Learning Religion in Confirmation: Mediating the Material Logics of Religion

An ethnographic case study of religious learning in confirmation within the Church of Norway

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Article I


Article II

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Article III

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1 Introduction

“Honestly, I still don’t know what confirmation really is about. I really struggle to get it”. This quote is from a 14-year-old boy, one of the confirmands I interviewed when his confirmation training was drawing to a close. Along with 66%\(^1\) of all 14-year-olds in Norway, he had chosen confirmation in the Church of Norway which is an eight month long religious educational activity. Introduced by law in 1736, confirmation preparation in Norway is a context where old traditions from a relatively homogenous religious society are admitted into a modern plurality. In 1911, confirmation became voluntary and it is still widely popular, although the majority of confirmands are newcomers to religious practices. Confirmation therefore offers an interesting opportunity to understand the processes of religious learning between the newcomer and the expert. It is also an opportunity to understand how religion is practiced by the institutional religious community in a complex multicultural society.

The reasons for the widespread popularity of confirmation are many, but the boy I interviewed chose confirmation training because he wanted to learn what confirmation is. He explained:

I have heard that the idea with confirmation work is to confirm my baptism, but I feel for the most part we just sit. We sit and learn about Jesus, God and different stuff, like diaconia\(^2\) and communion. Still, I like to sit, it has been cozy. I mean really, confirmation work has been one of the few occasions so many of us from school can meet and hang out!

Despite his confusion, he was content with his choice. Confirmation training had been a good time because of the fellowship he experienced with friends from school. The confirmand’s description of confirmation encapsulates the key question for this dissertation: What does religious learning in confirmation training look like? The quote also expresses my motivation for this study. I seek to explore what religious learning

\(^1\) The number is based on the latest information found at the Church of Norway’s English website. In the extended abstract I use 66% but in the articles I have used 67% which is statistics used by the European Confirmation study Høeg, Ida Marie and Bernd Krupka (Schweitzer 2010), [http://www.gammel.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=5276](http://www.gammel.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=5276) (Downloaded December 16, 2014)

\(^2\) Diaconia is the social work of the Church of Norway. This is one of the ministries that are presented for the confirmands. Often it involves serving minority groups and older people.
signifies by conducting an empirical inquiry into how religious learning is conceptualized and how religious learning processes take place in the field of confirmation training. Theoretically, the study takes a sociomaterial approach to learning: learning is not an entity in itself, but is intertwined with persons and material things as part of a collective practice. A sociomaterial stance on learning seeks to identify how these connections bring about change, and how participation is mediated by material tools (Fenwick et al. 2011; Law 2002; Sørensen 2009; Wertsch 1998).

Empirical inquiries into learning and knowledge processes in faith communities, and into practices such as confirmation, represent a lacuna in the field of religious educational research. Religious education in the Norwegian context has traditionally been less concerned with theories of learning than with systematic theology or didactics (Afdal 2008:3).

Astley emphasizes religious learning in his theory of ‘ordinary theology’, using a phenomenological approach to conceptualize religious learning. Religion, he says, is always learned (Astley 2002:17), and he argues that religious learning is vital to religious formation. In the wake of Astley’s theoretical contribution, a strand of empirical studies exploring the everydayness of peoples’ theological expressions has emerged (Christie 2005, Ward et al. 2011). These studies signify a move within practical theology and religious education towards an empirical grounding of people’s everyday use of religious and theological expressions. Although religious learning is mentioned, it is not in the forefront of this empirical inquiry.

Another valuable theoretical perspective comes from Jarvis’s discussion of religious learning as secondhand experiences (Jarvis 2008). Jarvis emphasizes the societal context as vital to learning, but I as understand Jarvis, the context become a static frame for learning, which misses a vital part of the analysis: how the material context is actually part of the individual’s learning process. Hermans’s contribution expands the notion of religious learning as part of the sociocultural context. In his Participatory Learning (Hermans 2003), he theorizes on a sociocultural understanding of religious learning. Hermans argues that there is a need for empirical studies from a sociocultural perspective on religious learning (Hermans 2003:333).

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3 This new empirical turn also involves the Ethnography and Ecclesiology network. See https://ecclesiologyandethnography.wordpress.com/ (Downloaded November 24, 2014)
4 Discussions on context as an independent frame or interwoven with practice is particularly addressed by Bateson and Cole (Bateson: 1972, Cole 1996). Cole emphasizes how the Latin root of the term contextere, means to weave together. Both of Bateson and Cole theorize on a notion of context that subsequently has to analyze action as interwoven to context, actions are not just occurring in context but part of context.
Empirical research on confirmation has mainly been preoccupied with the ritual aspects of confirmation (Høeg 2010; Salomonsen et al. 2005; Salomonsen 2007). But the field of confirmation research has recently expanded via a quantitative study of seven European confirmation works (Schweitzer et al. 2010). This is a significant contribution to the study of religious education and youth outside the school setting. The study’s quantitative methodology produces a valuable overview, but lacks the in-depth analysis offered by qualitative research into religious learning processes (Schweitzer et al. 2010:35).

The present study argues that an empirical investigation of religious learning is needed. Building on an ethnographic case study, I have written three articles which together illuminate new perspectives on religious learning in confirmation. Through a study of the curriculum for confirmation, confirmands, and confirmation workers, this thesis argues that religious learning is constitutive of religion in itself. Religious learning takes place, but in ways other than those we are usually aware of, and religious learning in confirmation involves a colliding of multiple worlds within the same physical space. This is a qualitative study which is theoretically informed. Drawing from two theoretical sources, sociocultural theory (Daniels 2008; Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch 1998), and actor network theory (ANT) (Latour 2005; Law 1994; Nespor 1994), the study positions itself within a sociomaterial paradigm (Fenwick et al. 2011).

This dissertation is part of a larger research project called Learning and Knowledge Trajectories in Congregations (Letra), launched in the spring of 2010 by MF Norwegian School of Theology with financial support from the Church of Norway National Council (Kirkerådet). The project was initiated by Professor Geir Afdal and developed together with Professor Sverre Dag Mogstad and Professor Heid Leganger Krogstad. From 2010 to 2015 the project has involved four Ph.D. students and several associated members.5 Every study in Letra was individually designed and the research was carried separately by the individual researchers.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The overall aim of the study is to contribute to a sociomaterial understanding of religious learning. Within this, there are two focuses.

First, the dissertation aims to contribute to a discussion within the international field of religious education and practical theology on how religious learning is taking

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5 For more details of the Letra-project see http://letra.mf.no/
place. Confirmation is a widespread educational activity which has attracted few empirical studies, and I wish to contribute to a growing international research field on confirmation, youth ministry and religious education. The intention is to provide a sociomaterial perspective in order to expand the discussion on how religious learning takes place in the intersection between humans, materiality and practice. Second, I aim to contribute to educational research: while this is not the main objective, I hope that the study, the empirical approach, analysis, and findings will be of interest for future studies of materiality and education.

The phenomenon of interest for this study is learning processes in religious practices, using confirmation training as a case study for investigation. The study’s main research question is formulated broadly in order to preserve an open approach and to situate the empirical context:

- What characterizes religious learning in the practice of confirmation in the Church of Norway?

The phenomenon of religious learning in confirmation is multifaceted. At present, approximately 40,000 14-year-olds are involved, and the majority can be regarded as newcomers to religious faith communities of any kind. A vast number of workers, both employees and volunteers, are also involved. The confirmation day involves the whole family. It is a large celebration resembling a wedding party, with dinner, gifts, and speeches. Furthermore, confirmation is part of the local congregational work and equally part of the Church of Norway’s national religious education program.

In this intersection three areas of religious learning are of interest: (1) how religious learning is expressed in the curriculum documents for confirmation, (2) local confirmation training and the confirmands’ religious learning processes, and (3) the religious learning practices of confirmation workers.

I have identified three subsidiary questions for three studies in order to operationalize a socioculturally informed study of confirmands’ religious learning

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6 The Church of Norway consists of 1260 congregations, with 1400 pastors. The accurate number of catechist and religious educators does not, to my knowledge exist. In the Church of Norway it is approximately 600 catechist and religious educators. From this number 181 positions are identified as catechists. The number is from KA “Kirken er et bra sted å jobbe” ISBN 987-82-7991-231-2. 
http://www.gammel.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=11943 (Downloaded November 24, 2014)
Each congregation is responsible for a confirmation work. However, sometimes congregations share the activities, teaching sessions, camps and so forth. The confirmation training is led by the pastor or some congregations have a catechist or another religious educator.
processes and to answer the study’s main question. The subsidiary questions here are identical to how I present them in each succeeding article. The first study asks:

- What are the modes of religious learning in curricula for confirmation?

The first study focuses on how religious learning is established and negotiated in the curriculum document, “Plan for Christian Education: God Gives We Share”. A sociomaterial stance views curricula documents differently from standard texts, because they are designed to implement conceptualized knowledge disconnected from the local educational practice (Fenwick et al. 2011:5). As an official curriculum, “Plan for Christian Education: God Gives We Share” forms part of confirmation training. The document was developed from local experience and practice, including confirmation, and a range of religious educational experiments conducted between 2004 and 2009. The curriculum document also represents political, economic, theological, and academic perspectives on religious education. This question aims to develop an insight into how religious learning is conceptualized in the curriculum for religious education and confirmation. How the official plans conceptualize the aims for confirmation, and how learning processes are understood in terms of tools, subjects and activities, are important for a case study of religious learning.

The two succeeding studies focus on religious learning processes with confirmands and confirmation workers, in three local confirmation training areas.

The second study asks:

- How is participation mediated by material tools, and how do space-time trajectories condition the meditating processes of participation?

