# The construction of "religions" during field visits

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## Abstract

Field visits to churches, mosques, temples or other buildings used by religious groups, are often valued by students of religious education as an opportunity to engage with the 'reality' of the subject: religions as they exist in the world (Beaven 2013, Britton 2014, Jørgensen 2017, Næslund 2009, Roos 2008). The Council of Europe text *Signposts* specifies field visits as an important contributor to the religious dimension of intercultural education, but also identifies issues which need to be addressed by researchers and teachers (Jackson 2014). During an excursion, students interact with representatives who are likely to represent their tradition in one particular way. The aim of this paper is to investigate how the representation of religion and religiosity is constructed during excursions by representatives and visitors. We have developed an analytical tool based on the interpretive approach (Jackson 1997) and the theory of speech genres (Bakhtin 1986). Based on our analysis of documentation related to four field visits with students to places of worship, we suggest how the different speech genres in play during an excursion can help in promoting awareness of different levels of religion: individual, group and the whole tradition.

Key words: field visits, excursions, study visits, speech genre, interpretive approach

## Introduction

The awareness of the plurality of our world is today perhaps higher than ever, yet segregation within societies is a growing challenge. In this situation we are all in need of nuanced understandings of cultural and religious groups as well as contact between/meeting points for people with different backgrounds. Schools will often be expected to handle this challenge. Religious education (RE) can be part of the solution. RE textbooks, however, often focus on religious teaching that is considered to be shared by everyone connected to a religious tradition. Cultural and confessional differences within the religious traditions tend not to be represented in the most readily available teaching material in many schools (Vestøl 2016, Andreassen & Lewis 2014). Studies also show that students who position themselves as religious often do not recognise their own tradition in the representations they meet in school and teaching (Moulin 2011, Nicolaisen 2013, Holmqvist Lihd 2016). To avoid these pitfalls of abstract, constructed religions and of students never recognising their own tradition, an option in RE is to create or invite intercultural engagement, exchange and meetings during field visits[1].

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[1] Although groups of students will always consist of pupils belonging to different cultures, the field visit offer an opportunity to draw attention to cultural diversity.

We know that field visits constitute an educational practice in RE, but very little is known about how common - or rare - they are[2]. Both anecdotal evidence and previous research show that field visits can be a powerful educational approach, perhaps because they are often valued by students and teachers of Religious Education (RE) as an opportunity to engage with the 'reality' of the subject: religions as they exist in the world (e.g. Roos 2008, Næslund 2009, Britton 2014, Beaven 2013, Jørgensen 2017). Previous research indicates that such excursions increase students' engagement with RE (e.g. Beaven 2013, Britton 2014, Riegel & Kindermann 2016), and create opportunities for students to learn about, as well as learn from, religion (e.g. Maybury and Teece 2010, Næslund 2009, cf. Grimmitt 1987). Field visits also are reported to stimulate students to make meta-reflections about religion and various religious representations (Britton 2014, Jørgensen 2017). Excursions to religious places organised by schools can further provide a unique opportunity for secular students to meet people with different religious affiliations[3]. Despite the documented benefits of field visits, they raise questions about the ways students are affected by being inside religious buildings (Riegel & Kinderman 2016, Britton 2014)[4]. Another challenge is to clarify the relationship between the visited site/group and the wider tradition (Britton 2014, Jørgensen 2017, Jackson 1997). To summarise, while previous research emphasizes several potentials with regard to study visits in RE, it also highlights some challenges that need to be considered carefully in order to maximise the educational value of such visits. These pedagogical challenges seem to require important preparation and follow-up reflection in the classroom (Dalevi and Osbeck 2012, Britton 2014, Jørgensen 2017, Kinderman & Rigel 2018), and therefore a high level of pedagogical competence from the RE teachers.

