to find an explanation to this, we turned to Marilyn Friend
and Jeanne Bauwens (1988) who present their theory in an article on teachers working with learning
disabilities. They claim that many teachers avoid interfering with other teachers’ classrooms due to
fear of failure which could cause them professional embarrassment or undermine their confidence (557).

These are only some of the issues that affect teacher cooperation, and we are sure that there are
many more things affecting this aspect of teacher planning. The combination of different subjects is
one aspect that we had not time to discuss in this study, but something that came to the surface in
our interviews. In essence: what subject teachers teach apart from RE affects how they teach RE
itself, and this in turn affects how teachers are able to work together (D & H).

"It is a Burden to Work Alone"

As already stated, the view on cooperation differs between different teachers and different schools.
We will now show, through a series of arguments presented by our interviewed teachers, that they
express a strong wish for cooperation and a willingness to share material, plan together and work
together during lessons and that some schools have a system that in a stronger sense encourages
collaborative work and planning.

Firstly, teacher J says that "it is a burden to work alone … the whole workload and no one to help
you if you face problems"56. She states that collective planning and teaching is something teachers
benefit greatly from. She brings up the same topic as H and A did earlier concerning subjects of
interest, but she presents it as a positive aspect of teacher collaboration. At her school teachers’
interests complete each other and topics within a course become “a question of interest … who
wants to work with ethics, who wants to discuss sects etc”57, and this becomes a way for teachers to
avoid subjects they are less interested in, and instead focusing on things they like. She adds that this
is not a simple arrangement, but requires a lot of work and there is “giving and taking … adapting
your strengths and weaknesses to the rest of the group”58 (J).

54 'Skulle du kunna titta på mina prov? Är frågorna bra? Kan jag uttrycka det så här?' – D.
55 Ifall jag går till en kollega och frågar … det tar inte lång stund förrän hon/han kommer och frågar mig 'vad tror du
om det här provet?' – D.
56 Det är en börda att arbeta ensam … hela arbetsbelastningen och inget att hjälpa dig om du når problem – J.
57 En fråga om intresse … vem vill arbeta med etik, vem vill diskutera sektor etc. – J.
58 Givande och tagande … att anpassa sina styrkor och svagheter till resten av gruppen – J.
Secondly, one of the aspects where teachers express most positive thoughts on cooperation is assessment. Teacher E and her team have had a common project concerning cooperative assessment where they have assessed the creation of tests and examinations in order for pupils to be assessed fairly regardless of which teacher they have. In this way, the teachers try to unite pupil opinion, steering documents and teacher views in order to collectively design their teaching (E). Teacher G also talks about collective assessment and considers it to be “beneficial … both to teachers and pupils”. As an example, she argues that pupils who are to give a speech in English, can build their speech around something they are really interested in, e.g. Math or RE. This way, pupils can improve both subjects at once, instead of struggling with one and excelling in another (G).

Thirdly, as stated above, cooperation is seen not only as beneficial for pupils, but also for teachers’ own development. A expresses that he would like feedback on his work from his colleagues. He gets feedback from his pupils and they are mostly pleased but he argues that he would like a more professional opinion on his work by for example having a colleague observe one of his classes as this “would be a quality assurance” (A). In their study, Thomas, Wineburg, Grossman, Myhre and Woolworth (1998) make the assumption that forums where teachers discuss teaching “provide the means by which individual contributions are taken to levels that no group member could attain individually”. Therefore, they reason that “by drawing on each individual’s private understandings, which represent … different degrees of pedagogical and disciplinary expertise, the collective understandings of the group is thus advanced” (23).

Lastly, something that should also be mentioned in connection to teacher collaboration is the issue of teacher students visiting the school. Teacher A finds teacher students to be a great asset, since this gives him “opportunities for pedagogical and … didactic conversations in a different way than there would be otherwise”. These visits have influenced his views on discussions of teaching and he wishes that there were “clearer forums where methods, didactics and content were discussed” (A).

To summarize this chapter, we have established that interest, assessment, teacher’s own development, and the collaboration with teacher students are all important aspects for teacher cooperation. These are but a few, and several more could probably be found, but in this study there was not time to delve deeper into this specific issue. From this chapter we move on to a discussion of the three factors and their importance for teacher planning.

59 Gynnar … både elever och lärare – G.
60 Skulle vara en kvalitetsförsäkring – A.
61 Möjligheter för pedagogiska och … didaktiska samtal på ett annat sätt än det skulle finnas annars – A.
62 Tydligare forum där metoder, didaktik och innehåll diskuterades – A.
4. Conclusion and Reflections

In this final chapter we will conclude the results that we have found and present a summary of the analysis that we have made of these results. Diagrams will not be repeated here, but will be referred to in their original form in the respective chapter when necessary. We will begin this chapter by repeating the purpose of our study and the conditions for it.