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7 In 2003 the Norwegian Parliament voted for religious education reform. The reform provided momentum for a new focus on confirmation and the practice of religious education in the church of Norway. The General Synod developed a new curriculum: “God gives - we share” (Norway, National Church Council 2010), with the aim of renewing Christian education and thus confirmation training ibid.. See also information in English at http://www.gammel.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=5685 (Downloaded November 19, 2014)
This study examines the religious learning processes of confirmands as new learners, and how the religious tools mediate participation processes. In other words, how the tools enable the confirmands to participate in religious practice.

Confirmation camps are important elements of confirmation training programs. The aim of the second study is to gain insight empirically into how learning processes take place at the camps. The conceptual focus is on the affordances and constraints of material tools and how space-time is constitutive of these processes.

The third study asks:

- In what way are spaces for religious learning constructed with material objects, confirmands, and religious educators as they participate in the practices of confirmation, and how do these spaces order logics for religious learning and religion?

The final study focuses on the confirmation workers, such as pastors, catechesis, religious educators and volunteer workers. They are the experts within the religious practice of confirmation. Their professional practices are also complex, involving relationships with staff and congregations, their academic background, and other church institutions.

The question aims to establish a better understanding of how the logic of religious learning is constructed among the confirmands, confirmation workers, and material objects in the practice of confirmation.

The research questions display the study’s interest in the field, its theoretical framework and, simultaneously, the limits of this study. No study can encompass everything and this thesis does not address learning outcomes or effects. My aim is to understand some of the learning processes taking place during confirmation training. I have confined the observations and interviews to the confirmation training program. What takes place in the years that follow is beyond the scope of this study. I have focused on confirmands, confirmation workers and voluntary leaders, but I have made no observations of the families or other people in the confirmands’ lives outside the confirmation context.
1.2 Theory and methods

The empirical material was obtained from two sources: the curriculum for confirmation and fieldwork in confirmation programs. Following the aim of the study, to contribute to a sociocultural discussion of religious learning in confirmation, I have chosen an ethnographic case-study approach. Ethnography is defined in its wide sense, as the study of particular people in their particular context and their particular practice (Manning 2011:148; Silverman 2006). The study is also conceptually generated to a higher degree than traditional ethnographic studies (Hammersley et al. 2007). I followed three confirmation groups, and the methods I employed were participative observation and semi-structured interviews. For the curriculum study, I used a comparative strategy with the Finnish curriculum for confirmation.

In this study I explore the phenomenon of religious learning with an open empirical approach. I am not assessing teaching sessions, but seeking to investigate where, how and if religious learning takes place, and to describe what this learning looks like. The empirical study is theoretically informed by various concepts of learning.

A theoretical point of departure for this study is Sfard’s seminal article in which she distinguishes different views on learning within two paradigms, learning as acquisition and learning as participation (Sfard 1998). The acquisition metaphor entails the traditional cognitive view, while participation signifies learning as social practice (Sfard 1998:5-6). Building on Sfard’s metaphors, Pavvola and Hakkarainen developed a third metaphor: learning as knowledge creation (Paavola et al. 2005). They conceptualize learning as a trialogical process evolving from the individual as part of a social practice with mediating artifacts (Paavola et al. 2005:539). Both Sfard and Pavvola/Hakkarainen contribute to fruitful clarifications of the different approaches to learning.

Furthermore, the study uses theory on three levels: (1) sociomaterial theories as an overarching paradigm, (2) the key concepts of mediation and materiality as an analytical framework, and (3) empirically generated theory. I distinguish these levels as a way to explain how the different theories are used to inform the practical approach, viewing them not as separated or isolated levels, but as coherent parts within a paradigm. The analytical process was characterized by the interplay of the empirical material and theoretical concepts. This approach can be called abductive (Alvesson et al. 2008:55) in contrast to deductive or inductive approaches. Sørensen takes a similar approach in her study on the
relationship between a traditional inductive and deductive study (Sørensen 2009:13). Theory on the paradigm level is labeled ‘sociomaterial’, which entails the epistemological and ontological frame for the study. Sociomaterial theories are part of a constructivist epistemology. The general assumption is that reality is always mediated, and is therefore indirect and relational (Vygotsky 1978) (Vygotsky et al. 1986). This also implies the ontological stance that reality is not singular and stable. Reality is performed or practiced as a heterogenic network or hybrid of humans and material things (Latour 1993; Law 2004).

Sociomaterial theories provide a conceptual apparatus that can identify religious learning as more than the acquisition of meaning. This implies that religious learning is understood as processes of change. Change involves different persons and things in different places, in the past, present and future. Hence religious learning is understood more widely than the transfer of a message or idea, it entails more than remembering what was said. Religious learning is connected to a wider field than what is located above the confirmands’ eyebrows. Religious learning is part of their practice, how they interact with each other, with the other confirmation workers, and the congregations.

Säljö argues that to understand learning you have to understand the practices which humans develop in relations with mediating tools and the interpretive communities that exist (Säljö 2006:195). Säljö’s argument positions this study’s two key concepts in relation to learning: mediation and materiality.

### 1.3 Key concepts

#### 1.3.1 Mediation

Mediation is Vygotsky’s key concept on how human development and experience is always indirect and mediated by cultural tools (Vygotsky 1978:40). The term is later developed by other sociocultural theorists (Cole et al. 1996; Engeström 2001:134; Wertsch 1991). I employ the term ‘mediation’ in the sense that it is used in James Wertsch’s *Mind as Action* (Wertsch 1998). Wertsch develops a more comprehensive and analytically diverse understanding of Vygotsky’s mediating artifacts. Wertsch’s main argument is that all types of action employ certain material tools so that action is never ‘pure’, it is always meditated by a range of properties, and that cognitive

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8 My translation.
processes are distributed onto material tools. Learning processes are thus always mediated processes. I identified affordances and constraints in particular as mediating properties.

1.3.2 Materiality
I derive the term ‘materiality’ mainly from the Actor-network tradition (Latour 2005; Law 1994; Law 2007; Sørensen 2009). Material tools are also central in sociocultural studies. However, ANT and other material-semiotics theories have developed a more diverse and dynamic understanding of materiality. I have used two vital analytical points concerning materiality. The first is the principle of analytical symmetry. ANT perspectives direct the analytical lens on both humans and non-humans, both agent and object. The person is understood as an effect of associated elements. People are networks (Law 1994:33). This perspective opens the notion of agency in connection with materials, that is, anything that changes the existing state of affairs can be called an actor (Latour 2005:71). I used this framework as a means to analyze how religious learning connects with the confirmands, confirmation workers and material objects. Second, I drew on the analytical perspective of how material objects, confirmands and confirmation workers were part of different spaces for religious learning (Law et al. 2001; Sørensen 2009).

1.4 Research design:
The thesis is designed as an ethnographic case study. I chose an ethnographic approach with the intent to observe how religious learning processes take place in the different activities of confirmation. The ethnographic case study follows a single case strategy. I used the single case as a sampling strategy to establish the case of inquiry within the large phenomenon of religious education. Furthermore, I utilized this strategy to analyze practices within the same case. The case is based on a two folded empirical material: curriculum documents and fieldwork. The main unit of analysis for the thesis is the learning processes of three groups of confirmands, confirmation workers with material tools and the curriculum for Christian education in the Church of Norway. Finally, based on the analysis from the case study I have written three articles. The findings across the three articles, forms the argument for the thesis as a whole and answers the main research question.
Document analysis of curriculum text for confirmation

**Main research question:**
What characterizes religious learning in the practice of confirmation in the Church of Norway?

**Main unit of analysis:**
The learning processes of three groups of confirmands, confirmation workers with material tools and the curriculum for Christian education in the Church of Norway.

Fieldwork, participating observation and interviews in three confirmation groups

Study’s argument and contribution

**Article I**
Modes of Learning and the Making of Religion
The Norwegian and Finnish curricula for confirmation

**Article II**
Learning religion: Exploring young people’s participation through the timespace and mediation at confirmation camp

**Article III**
Material Logics of Confirmation

Figure 1: Research design
1.5 Overview of the articles

**Article I: Modes of Learning and the Making of Religion - The Norwegian and Finnish curricula for confirmation**

This article is a comparative study of two curricula for Christian Education: the Finnish confirmation training plan, “Life-Faith-Prayer” (2001) and the Norwegian plan for Christian Education, “God gives -We share” (2010). Usually, ethnographic studies have their main research focus in the field, observing actor’s social contexts. Nevertheless, documents and written accounts are often part of these social contexts (Silverman 2006:169).

Stemming from the sociocultural view of learning as tool-mediated processes, this is a document analysis of how subject, tools and activity are presented in the curricula for confirmation. The trialogical analysis is used to identify learning modes in the text (Afdal 2014). This article examines the curriculum for religious education in the Church of Norway through a comparative document analysis with the curriculum for confirmation in Finland. Adopting a comparative design was a strategy to identity the particular views on learning in the two texts.

The curriculum “God gives -We Share” was developed by a centralized committee, the Church of Norway’s National Council. It is a political document for the practice of confirmation. Hence it is of great value to identify the official voice of religious learning for the field of confirmation.

**Article II: Learning religion: Exploring young people’s participation through the timespace and mediation at confirmation camp**

This study explores the confirmants’ learning processes in terms of participation in religious practices. Drawing on one year of ethnographic field work where I followed three confirmation groups, two pivotal episodes from confirmation camps are analyzed. The analytical model deployed for this study examines how material tools offer affordances to participation or constraints on it, and how space-time trajectories are connected with these processes. The two episodes that are analyzed in this article can be read as representative of a recurring pattern of participation. The analytical framework stems from Wertsch and his concept of mediated action (Wertsch 1998), and Schatzki’s notion of time and space as unified features of human activity (Schatzki 2010).
Article III: The Material Logics of Confirmation

The aim of this article is to explore religious learning processes in the practice of confirmation and draws on one year of ethnographic fieldwork with three confirmation programs in Norway. The data material is analyzed with the interpretive lens of science and technology studies (STS) and actor network theory (ANT). I tried to understand how religious learning took place in the interplay with the confirmation workers, confirmands and the material objects.