The present article is an attempt to contribute with some new research. Applying analytical tools based on the interpretive approach (Jackson 1997, 2016, 2019) and theory about speech genres (Bakhtin 1986), we focus on **how religious traditions are constructed through the communication that takes place during the study visits.** Our point of

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[2] Beaven (2013) found 45 RE-related visits in her 2011-12 survey of 17 state grammar schools for boys. Fuglseth (2014) found that among the 280 teachers in the five northernmost regions of Norway answering a questionnaire, about 23% never take their students to churches and about 63% never take their students to "other religious buildings" ("omvisning i andre gudshus [enn kirker] og forsamlingshus"). Although these samples are relatively small, the findings support the fact that field visits are among the educational approaches available to RE teachers. More comprehensive statistical investigation clearly is desired.

[3] In *Signposts*, study visits to religious places of interest are treated as part of the theme: 'Linking schools to wider communities and organisations' (Jackson 2014: 87). Creating opportunities for exchange and dialogue between pupils from different cultural environments is understood as promoting education in democracy. Religious communities are mentioned as a type of institution with which it is desirable for pupils (and therefore teacher students) to establish positive relationships. Advice on how to conduct such field visits successfully was requested frequently by respondents to the questionnaire sent to the 47 education ministries of the Council of Europe (CoE) member states, asking for the identification of issues they would have in adapting the 2008 Recommendation on education about religions and 'non-religious convictions' (Council of Europe 2008) to their own education system. The CoE publication *Signposts* (Jackson 2014) addresses this and other issues raised in the questionnaire returns, and makes reference to recent European research and good practice. In *Signposts* Jackson also points out that further research is needed in order to support educators in developing good practice.

[4] Within a non-confessional RE, as in Norway, Sweden and England, there are also juridical restrictions that prohibit confessional elements in education. The borderline between denominational and non-confessional elements related to excursions is contested (Jørgensen 2017). Within a non-confessional RE, one position discourages field trips as a part of RE, because there is a risk that these excursions will expose students to religious practice and missionary elements (Andreassen 2012). Another position advocates excursions because visits to religious buildings give an important emotive insider-perspective (Eidhamar 2009). Furthermore, previous research indicates that students' own interpretations of life affect the way they understand and experience study visits and dialogues with representatives (Britton 2014, Riegel & Kinderman 2016). Thus, the varying prejudices and understandings of the students are probable challenges for RE teachers to handle.

departure is that the teacher, not the representatives, is responsible for the learning outcome of a field visit. Therefore, our aim is to provide research that is relevant to the specific pedagogical choices connected to taking students on study visits to meet representatives of religious groups in the buildings used by their communities. Meetings between students and representatives offer simultaneously an opportunity for intercultural[5] and interreligious[6] encounters. To investigate this, we examine data documenting field visits to four buildings used by religious groups in Sweden and Norway: one Buddhist temple in each country, a Hindu temple in Norway and a mosque in Sweden.

## Theoretical approach

To analyze the communication about religion that takes place during a study visit, we will make use of the three analytical units by which religious traditions are described according to the interpretive approach (Jackson 1997, 2016, 2019). Essential to the interpretive approach is the view of all religious traditions as dynamic and internally diverse. This means that "religious tradition" - the first level - is used to designate the whole of a religious tradition, including all of its denominational and cultural manifestations. These cultural, denominational, sectarian and/or ethnic groups (or a mix of these) constitute the second level. The third level in this model is that of the individual - who may or may not be (or feel) attached to a group within the wider tradition. The purpose of this didactical tool is to offer a model for description of parts of a religious tradition, while at the same time being precise about the fact that the part fits into a wider, complex reality. In this study, the interpretive approach contributes to understanding the constructions of religious traditions during an excursion. To analyze the communication about religion that takes place during study visits, we will make use of these three levels, the religious tradition, the group level and the individual level.