Purpose of Study

Many aspects affect RE teachers’ planning of a term or course. Our purpose has been to show how three of these aspects: steering documents, pupils, and colleagues affect this planning and if they affect the planning to different degrees. We have studied in what way the different aspects affect teachers and whether or not there was a recognizable difference in the degree that teachers relate to each of the aspects.

In order to find this information, we have interviewed ten RE teachers of different upper secondary schools during a period of one month. The teachers have been interviewed and their answers have been transcribed and analysed.

Results

During our study, we have found that the three factors mentioned do in fact influence RE teachers’ planning, to a greater or lesser degree. The greatest contributory factors to teachers’ planning are the steering documents. Most teachers not only connect their teaching to the documents when planning, but in several cases plan their teachings almost solely around the documents and use these documents as their primary source of inspiration. Pupils influence planning with their interests and preferred work methods. In addition, the steering documents’ requirements that teachers should consider the needs of individual pupils, also requires teachers to vary their methods. However, we found pupils influence on lesson planning to be less than that exerted by the steering documents, and it is often reduced to merely affecting work methods and examination methods, as opposed to the content of the course. When it comes to colleagues, opinions differ between teachers. In most of today’s upper secondary schools, teachers are not required to plan their teaching together with their colleagues. Different schools have different views on how important the teacher teams are, and what effect they should have over individual teachers. In schools where thematic work is being done, the teacher team naturally becomes more important and planning, assessment and training is a part of the team work, whereas in schools where thematic work is less used, the teacher team becomes mainly an area for exchanging material, discussing schedule-breaking activities and for pedagogical support regarding individual pupils.
Discussion

Throughout this essay we have tried to find out how three aspects: steering documents, pupils and colleagues affect RE-teachers' planning. The results are not unanimous; to what extent these three factors influence teachers' planning seems to be more or less up to the individual, hence it can differ a lot from one teacher to another. However, a tendency can be seen from our results, and the teachers have common ideas and ways of doing things, even though their methods may not be entirely identical. The three factors in our study do have an influence; this conclusion can be drawn both from our interviews and the research we have presented.

Steering documents are regarded by most our informants as the frames for how their courses will look. The syllabi are more frequently used but the curriculum also plays a big part with its demands on treating the subject of respecting others and learning about different cultures. These steering documents are used as a starting point in planning for the major part of the interviewed teachers. Course material and examinations that teachers create are based on them and they are shown on overhead transparencies to create awareness among pupils. Our informants agree on the goals in the syllabi being wide, and some of these teachers find them puzzling. However, the flexibility of the goals is also thought of by some of the teachers to show confidence in their profession, they have the ability to decide what is suitable to study and in what manners this should be performed. The reason for the almost unanimous usage of the steering documents is simply that they control what goals are to be reached, and that they are used to legitimize the teaching, as defense if criticized. We cannot help but wonder whether teachers are so busy with trying to keep pupils, time and workload on an even keel, that the actual interpretation of these documents becomes something that is reduced to once-a-year conferences and teacher training? Many teachers speak about the flexibility of the goals and the ease of interpreting these goals, but they seem uncertain how to use it for the benefit of their pupils. Because of this flexibility and the possibilities imbedded in these goals, we think that pupils should be able to have a bigger part in shaping the course of RE. Teachers often argue that they are unaware of what pupils desire before they enter the classroom for the first time, but simultaneously, they show in our study that they seem to be fully aware of what interests pupils in general.

All though many studies have shown that teachers start out from pupils’ needs and interests when planning, teachers in our study seem to be using the aims and goals as a starting point. However, it is too simple to say that because nine of our informants prioritize steering documents when planning that they do not consider their pupils at all. Even though they might not have met their pupils yet, experienced teachers probably have them in mind when planning a course even if they
say they prioritize the goals. It is likely that through the years they have come to know what works and what does not. They have also had the chance to read through evaluations filled in by former pupils and as can be seen from our study these also help to shape future planning.