During the fieldwork I found different aims and rationales for confirmation. The pastors and catechist presented various goals and reasons for confirmation. Also the confirmands had different reasons why they chose confirmation training. With these different motivations for confirmation, religious learning is practiced differently. However, the different practices of religious learning are part of, and in some way constituted by, material things.

1.6 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part is the extended abstract. This provides a more detailed account of the dissertation’s theoretical framework, methods and contributions. The second part includes the three articles. These are the empirical studies which together form the argument and research contribution for the thesis.

The extended abstract is organized in seven chapters. Chapter one is the introduction and is intended to provide an overview of the dissertation. The chapter summarizes the empirical focus of confirmation training and the theoretical focus of sociomaterial theories as the framework for the study. Here I outline the study’s aim and research questions, and explains how the three articles are designed as one study. Chapter two presents the theoretical perspectives, giving a short overview of how I understand the terms ‘sociomaterial theories’ and theories of learning. The following sections of the chapter concentrate on the study’s key concepts: mediation and materiality and how these concepts relate to learning. The final part elaborates on the study’s approach to religious learning and how concepts are operationalized in the three studies. Chapter three provides an overview of the context of confirmation training in Norway. In chapter four, I outline the relevant research literature for this study, concentrating on empirical studies within the field of religious education and confirmation. Chapter five presents the methodology and research design and the analytical approach for the study.
The main research paradigm is discussed and related to the case study, research questions and unit of analysis. The overall analytical approach is presented through the analytical paradigm, technique and strategy. Chapter six is a summary of the three articles. In chapter seven, I discuss the findings from the three studies and how they together contribute to the dissertation’s argument on religious learning. In the second part are the three articles, which contribute as empirical studies to the larger case study of learning.
2 Confirmation in Norway: context and history

This chapter describes the historical background of confirmation and the development of today’s confirmation practice. I will comment on the development of educational preparation for confirmation, and also on how confirmation is understood within the Lutheran church and in contemporary Norwegian society.

Now we have two forms of confirmation and multiple forms of confirmation teaching. But we are not sure if confirmation should lead to communion or not? We stand here - questioning and searching, for the best way to answer and enhance the heritage from our fathers (Welle 1935:44) ⁹

2.1 Short historical outline

Confirmation was introduced in Norway in 1736 by law. Growing out of the pietistic movement, confirmation was a tool used by the Danish-Norwegian King Christian VI to secure the Lutheran faith of the population of Norway and Denmark (Salomonsen 2007:162). Being a Norwegian implied that you were baptized as a child into the State Church of Norway, religious identity and citizenship was regarded as the same in this era ¹⁰. With the law of confirmation, religious education was tied into everyday culture throughout Norwegian society. Confirmation was now compulsory for as every citizen. This compulsory religious practice meant that no one could buy land, marry or act as a witness in court without being confirmed. Confirmation had to be completed before the age of 19, under threat of a prison sentence if this was not done (Aadnanes 2004; Salomonsen 2007). Because of compulsory confirmation, communion also became a forced practice. Thus, for many years, being a Norwegian citizen implied that you had to be confirmed and that you had to take communion (Fossum 1986; Hareide 1971:63). Confirmation was compulsory until 1911, when new legislation made it voluntary.

For the majority of 14-year-olds in Norway today, confirmation is still an important activity, conducted either within the church (chosen by 66 %) or through the Humanist Society (chosen by 15 % as a humanist non-religious confirmation).

¹⁰ The Reformation came in 1536. Lutheran faith not only had religious primacy, but it was compulsory for every citizen until 1845 with the Dissenter act opening for other Christian denominations. Religious freedom was legislated as late as 1964.
Confirmation is even carried out by Baptist and Pentecostal denominations and the Holistic federation (Høeg et al. 2010:166). The confirmation day is an important family event, celebrated in cities and villages all over Norway, either in May or September. In many ways it resembles a wedding: family, relatives, and friends dress up for a feast involving gifts and speeches. Salomonsen (Salomonsen 2007:169) argues that the family feast is unique to Scandinavia and is one reason for the prevailing popularity of confirmation. She also suggests that the family feast is a reason for the alternative non-religious confirmations (Salomonsen 2007:169). The form of the feast follows prescriptions from Old Norse feasting traditions where the young boy or girl is put in the ‘high seat’ as a symbolic king or queen (Salomonsen 2007:169). Confirmation in Norway also fulfils an important role as a rite of passage, the initiation from childhood into adulthood (Høeg et al. 2010; Salomonsen 2007). When it was introduced in 1736, confirmation was set at the age of 15 and conferred the right to participate in trade and to marry. Confirmation opened the door to adult culture; adult clothes could be worn and the confirmed 15-year-old gained admission to dance parties (Salomonsen 2007:169).

**2.2 Confirmation and education**

Historically, a strong bond has existed between confirmation and schooling. In one sense, confirmation created the need for schools in Norway and (Haraldsø 1986:20) illiteracy was probably overcome thanks to confirmation (Tveit 1986:51). Traditionally, schools were for the wealthy few but because of compulsory confirmation people from all classes were required to be literate. The main objective of confirmation was to read Pontoppidan’s commentary on Luther’s catechism (Jensen 2006:106), hence people had to learn to read. Other countries with a history of compulsory confirmation share similar stories of how reading and education were connected to the practice of confirmation (Salomonsen 2007:163).

A new perspective on confirmation as a catechetical period developed gradually after 1911 (Aadnanes 2004:29) and in 1978 the first curriculum to prepare children for confirmation was introduced. Before this, confirmation training was carried out by each local pastor. With the introduction of the curriculum, the focus was on confirmation as a training period rather than simply on the confirmation day (Krupka 2009). The curriculum of 1978 included a detailed pedagogical program and represented a
milestone in confirmation work in Norway. The new plan focused on the role of the confirmands in congregational life’ (Aadnanes 2004). A revised plan was introduced in 1998.

2.3 The purpose of confirmation

The purpose of confirmation has always been a focus of debate within the church because the understanding of confirmation has changed over the centuries (Hareide 1971:78). With the Reformation in the early 16th century, confirmation seemed to present a dilemma for the Lutheran theology. Unlike in the Catholic theology, confirmation was not viewed as a sacrament. Luther referred to confirmation contemptuously as “monkey business, lies and deceits”\textsuperscript{11}. He felt that confirmation would interfere with the understanding of baptism as the sole means of salvation (Fossum 1986:81). Nevertheless, Luther saw confirmation as a useful educational tool, and the reformation brought a strong emphasis on Christian education. Through Lutheran reformation, confirmation became the admission to communion. From 1523, Luther demanded a test of the catechism in order to take communion (Fossum 1986:81).

Luther’s view on confirmation prevailed with the development of confirmation in Norway. Knowledge was a prerequisite for taking the communion meal. Confirmation was viewed as the logical place for the young people to be taught the essentials of catechism. Thus confirmation became the testing ground for the catechism and the communion was main goal. In many ways this was an expression of the individualization which characterized the reformation. Each person should have access to the Bible, and each person’s level of Christian knowledge was tested (Elstad 2007:146; Fossum 1986:81; Haraldsø 1986:16).

After 1911 confirmation was voluntary, and the purposes of confirmation became even more diverse. Confirmation opened with different liturgies depending on the individual confirmands’ responses to confession or communion. Each diocese practiced differently (Elstad 2007; Holsvik et al. 1935:224).

The purpose of confirmation however, changed in 1968 with a new legislation allowing children down to the age of 12 years to take communion, without being confirmed. Consequently, confirmation could no longer be regarded as the admission

\textsuperscript{11} The original quote is from 1522 from «Vom ehelichen Leben». My source is from the Norwegian text on the history of confirmation (Konfirmasjon i går og I dag, Fossum 1986), English: Confirmation: yesterday and today
test to communion (Hareide 1971:76). Hareide argues that this situation gave a momentum for a new sense of direction for confirmation in Norway. In 1968, the Bishops of the State Church in Norway approved to widen the time frame for confirmation; registration in August/September and confirmation in May/June (Hareide 1971:76). During the 970s, a change from individual confession by the confirmands to prayer and a blessing of the confirmands became widespread and this change was included in the 1978 curriculum.

The aim for confirmation as expressed in the most recent curriculum is as follows:

The aim for confirmation time is to revive and strengthen the life of faith given in baptism, so that young people can live their lives in renunciation of the devil and faith in Christ, in worship and service, as disciples of Jesus Christ at home, in church and in society. (Norway 2010:23)

2.3 Confirmation today

2003 saw the introduction of the largest reform of religious education in the Church of Norway, the National Faith-Nurturing Reform12. Through this, Parliament provides money for certain parts of faith communities’ educational programs. As a result, the Church of Norway receives increased funds for a Christian educational program aimed at all baptized children from 0 to 18 years. The reform has changed confirmation to be included into the large scale Christian educational program. Thus, from the Church of Norway’s view, confirmation has been transformed from an independent program to be one activity in the renewed program. Consequently the curriculum from 1998 has been revised and is now one chapter in the new Christian education curriculum, published in 2010 entitled “God Gives - We Share: Plan for Christian Education” (Norway 2010). The young confirmands will not recognize the new situation. The parish however, with the employed confirmation workers has to navigate in new waters. Since the introduction of the reform, a range of new posts is financed through the reform in order to lead, teach or develop Christian educational activities (Trosopplæringstiltak). In the Church of Norway today there are 1260 local congregations (parishes), approximately

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12 For more information http://www.gammel.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=5685 (downloaded 30th Sept 2014)
1400 pastors and 600 catechist or religious educators. Who is in charge of confirmation will vary within each of congregation. Usually it is the local pastor but it could also be the catechist or a religious educators. How confirmation will be affected by the reform is too early to tell.