To identify and characterize the communication that takes place during study visits, we will make use of the theory of speech genres formulated by Bakhtin. The theory of speech genres suggests that "[a]ll the diverse areas of human activity involve the use of language" and that "[l]anguage is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances" (Bakhtin 1986, p 60). "These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area (…) [through] thematic content, style and compositional structure" (Bakhtin 1986, p 60). Each sphere develops its own relatively stable types of utterances: the speech genres. Every sphere of communication will have several speech genres in play. "Any concrete utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere" (Bakhtin 1986, p. 91). An utterance therefore is dialogic because it will always be a response to previous utterances, and expect an answer. As the speaker– more or less consciously – will include single words or substantial fractions of previous utterances in their own utterances, every utterance will be dialogical in more than one way. One group that affects the use of speech genres is the

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[5] Though groups of students will always consist of pupils belonging to different cultures, the field visit offers an opportunity to draw attention to cultural diversity.

[6] While the students in a group may belong to several different religious groups, it is also likely that some do not belong to any religious group. Although some may belong to an organized secular life view (such as the International Humanist and Ethical Union), others may be "nones" (believing or not believing in a god or universal spirit, but not belonging to a defined group). However, as "inter-life-view-encounters" is not an established term, we use the term "interreligious".

addressees who constitute part of the communication sphere. Bakhtin further emphasizes that every utterance embodies resonance from other utterances; for example, when a student asks a question during an excursion, this question will contain his or her prejudice and understanding of the religious tradition, and also of the teacher's request and also resonances from media discourses etc. (Britton 2014). Another example of utterances with resonances from previous utterances is when members of a tradition/representatives quote the Qur'an or chant a sutra. During a study visit, it is likely that the communication will include resonances from the religious tradition in question, the general public discourse and the individual participants' experience.

## Analytical tool

Based on the interpretive approach and the theory of speech genres, together with a tentative analysis of our data, we have developed an analytical tool to investigate the communication that takes place during the study visit. It lists some selected speech genres[7] we have identified in our data and the three levels of religious traditions. In addition, attention is drawn to the question of which participants are active in the communication:

| Speech genres | Individual level | Group level | The whole tradition | Who draws attention to the different levels |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Biography of representative | | | | |
| Demonstration of religious practice | | | | |
| Talk about activities organized by the local community | | | | |
| Talk about material context (artefacts, objects etc) | | | | |
| Talk about religious teaching | | | | |

Each of the speech genres has its own characteristics and pedagogical potential. In the results section we will present examples of how the different genres were played out during the excursions we investigated, and discuss pedagogical possibilities offered by the particular genre and what the teacher can do to make use of that potential.

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[7] In addition to the ones listed here, we identified «opening» and «closure» as speech genres with didactical potential. Due to the wordage limit for the present article, we do not discuss them here.

# Materials and methods

The empirical data we analyze in this article is documentation related to field visits to two Buddhist temples, one Hindu temple and one mosque, conducted in Sweden and Norway. The religious traditions involved were selected according to two criteria: (1) The RE curriculum in both Sweden and Norway is based on the "world religions paradigm" (cf. Owen 2012) and the three chosen traditions are considered to be examples of "world religions". (2) The social and media discourses about these three religious traditions differ and students' pre-understandings therefore could be expected to vary in accordance with the social and media discourses – Islam being connected to terrorism and violence, Buddhism to peace (of mind) and inner reflection, while Hinduism is hardly mentioned in the social and media discourse in Sweden and Norway. While the social and media discourses differ, these three religious traditions are mentioned as three out of four "other world religions" in the school and teacher education curricula in Sweden and Norway. This context – of similarity in being "other" and differences in social and media discourses – was considered as a reason to expect both similarities and differences in how the religious traditions would be constructed during study visits.

The students taking part in the field visits in Sweden were upper secondary students, while the Norwegian students were student teachers. The Swedish field visits were audiotaped, while the Norwegian field visits were "recorded" by field notes. In addition to the observations of field visits, the Swedish Tibetan Buddhist representative and the Norwegian Hindu temple representative were interviewed on audiotape. The interviews were semi-structured and planned from the background findings in previous research (Britton 2014, Jørgensen 2017, Svahn 2010, Gunnarsson 2016). The (recorded) observations from the field visits constitute the primary data analyzed, while the interviews constitute secondary data, supplying information on how the interviewed representatives talk about the practice of receiving students at their mosque/temple. The general public discourse related to these religious traditions constitutes the context for the study visits (e.g. Otterbeck & Bevelander 2006, Thurfjäll 2013, Kittelmann Flensner 2017).