The third factor, colleagues, is also a point of interest in our study. In general, teachers in our study seem to be somewhat uninterested in their colleagues’ work and also want to keep their privacy and have their own work to themselves. However, as with the other factors, this is a very personal decision, and some teachers carry out most of their planning with their colleagues. This is something that these teachers find very beneficial, and as future teachers, we cannot help but think that collaboration with other teachers seems to be something that not only teachers but also pupils benefit from. Therefore we are curious as to why more teachers are not encouraged to cooperate with their colleagues, and why this is not something that is more fully addressed in the curriculum? This is also something that would be interesting to do more research on, especially in upper secondary school, as there seems to be little carried out in this field. There is plenty of research on teacher cooperation when it comes to teacher teams or pupils with special needs, but not when it comes to the daily work, interdisciplinary studies, or practical planning.
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J, RE Teacher in an Upper Secondary School, 2009-05-06
Appendix 1: Intervjuguide

1. Examensår?

2. Antal verksamma år som lärare?


4. Vilka krav upplever du att det finns på dig i din roll som religionslärare?
   Utifrån: Styrdokument
   Elever
   Kollegor

5. När du planerar din undervisning, hur prioriterar du följande (från 1-4, 1 är viktigast):
   - Kursplaners mål
   - Elevens önskemål
   - Uppfyllande av betygskriterier
   - Arbetslagets önskemål/synpunkter/idéer

6. Om du jämför med din första yrkestid, hur ser din planering ut nu?

Frågor rörande styrdokument:

7. Hur förhåller du dig till styrdokumenten?

8. Hur använder du dig av styrdokumenten i din planering?

Frågor rörande elever:

9. Vad anser du att eleverna finner mest intressant inom religionen?

10. Hur använder du dig av utvärderingar av dina kurser?

11. Hur arbetar du med elevdemokrati i ditt ämne?

12. När du inleder en kurs, arbetar du fram planeringen tillsammans med dina elever? Om ja, hur?

Frågor rörande kollegor:

13. Det börjar en ny lärare på skolan som har ditt ämne, vad har du för förväntningar på den läraren?

14. Vad upplever du att det finns för förväntningar på dig från dina kollegor?

15. Hur vanligt är det att ni är flera lärare som planerar en kurs (eller ett ämnesområde)?

16. Hur mycket inspiration och idéer får du från andra lärare? -> Kommer lärare till dig för idéer och inspiration?
Appendix 2: Interview Guide

1. Year of graduation?

2. Number of years working as a teacher?

3. State two or three topics/areas that you have brought up during the course/term and motivate the choice of these topics.

4. As a teacher of RE, what demands do you perceive from:
   - Steering documents
   - Pupils
   - Colleagues

5. When planning, how do you prioritize the following aspects (from 1 – 4, 1 being the most important):
   - The goals of the syllabi
   - Pupils’ wishes
   - The fulfilling of criteria
   - Opinions, ideas and wishes from the work team.
   From which of these aspects do you start out? And then? Motivate the answer!

6. When comparing your first years of working as a teacher with today, how has your planning changed?

Questions concerning the steering documents:

7. What is your attitude towards the steering documents?

8. How do you use the steering documents when planning?

Questions concerning pupils:

9. What do you think pupils find to be most interesting within RE?

10. How do you use evaluations in your courses?

11. How do you work with pupil influence in RE?

12. When starting a course, do you make a plan together with your pupils?

Questions concerning colleagues:

13. A new RE teacher starts working at your school: What are your expectations on this teacher?

14. What expectations do you think your colleagues have on you?

15. How common is it for you to plan together with other teachers? (a course or part of a course)

16. How much inspiration and ideas do you get from other teachers? Do other teachers come to you for inspiration and ideas?
Appendix 3: Teacher Presentation

This is a short presentation of the teachers interviewed for our study:

A is a Male RE Teacher who graduated in 2000 and has 5 year’s experience as a teacher of upper secondary school.

B is a Female RE Teacher who graduated in 1979 and has 30 year’s experience as a teacher of upper secondary school.

C is a Female RE Teacher who graduated in 2009 and has less than one year’s experience as a teacher of upper secondary school.

D is a Female RE Teacher who graduated in 2000 and has 10 year’s experience as a teacher of upper secondary school.

E is a Female RE Teacher who graduated in 1975 and has 34 year’s experience as a teacher of upper secondary school.

F is a Male RE Teacher who graduated in 2001 and has 8 year’s experience as a teacher of upper secondary school.

G is a Female RE Teacher who graduated in 1997 and has 12 year’s experience as a teacher of upper secondary school.

H is a Female RE Teacher who graduated in 1986 and has 20 year’s experience as a teacher of upper secondary school.

I is a Male RE Teacher who graduated in 1996 and has 12 year’s experience as a teacher of upper secondary school.

J is a Female RE Teacher who is not graduated but has 8 year’s experience as a teacher of upper secondary school.