According to Høeg and Krupka, the general attitude among many confirmation workers is to include the confirmands in the fellowship of faith (Høeg et al. 2010:178). The narrative of the disciples of Jesus in the Gospels seems to be an ideal image of the confirmands. Confirmation today resembles youth work activity more than traditional catechist teaching (Aadnanes 2004:21).

This short chapter shows that confirmation is a complex practice, both a family feast day and a religious educational program. Following a tradition originating in 1736, the confirmands enter a religious educational activity which was developed in a homogenous religious society. As Salomonsen shows, the confirmation day is a deeply rooted tradition (Salomonsen 2007:170). Yet, from the point of view of the Lutheran Church, the emphasis has changed from the confirmation day to the confirmation training time within the congregation (Haraldsø 1986:101; Norway 2010:23). These different aspects suggest that confirmation training is an interesting case for an inquiry into religious learning.

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3. Literature review and research debate

In this thesis I want to investigate how religious learning is characterized in confirmation. I have explored the phenomenon empirically through an ethnographic case study which is theoretically informed by a sociomaterial framework. A further aim is to contribute to a discussion within the international field of religious education and practical theology on how religious learning is taking place. Both religious education and practical theology are broad disciplines and often involve interdisciplinary studies. My intention is not to give an exhaustive description of these fields. The function of this chapter is to establish a relevant research dialog that enables me to discuss the findings from my study of religious learning.

The chapter starts with a broad review and then moves on to a narrower focus. I have structured the literature review in accordance with the study’s aim and will focus on studies within the international field of religious education and practical theology. My main dialog is with international empirical studies. A subordinate but highly relevant field is that of educational studies which uses sociomaterial theories.

3.1 Norwegian studies

Several studies from the Norwegian context fall outside the scope of international debate, but are nevertheless valuable. Confirmation research in Norway has predominantly involved historical or systematic theological studies (Aadnanes 2004; Asheim 1970; Elstad 2007; Hareide 1966; Hareide 1971). Ulstrup Engelsen (Engelsen 1998) was the first to contribute to curriculum studies on confirmation and Christian education. Her main focus was on different epistemological views and didactics in the curriculum ‘in 1978 and ‘in 1998. A more recent contribution is a study of local plans (Fuglseth et al. 2012) which analyzes the processes of local congregations and how they develop local curricula for religious education. Gjesdal’s master’s thesis on confirmation camps argues that the camps provide confirmands with a positive experience which leads to their continued participation in the youth work of the congregation (Gjesdal 2014:74). A highly important empirical contribution is the Ph.D. from Elisabeth Tveito Jonhsen (Tveito Johnsen 2014). Her study is also part of the Letra project, but has studied children’s negotiation in the Church of Norway.
3.2 Religious studies and material religion

Religion has rarely been subject to sociocultural inquiry. Few exceptions are studies on how religious communities take part in children’s mathematical development (Taylor 2013) and on parental child rearing (Wiley 1997).

This dissertation analyzes religious learning in the context of confirmation, not as a school activity. By contrast, a sizeable strand of existing research focuses mainly on religious learning in schools (Haakedal 2012; Leganger-Krogstad 2011; Osbeck et al. 2012; Roebben 2009a; Roebben 2009b; Valk 2009; Vermeer 2012). Equally large is the field within religious studies devoted to material religion (Houtman et al. 2012; Morgan 2010; Orsi 2005; Vásquez 2011), a growing area with its own dedicated journal, Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief. The various studies are certainly relevant to my research and I refer to some of them in this dissertation, but this strand of contributions does not include the focus of learning. The educational aspect of materiality is the main focus of my thesis.

3.3 Theoretical contributions

Within the field of religious education and practical theology, religious learning has attracted increasing attention. However, the majority of contributions have been mainly theoretical studies. Astley developed his theory of ‘ordinary theology’ using the concept of religious learning as a conceptual departure (Astley 2002:5, 17). He deploys a range of perspectives on learning, some from Lave and Wenger, and others from Jarvis, without expounding them theoretically. Nevertheless, Astley’s contribution is highly interesting because he connects religious learning to the development of everyday theology. Equally interesting is that his concept of ordinary theology has generated some empirical studies, such as those by (Christie 2005; Christie 2007; Ward et al. 2011). These studies offer insight into how theological language is articulated by lay people or non-experts (Christie 2007:184; Ward et al. 2011:226). However, they focus on theology as narrative or on the articulations of theology, not on how the wider material context contributes to religious practices.

Hermans’ contribution is a comprehensive and theoretically stringent work in which he elaborates on religious learning from a sociocultural perspective (Hermans 2003). Hermans argues that in order for religious development and learning to take place, the learner has to participate in the socio-historical practices of religious
communities (Hermans 2003:295-96). Hermans also makes use of Wertsch’s conceptualization of mediated action. But from my perspective, the analytical approach is too narrow. Although Hermans acknowledges that material tools are part of the participatory learning process, he does not elaborate on how artifacts and actors are intertwined (Hermans 2003:277). His understanding of sacred space is narrow in that it includes only the traditional religious tools, ignoring the possibilities of other everyday tools (Hermans 2003:8-9).

3.4 Empirical contributions
With growing interest in young people and religion from the perspectives of both practical theology (Ziebertz et al. 2006) (Ziebertz et al. 2009) and religious studies (Collins-Mayo et al. 2010a), some larger empirical studies have been made. Some of these studies are large quantitative surveys and have researched religious learning predominantly as a school phenomenon. Most interesting is the mapping of different attitudes to institutionalized religion, with the Netherlands and Sweden being the most negative, while Finland and Croatia have the most positive attitudes (Ziebertz et al. 2006:255). These studies also show how young people in Europe appreciate learning about religion because they live in a multi-religious society (Ziebertz et al. 2009:117).

Through his analysis of catechetical learning, De Kock’s study focuses more closely on religious learning from the perspectives of religious educators (de Kock 2014; de Kock 2012). De Kock interviewed catechists and researched their conception of the catechetical learning environment (de Kock 2014). These are valuable empirical and theoretical contributions to catechetical and religious learning, but material tools are not included in his analysis. In his concept of the ‘learning environment’, De Kock understands environment in terms of the surroundings in which action is taking place, and learning as an individual activity occurring between the catechist and the catechumen (de Kock 2014:2). The societal context is not analyzed as part of the learning process.

3.5 Confirmation research
The European comparative study on confirmation work (Schweitzer et al. 2010) is a major contribution to religious learning in confirmation and is highly relevant to my dissertation. It represents an important addition to a field in which research on religious
learning outside formal schooling contexts is limited (Schweitzer et al. 2010:25). This is an extensive quantitative study covering seven countries, with the answers from approximately 20,000 confirmands through a questionnaire. The researchers found that, in general, confirmands are satisfied with their confirmation (72%). Where camps were part of the confirmation experience, the level of satisfaction was even higher (Schweitzer et al. 2010:281). This finding is interesting as one my articles specifically analyzes learning at camp (article II). However, the European study, with its methodological design, provides a map of confirmation work in Europe, but not an understanding of the in-depth dynamics of how the confirmands negotiate Christian knowledge (Schweitzer et al. 2010:35). It is limited when it comes to understanding the learning processes and how Christian knowledge is negotiated. Yet the European study’s importance extends beyond the size of the project: through this research, the different contributors have developed an international research field (see http://www.confirmation-research.eu/). Salomonsen, Høeg, and Krupka have contributed to confirmation research both in the Norwegian context and internationally. Salomonsen and Høeg have studied the ritual aspect of confirmation as a rite of passage (Salomonsen et al. 2005; Salomonsen 2007) while Krupka and Høeg have developed a Norwegian quantitative study based on the larger European study (Høeg et al. 2010; Krupka 2009).

3.6 Studies within youth ministry
An equally relevant area of research is the field of youth ministry. Through the International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry (IASYM), several important studies on young people and religion outside the school setting have been developed (Dean 2004; Ward 2005; Ward et al. 2011).

Collins-Mayo, Mayo, and Nash have conducted two qualitative studies concerning young people and religion. The key finding is that young people structure their lives according to a ‘happy-midi narrative’; that is, they rely on their friends and family as structures for a good and happy life (Mayo et al. 2006). They view religion in terms of what works in everyday life, not necessarily as part of a larger Christian narrative, but what they term ‘bedroom spirituality’ (Collins-Mayo et al. 2010b:45). The concepts of materiality and learning are not included in their studies, but their contributions are highly valuable since they share some similar findings with my study.
4 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, a theoretical framework is established for analyzing religious learning in the curriculum and the fieldwork of confirmation. The theoretical framework stems mainly from two traditions: sociocultural theory and actor-network theory (ANT). The two traditions fall under a common epistemological umbrella that is adopted for sociomaterial theories (Fenwick et al., 2011).

First, the thesis will be situated within the paradigm of sociomaterial theories, followed by a brief overview of learning theories to serve as a theoretical backdrop. However, the vast field of learning theories will not be scrutinized since it is beyond the scope of this thesis. The aim of this research is to highlight some key issues from the field of educational research which are germane to this dissertation. Second, the thesis’ key concepts of mediation and materiality will be expounded upon to address their place within a sociomaterial paradigm and how they are related to learning. Third, a discussion about how the concepts are related to religion and religious learning will follow. Finally, the operationalization of concepts in the three articles is outlined.

The theoretical framework for this thesis can be understood on three levels depending on its relationship to the empirical material. The first level is on a paradigmatic level. It is an overall level that establishes the rationale for learning and maps the analytical possibilities, but also sets the frames for the study. The second level is on the direct operational analytical level. Here, the concepts illuminate and interpret the material. The third level is addressed in the discussion chapter. This is an empirically generated theory from the concepts in the material.