*Signposts* suggests two ways for schools to establish educational links with religious and belief organisations in the local community: to invite visitors from the organisations to the school, or to take the students on a study visit to buildings used by religious or other communities (Jackson 2014). There are, however, multiple ways in which a field visit can be organized, depending on the intended focus. For the field visits constituting the empirical data we investigate in this article, the group of students ('the class') and their teacher went together to the religious community where they met a representative of the community. Based on the communication that took place, we found reason to describe and discuss the following five speech genres: "Biography of the representative", "Demonstration of religious practice", "Talk about activities organized by the local community", "Talk about material context" and "Talk about religious teaching". The degree of participation in the different genres, by the different participants in the field visit, varied. Accordingly, we will analyze the communication in each of the genres, to identify the representation of religion that takes place in each.

# Results

In the results section we will present examples of how the different genres were played out during the field visit we have investigated. Based on the findings, we will discuss pedagogical possibilities offered by the genre, and what the teacher can do to make use of that potential. The different genres are discussed separately, and they are treated alphabetically. During the visits investigated in this study the communication switched back and forth between the different genres.

## Biography of representative

Both the Buddhist representatives and the representative in the mosque, shared elements of their personal biographies with the students. The shared biography of the two Swedish representatives (Tibetan Buddhist and mosque) included a conversion (from a more or less secular Christian background), while the Vietnamese Buddhist told about his transformation from being a lay Buddhist through education to become a monk. The Hindu representative did not give an explicit account of his life story during the study visit.

In the case of the two Swedish representatives, several students from a secular background regarded the representatives' conversion (reversion) as proof of the authenticity of their religious conviction: the representatives had chosen to belong to this religion themselves, rather than being born into the tradition. Students who themselves belonged to a tradition, tended to be more critical towards the trustworthiness of these representatives: when they were not raised as Buddhist or Muslim, were they really authentic Buddhists/Muslims? (Britton 2014).

In the Swedish data the representative's biography was often brought to attention through students' questions. Also, talk about the representative's biography seemed to encourage more existential questions from the students. In line with a general interest/acceptance of the importance of choices, the students, through their questions, showed an interest at an individual level in the personal choices made by the representatives. In the case of the Buddhist monk in the Vietnamese temple, he gave an account of his own escape as a boat refugee from Vietnam, as well as about his secular education and work, before becoming a monk. While his story therefore also told about life choices, it differed from the Swedish data, because the biography highlighted the group-level of the religion: he came from Vietnam, he went to a Vietnamese temple in Oslo, and to Vietnam during his studies to become a monk. Nevertheless, his biographical account also drew attention to the individual level.

A possible pedagogical potential, related to the biography of the representative, could be – after the field visit – to ask the students to reflect on the differences and similarities between being born into a tradition, choosing to stay in it or deciding to leave it and/or convert to another religious (or life-view) tradition. The reflection could also include the question of whether a conversion can be to the tradition as a whole, whether it needs to be related to a group, or can be a purely individual experience.

## Demonstration of religious practice

In all the field visits considered, some examples of religious practice have been included. In the Tibetan temple, the representative invited the students to take part in "a light version of a guided meditation" (this was her own description, given during the interview). In the mosque, the representative recited (chanted) from the Qur'an, and also left the students and teacher