4.1 Sociomaterial: Mapping the Epistemology and Ontology of Learning

The theory on the first, paradigmatic level is called sociomaterial, a term employed here as a larger conceptual umbrella for this thesis. Sociomaterial is a term developed

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14 The term sociomaterial is used in various disciplines, especially in technology studies Nardi, Bonnie A., Paul M. Leonard and Jannis Kallinikos 2012, Orlikowski, Wanda. J. 2007. In educational research, however, the term sociomaterial has been labeled by Fenwick et al. (2011) as an overall frame for studies connecting social practices of learning with materiality. Their book, Emerging approaches to educational research: tracing the sociomaterial, discusses four larger theoretical traditions: complexity theory, cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), actor-network theory (ANT), and spatial theory. Despite obvious differences between the four traditions, the editors argue for some larger common frame. In particular, how material objects are intrinsically part of human learning and knowledge processes.
within educational research to indicate the strong reciprocal character of social human life and the material contexts. The social arena is not just a place for learning and the material things are not just methods for learning. The framework of the sociomaterial opens up a much stronger dynamic. In the home of the sociomaterial, the material things have moved in as doers, not just passive things to be used. This relates to the vital topics of epistemology and ontology, how we can obtain knowledge of learning and the nature of learning.

A strong material relational understanding implies that what we perceive and how things really are is always subject to constitutive relationships. Knowledge becomes contextual and situated according to the material things within various practices. Learning becomes more than a person to person practice. Learning always consists of indirect processes, related to more than the individual person. Consequently, to understand learning, the practice involving persons and thing needs to be accounted for. Thus, the material relationship constitutes part of the learning process. Hence, sociomaterial theories oppose a Cartesian divide of the mind and body. Consciousness or the mind is understood as distributed onto or as an effect of the material body and other things. Both humans and non-humans have constitutive relationships to how we learn (Fenwick et al. 2010:8; Fenwick et al. 2011:170).

Learning then is material relational activity. This implies that learning, as any practice, is not only part of material things, but that material is entrenched in the learning process. This also relates to the ontology of learning. Learning is not sui generis in itself. Rather, it is always contingent and mediated indirectly through the language, but also other material objects. Thus, learning becomes a complex network of relationships, and learning processes are connections, more than a linear activity of a teacher transmitting a message. This also implies that it is necessary to observe learning in situ, in the practices in which the processes of change might take place.

Bateson’s example of the blind and the walking stick illustrates the point of how the mind is connected outside of the brain or the body. “Suppose I am a blind man, and I use a stick. I go tap, tap, tap. Where do I start? Is my mental system bounded at the hand of the stick? Is it bounded by my skin? Does it start halfway up the stick? Does it start at the tip of the stick?” (Bateson 1972, Cole 1996, Nespor 1994, Wertsch 1998).

Lave (Lave et. al 1993: 5-6) defined learning in this way: “there is no such thing as ‘learning’ sui generis, but only changing participation in the culturally designed settings of everyday life. Or, to put it the other way around, participation in everyday life may be thought of as a process of changing understanding in practice, that is, as learning.”
In one sense, theory is regarded in this thesis as a tool with different aims and functions, as ideas of practice or as an analytical language of practice (Afdal 2010:45). For this study, sociomaterial theory provided this researcher with glasses through which confirmation practice could be observed and an analytical language to describe what had been observed.

In summation, sociomaterial theories within educational research are diverse but they share some important perspectives. Concepts such as learning, knowledge, and education are understood as effects of materiality, placing materiality as a constitutive part of learning processes (Nespor 1994:10). A sociomaterial study of learning needs to account for more than the individual agent (Lave 2009:203; Wertsch 1998:21), and to identify the processes taking place in relation to the materials and humans in situ (Säljö 2006:195; Sørensen 2009:5).

The larger theoretical paradigm of sociomaterial theories enabled the invocation of different concepts on an operational level in this study. Here, perspectives from both sociocultural theory and ANT are used. They differ in how they illuminate different parts of the empirical material, but are still compatible as they share similar approaches to learning as processually and materially related.

### 4.2 Theories on learning

Learning is also a very complex matter, and there is no generally accepted definition of the concept (Illeris 2009:1).

Learning is not an easy subject to define. As stated by the Danish learning theorist, Knud Illeris (Illeris 2009), learning is complex and conceptually diverse. Learning and knowledge have been widely debated within educational research (Bråten 2002; Greeno 1998; Sfard 1998). In the beginning of the 20th century, the dominating view came from behavioral psychology informed by philosophical empiricism (e.g., learning as a stimulus-response process and change of behavior (Pavlov, Skinner). Behaviorism lost ground to cognitive theories emphasizing the mental structures and individual cognitive constructions of knowledge.

Today, the debate usually centers on understandings of learning within a cognitive paradigm, or learning within a situated or sociocultural paradigm (Bråten, 2002). Illeris (Illeris 2009) tries to connect the individual’s learning processes to both mental and social processes. He certainly acknowledges the social context as important
for learning, but appears to view learning as an individual endeavor. Illeris’ own definition on learning is: “any processes that living organism leads to permanent change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing” (Illeris 2009:7). This definition focuses on learning as change, and change is understood broadly. Illeris tries to avoid the narrow focus on learning as strictly internal cognitive changes, or behavioral changes.

At the same time, he argues against what he calls modern social theories; however, his opinion becomes too attached to external interactions alone (Illeris 2009: 9). Still, Illeris’ contribution is helpful because it widens the analytical space, making room for different processes of change, but his definition is difficult to operationalize. Particularly difficult is how Illeris frames learning as permanent change. Thus, his definition is also broad, which helps to include a wide range of positions concerning the concept of learning. Yet, the definition is too broad for the phenomenon of this study. For this dissertation, the vital questions have been: who is part of the learning process? How are material things constitutive of the learning processes and what characterizes these processes as religious learning with confirmands and material tools?

4.2.1 From acquisition to participation to mediation

One way to understand this dilemma is found in Anna Sfard’s seminal article (Sfard, 1998), where she identifies the different views of learning within two metaphors (i.e., learning as acquisition and learning as participation). Learning as acquisition implies that it is the individual person who in various ways acquires external knowledge. Knowledge, skills, facts are defined as entities in different ways. The mind becomes a storage place for the externally acquired knowledge. Once acquired, the learned knowledge can be transferred irrespective of context (Sfard 1998: 5–6).

In contrast, the participation metaphor defines learning and knowledge as practices the person enters into. Knowledge is not an entity separated from context or the practice of learning, but is part of the process. Knowledge is not something you have, it is something you do. Learning is understood as gradually participating in the knowing processes. Concepts such as “situated learning” and “legitimate peripheral participation” explain learning processes as ongoing activities that are never separate from the context in which they take place (Sfard 1998:6).

The division between mind and body, the individual and the context is contested. Emerging from the debate on Sfard’s article, the Finnish researchers, Paavovla and
Hakkarainen (2005:535) launched a third metaphor: the knowledge creation metaphor. They attempt to conceptualize a trialogical understanding of learning. In contrast to the monological acquisition view and the dialogical participation view, learning is understood as a creative trialogical process between individual, collective, and mediating artifacts. I found the knowledge creation metaphor helpful as it explicates how mediation and materiality form part of the learning process. Still, their approach is similar to the participation metaphor, but more elaborately detailed. Although, I agree with the trialogical process, both the participation metaphor and the knowledge creation metaphor seem to share a sociomaterial stance on learning.

From the very onset of the project, the aim was to contribute to the sociocultural discussion of how religious learning processes take place among the confirmands in their confirmation training program. The ambition was to understand more of the processes taking place among the confirmands within the cultural practice of confirmation. Consequently, theories belonging to the participation/knowledge creation metaphor were favored as fruitful candidates for the study. One point of departure was sociocultural theories placed within the epistemological strand of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). The challenge was to find concepts which were operationally useful for the analysis. The knowledge creation metaphor helped to focus on two concepts: mediation and materiality. With this trialogical model as a backdrop, I invoke Vygotsky’s concept of mediating artifacts and understand learning as the individual or individuals’ participation in social practices while different cultural (contextual) mediating artifacts or tools. Hence, learning processes are understood as mediating processes between persons and context. However, a more refined conceptual language of materiality was found from the strand of ANT. The following paragraphs outline the thesis’ main concepts of mediation and materiality.

### 4.3 Mediation

Mediation is a key concept in Vygotsky’s work (Cole et al. 1996; Daniels 2001; Wertsch 2007; Engeström 2001). Vygotsky’s initial claim was that we do not have direct access to the societal surroundings. Every encounter, thought, and experience is indirect and mediated through either semiotic signs or material tools (Vygotsky

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17 This study is situated in the stream of Vygotskian interpretations that emphasize mediation as a key concept (Daniels 2001:2). Interpretations of Vygotsky’s work have taken different paths, but this study will not elaborate the various stances. Daniels’ books provide valuable overviews (Daniels, 2001, 2008).
Vygotsky understood the development of human cognition through the use of signs and tools, such as language, hammers, pens or the crucifix. They are all culturally developed artifacts that are bound to meaning-making processes which are mediated. Hence, intricate connections exist between the individual mind and the external context. Initially, Vygotsky argued against the behavioristic approach. Vygotsky’s critique was especially aimed at how change in the subject’s behavior was understood as a direct response to stimuli impulses (Vygotsky 1978: 39). Vygotsky argued empirically that the subject does not have direct contact with its object; rather, the process is a complex mediated act (Vygotsky 1978:40). With the argument of mediation, culture and the social context were brought in as essential parts of human development. The mediation of signs and tools broke away from a one-sided biological and deterministic understanding of development (Vygotsky 1978:40).

As the title of a collection of Vygotsky’s papers, Mind in society, suggests, the mind was now understood as in society, not separately (Vygotsky 1978). However, mediation is a versatile concept. The Vygotskian scholar, James Wertsch, explains how the concept of mediation was under ongoing development in Vygotsky’s short life (Wertsch 2007:178). In Vygotsky’s last essay, he clearly states that the central fact of psychology is the fact of mediation, cited in Cole and Wertsch (Cole and Wertsch 1996). Yet, Vygotsky himself never gave a single unified definition (Wertsch 2007:179). In contemporary sociocultural research, the concept of mediation has developed with different emphasis. Within a large stream called cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), the emphasis is towards the systemic. Mediating tools plays a prominent role connected in a collective activity system (Engeström 2001:135). Engeström, one of the key developers of CHAT, ascribes Vygotsky’s understanding of mediation as revolutionary. Mediation overcame the Cartesian split between the individual mind and the social context (Engeström 2001:134). From cultural psychology through the works from Cole, mediation signifies the material and ideal character of artifacts (Cole 1996:117).  