(in one part of the mosque) to take part in prayer together with other Muslims (in the prayer hall). In the Vietnamese temple, the monk chanted sutras (one slow, and one very fast), accompanying himself on several rhythmic instruments. In the Hindu temple, the representative chanted/sang passages from hymns/devotional songs directed to different gods (Ganesha, Murugan, Durga, Shiva), accompanying himself with a tambourine. Although the religious practice – except the meditation – had the character of a monologue, the students could listen to/observe, what was, in Bakhtinian terms, a dialogue, since the representatives were in dialogue with authoritative religious texts from their tradition during the demonstration of these practices. During the visits, however, this genre was introduced and dominated by the representative – except the meditation, which included the students. If students are well-prepared, and listen carefully, the demonstrations can give them some information about a religion at group level, since, in our examples, the chanted sutras may be part of the Mahayana corpus, but not the Theravada corpus of the Tripitaka/Tipitaka, and the hymns in Tamil also related to a particular cultural group of Hindus. A pedagogical possibility may be to direct the students' attention – after the field visit – to the demonstration of religious practice chosen by the community spokesperson, in order to represent religious practice at the building visited (representation being one of the key concepts in interpretive approach [Jackson 1997, 2019]). This would be an opportunity to illustrate how cultural contexts and religious practices influence each other.

## Talk about activities organized by the local community

As with the other speech genres discussed in this article, a listing of activities organised by the community may or may not be included as part of the field visit. While some speech genres in our data are clearly dependent on being introduced by a particular participant – for example, the representative – listing of activities can be initiated by the students, the representative or the teacher. Typically, the list would include daily, weekly and or yearly celebrations. Just as with the demonstration of religious practice, ability to use the information about the activities organized by the community, in order to identify the confessional or other group, demands significant knowledge. The pedagogical value of framing this as a kind of 'treasure hunt', however, should not be overlooked. Based on the information about annual celebrations, students could be asked whether it was likely that the mosque is a Shia mosque (was Asura listed among the yearly celebrations?). In the Hindu temple, the listing of activities was used by the representative to highlight questions related to the group level. Weekly activities included puja every Friday. However, once a month, the puja was organized by Indian Hindus. The representative thereby pointed to an ethnically defined division among the Hindus using the temple. In our data, this opportunity was seized by the teacher, who drew attention to the process of building the temple, when it was decided to have Ganesh as the main deity, because all Hindus relate to him[8]; the temple being visited was intended to be ecumenical, accessible for all the Hindus in the region, even though it is owned and run by the Tamil Hindu cultural organisation.

## Talk about material context (artefacts, objects etc)

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[8] Before building the Ganesha temple, the community of Tamils running it had temporary temples devoted to Skanda.

In our data, talk about material context was initiated by the representative, the teacher and students. This conversation took place during a guided tour of the facilities, after an individual exploration of the building, or in a question/answer session. While the demonstration of religious practice was dominated by the representative, this genre, in all the visits we have included in our data, was dominated by dialogue among those taking part in the field visit: representative, students and teacher. In the Hindu temple and the Vietnamese Buddhist temple, images, statues and other artefacts that attracted the students' attention were taken as points of departure in telling a story relating to the figure depicted, the acquisition of the artefact, or an explanation about the character and importance of what is represented. Talk about the material context also focused on the activities taking place in the different rooms/spaces. This, of course, to some extent, overlapped with the listing of activities organized by the community and the talk about the material context.

In the Hindu temple and the Vietnamese Buddhist temple, talk about the material context drew attention to similarities between the site the students and teacher were visiting and other temples, and to adaptations made in the Scandinavian context. Making the walls around the Ganesha temple carry a roof, is such an adjustment: the temple is located within what looks like a red and white-striped house, which is really the walls around the temple – with an adaption to the Scandinavian climate: a roof. Within the walls of the temple, the representative showed the students another adjustment – not related to the Scandinavian climate, but to the ecumenical ambitions of catering to all Hindus in the region: a murti of Ayyappa[9]

This example from the visit to the Hindu temple shows how talk about the material context draws attention to variety within the tradition, by highlighting similarities and differences between the visited temple and other Hindu temples of the South Indian tradition, between different stylistic traditions for Hindu temples, and ethnic and geographical variety among Hindus. Similar talk about the material context took place during all the excursions included in our data.

Talk about material context draws attention to an ability that is not always included in descriptions of reading ability in schools. These are usually focused on cognitive achievement: alphabetical reading/reading of verbal texts usually takes all attention, while talk about material context draws attention to the ability to 'read' images, non-verbal visual expressions and architecturally-shaped environments (Winje 2012, Winje 2014). Images and other non-verbal expressions, however, will often reveal much about the religious group who use and shape a physical environment. Their aims and ambitions may be visible, as may the level of resources available for the fulfilment of their ambitions. The resources available will be related to the number of members and their socio-economic status. The aims and ambitions are likely to reveal what confessional and cultural groups, within the wider tradition, are associated with the building being visited. Talk about the material context thus offers rich pedagogical opportunities to learn about the variety within a religious tradition. It does, however, demand an awareness of the variety, especially in terms of groups that the place (to be) visited may actualize.

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[9] Ayyappa is worshipped mainly in South India. The temple also has murtis of Vishnu and Lakshmi, but Ayyappa is the one introduced by the representative as reaching out beyond the Tamil community.

Previous research indicates that post-visit reflection on the experiences, gained during and excursion, is more rewarding/important than preparation for the visit (Britton 2014 and Riegel & Kindermann 2016). However, Jørgensen (2017) indicates that the knowledge acquired before an excursion greatly influences the students' possibilities for gaining knowledge during the excursion. With regard to the material context, ability to "read" visual environments is likely to influence what is seen: for example, without knowledge about bodhisattvas and Buddhas other than the historical Buddha, it is unlikely that students would identify representations of anyone but Siddhartha Gautama – even if the temple and temple grounds are filled with representations of Amithaba, Avalokiteshvara/Guan-yin, Ksitigarbha, Maitreya and others. Moreover, without the ability to recognise anyone but the historical Buddha, the material context cannot be used to identify a temple as Theravada or Mahayana. Thus, providing students with relevant "visual culture reading skills" before a study visit, may increase their ability to interpret what they see, supporting their learning. If preparations/acquisition of required skills cannot be gained before an excursion, asking the pupils to photograph the locality they visit at least makes it possible to develop knowledge and "visual culture reading skills" after a study visit. A photograph documents not only what the photographer is able to interpret when a picture is taken, but also what is visible from the point and angle chosen.

## Talk about religious teaching

Talk about the teachings of the religious tradition – as understood by the participants during the visit – will usually also take place. It may be initiated by the representative, as part of an introductory lecture, or by questions from the students, or it may develop from talk about activities or about the material context: our data include examples of each of these.

From the communication that takes place during the visit, it is not easy to be certain whether representatives intend to describe the tradition as a whole, the group or just themselves as individuals. In the interview, however, the representative of the Tibetan temple said she intended to present a 'basic Buddhism' (Swedish: 'grundbuddhism'), and therefore did not focus on the specific – Tibetan – version she adheres to personally. She also explained that she was doing this because the lama had chosen her to do this task, which indicated that she represented the community. The representative at the Ganesha temple, in the interview, declared his intention to "explain what is unclear about Hinduism" to the pupils, how the temple was constructed, what rules the community has, and to explain the many gods. He was one of three representatives of the community appointed by the board to receive students.

The degree to which representatives of communities draw the visiting students' attention to variety within the group varies both among the representatives and the speech genres. When talking about religious teaching, the representative may draw attention to variety within the teaching of his/her own tradition in order to challenge anticipated prejudice amongst the students. The mosque representative challenged students' questions about what Muslims as a group believe and practice. He emphasised the variety within Islam by pointing out that everyone makes his/her own interpretation. At the same time, he condemned Al-Quaida and compared their interpretation of the Qur'an to the saying "As the Devil reads the Bible...". On the one hand, the visit provides an opportunity for the students

to meet a valuable counterpart to a discourse about Muslims as terrorists; on the other hand, some students found the representative inconsistent with regard to interpretative freedom (Britton 2014).