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18 One example is the “Forbidden Colors Game.” The study was set up as a game with different colored cards, and the children involved were asked to remember certain colors. The participants were handed colored cards, and they were not allowed to say the names of certain colors. The study showed how they used the cards as tools in order to remember; thus, the cards mediated memory and helped them. However, the use of the tools varied depending on age. The children from the ages of 5 to 6 did not use the cards, but those aged 10 and upwards did. Vygotsky and his researcher showed how the children’s development paths related to their use of mediating tools (Vygotsky 1978: 46).

19 The material and ideal aspect of artifacts, or tools is important to underscore, because tools are not viewed as either material or psychological (ideal), they are connected. The same rational is elaborated
All of these studies establish different approaches to mediation. In a manner of speaking, they open up different paths into the empirical field and their approach to the analysis of the material. CHAT, with its systemic focus, was particularly attractive because it illuminates mediation and learning as a collective enterprise. However, confirmation work is quite fragmented. The majority of participants are new to the practice and after eight to nine months, the whole program is finished. Therefore, for this study, the CHAT framework was deemed too restricting for a rather loose and disperse field.

The concepts from Wertsch (Wertsch 1998) however, emerged during this researcher’s fieldwork with a more nuanced and sharpened language. Wertsch has a more versatile approach because he focuses on human action in general. The following paragraphs will elaborate the concept of mediation and learning, using Wertsch’ concept of mediated action as one way of understanding Vygotsky’s claim of learning as interconnected social and individual processes.

4.3.1 Mediation and learning

As mentioned earlier, learning is not sui generis, but has to be empirically analyzed. From a sociocultural view stemming from Vygotsky, the social is placed at the heart of where learning takes place, not the individual (Vygotsky 1978:57). Vygotsky understood learning as the making and development processes that are first situated in the social surroundings, people, and language, which are then internalized by the individual (Vygotsky 1978:56).

The “social” are categorized as intermental psychological functions whereas the individual functions are categorized as intramental. Every development, concept, or change occurs on two planes, intermental and intramental psychological functions, with the social level preceding the individual level (Vygotsky 1978:57). The intermental-intramental process is a central point of departure within sociocultural theory in order to analyze learning as processes of change first situated in the social and then with the individual. Vygotsky emphasized the interconnectedness of these two psychological functions further under the Vygotsky’s intermental–intramental process (see mediation and learning). I explicate this point because I take the same stance, as many sociocultural theorists do (Wertsch 1998, Cole 1996, Säljö 2006) to talk of mediation of material tools as connected to both material and ‘inner’ cognitive tools.
functions. These processes are known as Vygotsky’s general genetic law of cultural development (Daniels 2001:33; Wertsch 1998:110).

The social and individual are not understood as separate levels; rather, the intermental and the intramental are intertwined. Wertsch (Wertsch 1991:59; 1998:53) and Säljö (Säljö 2006:49) advocate the term “appropriation” instead of internalization, because it better grasps the process of both the social and individual. However, Wertsch claims the concept of mediation is the key to understanding the connectedness of the intermental functions between people and things, and the intramental, individual functions. The processes are one and the same, occurring twice, between the social and in the individual (Wertsch 1998:111). Human action is mediated by cultural tools.

Wertsch elaborates his concept of mediated action using the works of Vygotsky, G. H. Mead, Bakhtin, and literary theorist, Kenneth Burke (Wertsch 1998). Connecting these theorists, Wertsch points to human action as their common analytical basis and that it needs to be analyzed as part of a larger perspective (Wertsch 1998: 12). With the concept of mediated action, Wertsch raises a fundamental question: who is doing the talking or who is carrying out an action? It is the agent-with-tool.

Thus, the answer to the question of who is carrying out the action will invariably identify the individual(s) in the concrete situation and the mediational means employed. (Wertsch, 1991:12)

Any action is possible to investigate, from the shortest conversations to larger issues, such as collective memory, because they all involve some cultural tools. Using the cultural as a point of departure indicates that the tools come from somewhere, they are grounded, and they have a background from other people, places, and circumstances. This is one of the pivotal points in sociocultural theory, but Wertsch integrates this stance into the following argument: Because we employ tools in our practices, our action becomes affected, modified and contaminated. Human action becomes mediated action which is conditioned by certain mediating characters (Wertsch 1998).

4.3.2 Learning is a social practice

Mediation raises the question of who is learning and how the individual is learning as part of a social practice. As Vygotsky argues, the development of concepts and memory
is by using the tools that are connected to the cultural practice through any contact with
the societal surroundings. This was a vital point that became evident during the
fieldwork. The various tools of confirmation training were connected to the practice of
confirmation, tools that were developed and mastered by the insiders (pastor, catechist,
leaders), and seemed to constrain many of the confirmands. Säljö (Säljö 2006) places
mediation and tools at the heart of learning processes when he writes: “to understand
learning is to understand the practices which humans develop in relationships with
mediating tools and the interpretive communities that occur” (Säljö 2006:195). However, for this study, it showed how novel the confirmands were to the
mediating tools of the practices they were to participate in.

With the argument of any developmental processes being mediated by tools,
learning is impossible to predict. However, it does not imply that learning will never
happen. It simply means the outcome of learning is unpredictable. Vygotsky argues that
every encounter with the social is indirect (Vygotsky 1978:39). Since any
communication is indirect and mediated by tools, the interaction is always open.
However, tools are also developed from a context and have historical trajectories; still,
their meaning or what they are developed to do can never be totally fixed.

4.3.3 Properties of mediated action
Wertsch’s central claim of mediated action is that human action employs mediational
means and that these means shape human action. Mediated action does not occur
separately from the sociocultural context; it is embedded in action and this gives certain
characteristics or properties to the mediation (Wertsch 1998:24–25). These properties of
mediation changes distort and create the processes of learning. Wertsch introduces 10
basic claims but opens a wide range of characteristics: 1: mediated action is an
irreducible tension between agent and mediational means; 2: mediational means are
material; 3: mediated action typically has multiple simultaneous goals; 4: mediated
action is situated on one or more developmental paths; 5: mediational means
constriction as well as enabling action; 6: new mediational means transform mediated
action; 7: the relationship agents toward mediational means can be characterized in
terms of mastery; 8: the relationship agents toward mediational means can be
characterized in terms of appropriation; 9: mediational means are often produced for

20 My translation.
reasons other than to facilitate mediated action; and 10: mediational means are associated with power and authority.

To operationalize parts of this study, Wertsch’ claim of affordances or constraints was found to be most useful (Wertsch 1998:38–42). The category of affordances and constraints put the analytical focus on how material tools form part of facilitating or hindering action. The material context of a confirmation training program has a wide range of cultural tools. The tools are arranged and used in various practices. One example is how chairs, bibles, candles, and songs are part of a liturgical ceremony. The different tools either provide affordances or constraints for how the confirmands participate in the practice. The affordances of tools are of vital importance because they concern how language and thought is developed through participation in practices (Wertsch 1998:38). Affordances or constraints also concern the empowerment or limitation of human participation. This raises important issues of inclusion or isolation and how confirmation training opens up religious practices for the novice confirmands. Thus, Wertsch’s concept of mediated action is interpreted here as a small-scale approach to understand human action and meaning making in relationships in the cultural, institutional and historical context (Wertsch 1998: 3). This is both the strengths and the weaknesses of his conceptual apparatus. Using the properties of mediated action, the processes and tools could be identified up close with the confirmands. However, the material tools are also related to persons and things which expanded the present situation. As a researcher who studies learning processes, it was necessary to account for more than the mere face-to-face interaction taking place in the physical context. Vygotsky also recognizes how learning processes are connected outside the physical presence:

    When the school child solves a problem at home on the basis of a model that has been shown in class, he continues to act in collaboration, though at the moment the teacher is not standing near him. (Vygotsky, Rieber, Carton, & Bruner 1987:216)

4.3.4 Mediation of time and space

Although Wertsch accounts for what he identifies as “social space,” he stresses the fact that mediated action can be misunderstood as isolated actions because even an individual in solitude employs sociocultural tools and those tools always have certain developmental paths (Wertsch 1998: 34–35,109). Thus, Wertsch’s point that space and
time is embedded in mediated action is understood, but they are not significantly addressed. The notion of time and space became important concepts during this analysis. A confirmation camp is certainly a physical place shared by both confirmands and leaders. However, the past experiences within that physical space differ between the two groups. The time dimension of the past will probably affect the present and future at the physical space of the camp. The space of the camp extends to the past and future; thus, space is more than the immediate here and now. Hence, both time and space become part of the learning processes for the confirmands at the camp. As a supplement to Wertsch’s small-scale mediated action, this study attempted to apply Nespor’s concept of time and space trajectories (Nespor 1994). Nespor argues: “People are always interacting with distant entities that have been material or semiotically transported” (Nespor 1994:133). Hence, learning or knowledge processes become part of spatial-temporal distributions (Nespor 1994:11). With this claim, Nespor challenges the Vygotskian stance of intermental/intramental development of learning (Nespor 1994:11). He critiques the notion of situated learning as ways of reducing learning processes to an activity in the community.