In the Hindu temple, the representative presented Hinduism as an internally diverse tradition, by mentioning national variety among Hindus and different affiliations (such as "saivam", "sowram", "sæktam", "ganapathiyam"). At the same time, however, the representative indicated that "the main god is Shiva", and "Brahma" and "Vishnu" appear to be subordinated under Shiva. To some extent, therefore, the presentation of Hinduism given by the representative underlined the internal diversity of the tradition, yet at the same time presented an understanding of Shiva as the (only real) main god. This understanding was repeated in the interview, when the representative talked about pupils' misunderstandings, which he attempted to correct during visits: because school textbooks can present a confusing account of the many gods, he attempted to explain that Shiva and Shakti are the main gods.

During the interview, the Tibetan Buddhist representative said that she usually challenged the prejudice that all Buddhists live in monasteries. In her presentation, she talked about Buddhist teaching without mentioning Buddhist concepts. She used an inclusive "we" while talking, and highlighted similarities between Buddhism, science and Christianity. She mentioned, at the outset, that the temple is affiliated to Tibetan Buddhism. In her presentation of Buddhist teaching, she talked about Buddhism in a general way, and when she told about a cabinet containing a cloth-covered bundle of religious texts, she referred to Tibetan texts, without mentioning whether they differ in some ways from, for example, Theravada traditions. Similarly, when a student asked about a person depicted in a photograph, she explained that he was one of the previous Lamas in the temple, but did not explain the meaning of Lamas in Tibetan Buddhism. Despite her intention to display "general Buddhism", understandably, her presentation was impregnated by Tibetan tradition, e.g. when speaking of Lamas and Bodhisattvas. Pupil reflection on issues in giving both an insider-perspective and a general introduction to the religious tradition is important for teachers to initiate, either in the classroom before or after the visit, or during the visit, and involving the representative.

## Discussion and conclusions

The research question addressed in this article was how religions are constructed through the communication that takes place during a field visit. We applied the interpretive approach (Jackson 1997, 2019) to grasp how three different 'levels' of religious traditions might be represented: as a whole, at group level and individual level. To analyse the communication that took place during the four visits included in our data, we used the notion of speech genres, and identified five different genres in our material. The presentation of results has shown that, in our data from field visits, some genres more readily lend themselves to a focus on the individual level than others, some support a focus on group level, while some facilitate discussion of the whole tradition. Links between genres and levels are, however, not fixed, but context dependent; the biography of the representative – although obviously appropriate for a focus on the importance and meaning of religion in his or her life – may also draw attention to the group level, as in the Vietnamese Buddhist temple. As previous

research indicates that students are not necessarily aware that they visit a group constituting part of the whole tradition (Britton 2014, Roos 2008, Jørgensen 2017), one aim of this study has been to present and discuss possible educational tools that can support teachers in drawing attention to the group level.

As mentioned above, field visits may be considered by students as a visit to the tradition as a whole. The speech genre "talk about religious teaching" also seems to focus on this first level of religion. When group level is focused in this genre, it is often because the representative distances him/herself from other groups within (or associated with) the tradition. At the same time, the representative is also presenting his/her (group's) interpretation as if it is the common, universally accepted, interpretation. It is important that the teacher helps the students to become aware of this, and position what they have met/experienced within the larger tradition. It is also important for the teacher to be aware that students – because of their diverse backgrounds and their differing previous experience and knowledge – will relate to the representative, and his or her representation of the tradition, in different ways: some will find him/her more trustworthy than others (Britton 2014).

With regard to the group level, the representatives seemed to downplay the specific tradition. They tended to speak too generally about the religious tradition, or about more personal experiences. According to the interpretive approach (Jackson 1997, 2019) the group level is necessary to understand representations of religion in their complexity. As the illustrations above show, the accounts by the representatives are often impregnated with information about their own specific branches and communities. The speech genres that – according to our results – most readily can be used to draw attention to the group level, are 'listing of activities organized by local community' and 'talk about material context'. In order to connect the material context to particular groups, the students need some knowledge about these groups before the field visit. Thus, it is important either to prepare students through learning about the specific branch of the tradition, or to ensure that this is done in follow up-lessons.

The personal level of religion and religiosity was referred to mainly when students asked their own questions. However, previous research shows that students, in the main, ask 'factual' questions about topics such as concepts, generic beliefs, the scriptures or religious practice, giving much less attention to questions about personal experiences (Britton 2014, Dalevi & Osbeck 2012, Svahn 2010). This seems to differ, however, between different religious traditions and, in particular, between different representatives and classes. Gunnarsson (2016), notes that most of the students who visited one mosque in Stockholm asked the representatives various questions that were too personal and private. Taking a post-colonial approach, Gunnarsson continues by comparing this kind of student questioning to Orientalists and their interest in Muslims' private lives. Gunnarsson takes the view that students, when asking private questions, take a similar superior position to the Orientalists, and that students simply want their prejudices to be confirmed by the representatives' way of living. According to Gunnarsson, such dialogues contribute to cementing hierarchies. On the contrary, in our study, most students were very polite, both in the mosque and at other religious places, and sometimes did not have the confidence to ask such questions (cf Britton 2014). Some possible explanations are that the mosque representative in the present study was an ethnically Swedish, well-educated male convert and that he challenged students when they asked very general questions – whether Muslim women are oppressed,

for example. The representative's education, ethnicity and gender seem to affect the students' constructions of the religion during excursions. One limitation of our study is that we do not have any formal interview data from the mosque representatives. We draw on previous research indicating that one reason for welcoming students to the mosque is to refute their prejudices (e.g. Karlsson Minganti 2010, Roald 2003, Svahn 2010), and we have observed that this can happen during the visit. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to talk with more representatives from different traditions, having a variety of educational backgrounds, and with varied ethnicity and gender.

Even the representatives in Svahn's study gave attention to personal questions. They emphasized that they missed being asked personal questions at the expense of factual questions about the specific group. The representatives in this study, too, were comfortable with personal questions, and this can be related to social discourses about the religious tradition that they represent. Moreover, it is likely that the religious education of the representative will have an impact on whether or not he or she talks more about his or her own experiences, or about the religious tradition in general. This discussion highlights the possibility that teachers might consider including representatives in the formulation of their teaching objectives, and ask them whether they feel comfortable with personal questions. If they answer affirmatively, the students can be encouraged to prepare and include such questions as well as others of a more factual kind (cf Britton 2014).

The age of students may also affect the dialogue. The students in this study were aged 16 years or older. Older students are more likely to be affected by social discourses than younger students, and this may well influence their constructions of the religion during the visit. Further research on excursions with younger students would thus be valuable. It would also be interesting to research the influence of students' politeness on the representatives, the hypothesis being that their experiences of meeting polite and open-minded young people during excursions might contribute positively to mutual understanding.

It is clear that follow-up work after an excursion is highly important, in terms of analysing the experience and relating it to other representations of the religious tradition. Otherwise, there is a risk that students will only understand the religious tradition narrowly and that their prejudices are supported. The present study evidences the complex processes at play in constructions of religion and religiosity during an excursion, where the focus is on the interactions and dialogues among students, representatives and teachers. On the basis of our research, we consider that one potentially effective strategy to help students to understand the representation they encounter is to pay attention to the three levels of the interpretive approach. These levels can be used as analytical tools for students in follow-up work.

We consider that our analysis, and the analytical tool, can be of assistance to teachers who wish to draw their students' attention to the different levels within a religion. The analytical tool can help students and teachers alike to identify if and how the different levels of a religion are thematized in each speech genre. We also take the view that the analytical tool can help teachers in planning visits of different kinds, with different foci. If learning about a specific group is the intended learning outcome, it might be wise to focus on aesthetics and/or the activity run by the community. If the intended learning outcome is related to the individual level, formulating good questions about personal experience and meaning making,

will be of importance. Whatever the intended outcome might be, what happens during a field visit can never be controlled fully by the teacher. Nevertheless, it is important, pedagogically, that what actually happens and is constructed, is analyzed – and our analytical tool might assist in this.

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