However, with the first review from Mind, Culture and Activity: An International Journal, I was advised to use Schatzki’s concept of timespace as unified features (Schatzki 2010). Although Schatzki uses somewhat different vocabulary, he has been recognized as sharing a similar epistemological stance with several sociocultural theorists (Foot 20002; Kostogriz 2006). Schatzki’s concept of practice is an open array of doings and sayings anchored in material arrangements and interwoven with timespace features (Schatzki 2002:23; Schatzki 2010:xii). Schatzki’s concept of timespace as unified features is derived from Heidegger’s Being and Time (Heidegger 1962). Building on Heidegger, Schatzki argues that human activity is fundamentally teleological (Schatzki 2010:111) and constituted by timespace. Space is understood as both material paths and places, but space does not exist on its own. Time, understood as past, present and future, is connected to space, and together, timespace is the teleological drive of practice. In other words, what people do and say are always part of a material context and towards some sort of aim. The concept of timespace highlighted the important connections to the specific tools in use. Thus, it was possible to identify how the past did something with the present and how other persons, even though they were physically remote, came close.
The framework from Wertsch combined with Schatzki was useful for the study of confirmands and tools. However, I disagree with Wertsch when he reduces the effect of material tools to only when they are in use. According to Wertsch, tools are powerless until they are in use by an agent (Wertsch 1998:30). This stance seems to be derived from Wertsch’ own claim of the close connection of material tools with the action of humans. A connection that, according to Wertsch, starts to redefine the notion of agent (Wertsch 1998:31). These connections are like networks of different persons, such as confirmands, pastors, religious educators, parents, and friends, as well as networks of material tools, including the mix of religious symbols, bibles, crosses, candles, chairs, smartphones, and other everyday things. These networks are part of why confirmation is a hybrid heterogenic practice. In order to highlight and describe this complexity, a more elaborate theory of the connections of persons and materiality was needed. For this project, the material semiotic\textsuperscript{21} approach from ANT and related science and technology studies were able to establish a vital material logic or religious learning.

### 4.4 Materiality

The first part attempted to make a theoretical stance of how learning processes are mediating processes, and inherently part of the confirmands’ group and their interactions. However, ANT and other material semiotic perspectives expand the analytical approach of how materiality and confirmands act together.

The concept of material semiotics implies that the meaning of objects or any given entity is relational. Things are not understood as in themselves but through the relationship with other parts. The relationship is material which includes more than language or text (Hassard et al. 1999:4). Together with sociocultural theories and phenomenology, ANT shares a mutual philosophical critique of the Cartesian mind/body dualism (Engeström 2001:134; Kaptelinin et al. 2006:196). Meaning-making processes must be understood in connection with the societal context. Yet, as elaborated by Fenwick and Edwards (2011: 97), the vital approach for ANT is not what text and other objects mean but what they do.

According to Bruno Latour, nature and society, sign and object, or materiality and representation are not separate realms; the distinctions between the two are modern inventions from the Enlightenment (Hassard et.al 1999:22; Latour 2005:110). ANT’s

\textsuperscript{21} John Law labels these different perspectives for material semiotics (Law 2007: 9).
principle of symmetry makes no analytical difference between actor and tools and uses the term *actants* from Greimas (Latour 2005:76). John Law argues that the principle of symmetry is vital to understand the complex network of humans and materiality. Individual agents cannot be understood as single persons just interacting with a context (e.g., sofa, TV, the Internet, other people). The person is understood as an *effect* of associated elements; thus, people are networks (Law 1994:33). On one level, we are networks of cells, enzymes, skin, and bones, elements of which we are usually unaware. On another level, we are constituted by things, visible or invisible, but the arrangement is not fixed but always in some sort of *ordering* process (Law 1994:33).

A similar argument is found in Wertsch’s claim of the *irreducible tension* between agent and mediational means. Though Wertsch sometimes talks of both agent and cultural tools as two distinct elements, it is merely to raise an analytical point. Agent and tool do not exist separately from action. The irreducible tension refines the notion of agent, and Wertsch argues for a designation of agent as an “individual-operating-with-mediational-means” (Wertsch 1998:26). The understanding of action and agent is an epistemological bridging point between Wertsch and ANT. According to Latour, action has to be understood as part of several agencies and not under conscious control. “Action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies” (Latour 2005:44). He opens the analytical view because materiality is given an active role. An actor is for Latour “anything that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference” (Latour 2005:71). It is the network of things and people that creates changes. A dramatic historical example of material semiotics and the network of agencies is a bus seat from 1955. On December 1, 1955 a black seamstress called Rosa Parks boarded a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. She refused to move to the “colored” section and was arrested. The effect of the bus seat, Rosa Parks, and the color of her skin sent her to prison, motivated the Montgomery bus strike, gave momentum to the whole Civil Rights movement, and changed US policy on the discrimination of their colored citizens.22

4.4.1 Materiality and learning

However novel ANT and similar material semiotic perspectives are to educational research, the contributions of research within this paradigm is growing (Fenwick &

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22 The bus is currently on display at the Henry Ford Museum.
Edwards 2010; Fenwick et al. 2011:110; Nespor 1994; Sørensen 2009). Learning processes within a material semiotic perspective explore the connections of materiality and humans. Learning is understanding how these connections or networks bring about changes or new forms of knowledge as distributed effects (Fenwick et al. 2011:117). ANT appears to share the sociocultural stance that learning is fundamentally a collective and distributed practice.

4.4.2 Learning as growth in material knowledge space

Learning, according to Sørensen, is growth in knowledge forms. Pertaining to the concepts of growth in knowledge, Sørensen develops various spatial expressions to analyze learning (Sørensen 2009:5, 130–131). Learning as growth is understood as a performance or enactment in certain spaces of knowledge. The knowledge spaces are fundamentally different in character to the extent that we can talk of different forms of ontologies (i.e., representational, communal, and liquid) (Sørensen 2009:133).

Approaching knowledge as different ontologies opens up both individualistic definitions of learning as well as a situated and socio-material definition of how learning is performed spatially – individual, communal, and liquid. Learning and knowledge are not defined a priori, but are subject to empirical analysis in order to see how learning is performed and, thus, what kind of spatial knowledge is established. The notion of space is adopted by Law (Law 2002) and Law and Mol (Law and Mol 2001, 2002). Space in this sense is the expanded web or relationships with humans and non-humans and how these components create spatial formations (Sørensen 2009:75). With the introduction of spatial formations as analytical concepts, Sørensen expands the network concept. In other words, the connections of humans and non-humans are understood as more durable discourses or cultures than flat networks.

This analytical expansion was introduced by Law with his modes of ordering (Law 1994) and further developed as spatial formations. The analytical point is that reality consists of bits and pieces. It is heterogenetic, hybrid, and messy. Reality, whether it is confirmation training or school, consists of bits and pieces, humans and non-humans that stand in a web of relationships and, thus, create notions of knowledge spaces. The point, according to Sørensen, is that learning processes are really growth processes in the different spaces. Taken from everyday common sense talk, we use spatial metaphors. When communication feels difficult, we talk of “hitting a wall,” or “belonging to different worlds.” Sørensen argues that the connections of humans and
materiality create notions of spaces that inhabit different logics, knowledge, and fundamentally, ontologies (Sørensen 2009:136).

4.5 The Materially-Mediated Religion in Religious Learning

The phenomenon for this study is the confirmands’ religious learning processes in the Church of Norway. The theoretical framework outlined above suggests that learning needs to be analyzed as mediation processes with material tools. As analytical concepts, they give certain implications for the phenomenon in question. In other words, the religion I enter is the material mediated practice of confirmation. This approach to religion follows some of the contemporary studies of religion. Here religion is understood as a constructed assemblage as opposed to a cohesive whole (Cadge, Levitt, & Smilde 2011). In the following, a short outline is presented of current understandings of the concept of religion and some important theoretical contributions on the topic of religious learning.

4.5.1 Religion as material practice

For this study, Bender, Cadge, Levitt, and Smilde’s (Bender et.al 2013) and Cadge’s et al.’s (Cadge et.al 2011) studies were found to be particularly fruitful because their approach to religion is similar to sociomaterial theories.

We could see religion not as a cohesive, rooted whole but as a loosely constructed assemblage of actors, objects, and ideas traveling at different rates and rhythms in to-be-determined geographies. (Cadge et al. 2011)

A similar perspective is shared by Vásquez (Vásquez 2011) when he argues in his book, More than belief: A materialist theory of religion, for religion as an open-ended product of embodied practices. He advocates: “the primary task is to identify the logics of religious ways of being in the world and to elucidate how these logics are inextricably connected with other ways of being in the world” (Vásquez 2011: 8). Woodhead also challenges how religion is conceptualized (Woodhead 2011). She identifies five concepts of religion: religion as belief, identity, relationship, practice, and power. Religion as belief is the traditional view. Being religious and thus learning religion often implies the ability to remember certain belief statements or be able to articulate religious ideas. The concept of religion as practice bears similarities to Lived
Religion from McGuire (McGuire 2008). A common denominator for these scholars is to focus on the concrete material practices of religion; that is, how religion is practiced in the everyday lives of people, outside the seminars and academic institutions.

4.5.2 Individual or collective learning

Religious learning from a sociomaterial perspective is collective in the sense that the minimum unit of analysis is the actor-with tool part of a religious practice. This is a significant point where this study diverts from other valuable contributions on religious learning (Fowler 1981; Jarvis 2008). Peter Jarvis argues for religious learning as an experiential phenomenon involving fundamentally primary experiences which create disjunctions (Jarvis 2008:557). Jarvis has criticized Kolb’s learning cycle for omitting the social and the interactions (Jarvis 2009:23). He values the social as important for the individual’s learning.

However, Jarvis still holds an individualistic approach. He argues that it is the person who learns and who is changed, and the changed person may cause different social outcomes (Jarvis 2009:24). The unit of analysis is nonetheless the individual. The individual as the loci of learning processes taking place is also found in cognitive theories of learning. For example, James Fowler’s (Fowler 1981) concepts of ‘stages of faith’ have been highly influential in the field of religious education (Gearon 2014:94; Hermans 2003:248). Fowler’s work pertains to Eriksson’s notion of development and a Piagetian notion as cognitive constructivism. In other words, faith is an active construction of the individual. The individual’s notion of faith is bound to certain preceding developmental stages. This study will not elaborate further on Fowler’s work, but it must be noticed due to its widespread use.

4.5.3 Participation or knowledge-creation

Chris Hermans (Hermans 2003) delivers a convincing argument on religious learning as participatory learning. Participating in socio-historical practices of religious communities is inevitable for religious development and learning (Hermans 2003:295–296). Hermans understands these processes through the theoretical framework of Vygotsky and Wertsch. In particular, Hermans uses Lave’s and Wenger’s (Lave et al. 1991; Wenger 1998) concept of legitimate peripheral participator. Religious learning processes are understood as the novice entering a religious practice and learning to
participate in a cultural context together with an expert. Hermans certainly includes the social in the analysis. However, he emphasizes the novice-expert relationship as focal to a sociocultural learning process. The material seems to play little role in the participation process; thus, it is a dyadic relationship. With this framework, religious learning tends become as you are and become like us.

Geir Afdal (Afdal 2013) challenges this notion with the knowledge creation metaphor from Paavola and Hakkarianen (Paavola et al. 2005), who expand on the learning metaphors of Sfard: acquisition and participation. Afdal argues that religious learning as knowledge creation is trialogical because it involves the creation of mediating knowledge tools or artifacts (Afdal 2013:200). Religious learning involves the processes of creating or developing religious tools in practices. Hence, it is the processes between actor-tool and practice that are in focus.

4.6 Operationalizing the Conceptual Framework

The beginning of this chapter outlined a large theoretical landscape. The landscape is large because both learning and religion are fuzzy words used differently within various disciplines and with sometimes contradictory definitions. Then, the large outlines were narrowed down to the two key concepts of mediation and materiality. These were discussed thematically in order to show how the concepts are applicable to empirical studies.

The final part of this chapter will clarify how the conceptual framework for the dissertation was operationalized. The aim of the thesis is to explore religious learning in confirmation training. The main research question is: What characterizes religious learning in the practice of confirmation in the Church of Norway? To answer the main questions, material was gathered from documents and fieldwork, and three articles were written. Each article has its own focus: religious learning in curriculum for confirmation, religious learning with the confirmands, and religious learning with the confirmation workers.

Article I is a documentation analysis of curricula for confirmation. It is a comparative analysis of the Finnish curriculum for confirmation (Finland 2002) and the Norwegian curriculum for Christian education (Norway 2010). The aim for article I was to identify modes of religious learning in the two plans. The notion of modes is partly inspired by Law’s (Law 1994) concept of modes of ordering and Afdal’s (Afdal 2014)
modes of religious learning. However, the analysis is operationalized differently than the two preceding studies. In order to identify the modes of religious learning, an analytical frame was developed. This is derived from sociocultural theory and consists of tools-activity-subject. In other words, these modes were established through an inquiry of how the plans understand: 1) the tools for confirmation, 2) what kind activities make confirmation, and 3) what notion of subject is confirmation for?

Article II used Wertsch’s notion of mediated action as an analytical framework. It provided a focus on the confirmands and guidance to look for their practice with different tools. However, the concept of mediated action is still a large frame; thus, it was necessary to limit the scope in order to operationalize the analysis. Subsequently, one of Wertsch’s (Wertsch 1998) 10 categories was chosen, with a focus on his use of affordances and constraints as properties of mediated action. Affordances and constraints were employed to analyze how confirmands participated in religious practices at two camps. The confirmation camps were particularly good sites because the confirmands could be followed closely over several days. However, during the analysis, it was realized that the affordances and constraints of the confirmands’ actions were affected by persons and places outside of the face-to-face interactions, and thus, the concepts of time and space were included. First, Nespor’s time and space trajectories were considered. However, after the first review from Mind, Culture and Activity: An International Journal, it was recommended that Schatzki’s (Schatzki 2010) concept of time and space as unified features should be used. Combining Wertsch and Schatzki presented opportunities for further study and allowed for showing how the time affordances and constraints of religious learning were mediated by different time and space features. The spaces for learning were constrained by the past leaders at one camp. At another camp, the affordances for learning were mediated by tools that connected the confirmands’ past and present life.

The aim of Article III was to understand the confirmation workers’ approach to religious learning. During the fieldwork, discrepancies were identified between the reasons and the motives for confirmation both among the workers and the confirmands. Therefore, analysis commenced with an emphasis on materiality from the ANT traditions. This research identified how different material objects, bibles, and wooden figures, were employed in different teaching episodes. In the analysis, the notions of material spaces from Law (Law 2002) and Sørensen’s (Sørensen 2009) study on learning were employed. Their conceptual language enabled identifying how these
material tools constituted these spaces differently with inherent logics of religious learning.

In all three articles, the concept of religion as material practice was used (Bender et al., 2013; McGuire, 2008; Vásquez, 2011; Woodhead, 2011). The common ground of these studies is that religion can be analyzed as more than cognitive belief statements or articulated meanings. Thus, their concepts of religion were related to the different learning processes in religion. This opened the analysis in order to see how learning also construes religion in different ways.
5  Methodological concerns

The following chapter explains how the study material was established and analyzed. In the first part I will outline the study’s research design as an ethnographic case study, and the research design for the three articles. This is followed by an outline of the sampling strategies, a description of the empirical field, and the methods I employed. The second part outlines the analysis of the material. My aim is to account for my choice of analytical paradigm, analytical techniques, and analytical strategies. Finally I comment on the study’s validity, reliability, generalizability, and ethical issues.

5.1 Research design and ethnographic case study

A research design is the study’s blueprint. Just as an architect needs a detailed plan for a building, the researcher needs to develop a research plan. The design entails the study’s logic and overall approach and must be appropriate for the phenomenon in question. For me, this has been an ongoing process. According to Yin, the research design is important in the initial stages of the research project as it sets out key concepts and the logical steps for the work (Yin 2009:26,40). The design must also achieve a balance between identifying the different steps in the project and being open to adjustments and changes during the study (Yin 2009:30).

In chapter 4 I situated the study within the sociomaterial paradigm. I argued that my study of religious learning could be operationalized through the main concepts of mediation and materiality. These concepts are derived both from sociocultural theories and ANT-related theories. A vital point to stress is that the choice of theory also regulates the study’s methodology. From the sociomaterial theoretical stance, religious learning is not only about ideas in the individual mind, but also the contextual character of learning and knowledge processes. Learning needs to be analyzed in situ, where meaning is constructed in material practices. Therefore I needed to meet the people and

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23 I use the term ‘established’ rather than ‘collected’ or ‘gathered’. From a sociomaterial view, the data material are part of mediating processes which are situated and produced. I am not outside the field collecting data, but data material also includes me the researcher, the people I have observed and their background and surroundings. I follow Kvale’s argument that the material from a research interview is an inter-view, the processes of knowing is co-constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale 2009). I also endorse Law’s argument that research is part of social practices which not only describes reality but through description’, the practices of science also produce realities (Law 2004).
see the contexts they participated in. Both the philosophical position and the theory suggested an ethnographic case study as the most appropriate overall research strategy.

5.1.1 The single ethnographic case study

In view of the above, the research was designed as an ethnographic case study. I use ‘ethnographic case study’ as one term, but I will explain each concept in more detail because the two words serve different functions in my study.

I use the term ethnography in a wide sense, as the study of particular practices of people in particular settings. An ethnographic approach allows the researcher to study people in their everyday context and to employ a wide range of sources for gathering the material (Hammersley et al. 2007:3; Manning 2011:148-49; Silverman 2006:67). In this sense, ethnography provides the rationale for the methods I employ in the study of religious learning. Through ethnography I am not only interested in what people say about religion, but also how they practice religion.

As an ethnographer I am also interested in particular groups of people. Before I began the fieldwork I identified two distinct groups: the confirmands and the confirmation workers. Although the members of the confirmands group were diverse, they shared some unifying characteristics and cultural traits. For the most part, the confirmands were of the same age, from the same geographical areas, and were not familiar with religious practices. The group of workers was similarly diverse and also shared certain common features. This group included pastors, catechists, religious educators and voluntary leaders, and what they shared was their role as leaders of religious practice. They led teaching, planned the semester, and in various ways were responsible for taking care of the confirmands.

Ethnographic fieldwork could have constituted the whole approach, but the phenomenon of religious learning is larger than the practices seen in confirmation training. In order to investigate the complex phenomenon of religious learning, I combined ethnography with a case study approach.

5.1.2 Establishing a case to study

Yin advocates on a general level that:
a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 2009:18).

I found Yin’s understanding helpful to a certain extent. Following his definition, the focus of this study is an inquiry into the contemporary phenomenon of religious learning in confirmation training. However, I have found Flyvbjerg’s arguments for a single case study approach, more illuminating when deciding how to conduct this study. Flyvbjerg, argues for a single case study methodology in research on human learning. Human affairs, he says, are context-dependent, and case studies produce the type of context-dependent knowledge needed to understand learning processes (Flyvbjerg 2001:71).

Faced with the complexity of learning in confirmation, I had to develop a way to conduct an in-depth inquiry. Both the phenomenon of religious learning and fieldwork suggest many possible approaches with a multitude of persons, relations, places and research disciplines. Cases study became a beneficial strategy because it helped to delimit the complexity and to establish a case to study. Part of this strategy is called casing (Ragin 1992:217). This means that the phenomenon needs to be understood in an appropriate manner in order to be established as an example: a case. A similar rationale is proposed by Stake, who argues that a single case requires the researcher to develop an appropriate specificity or boundedness (Stake 2005:444) for the study. I used the tactic of casing in order to establish a case to study. I developed the case empirically from the field of confirmation training; this means that the case of religious learning is part of religious practices in a religious community, which is a different practice than religious learning in schools. The case is further specified or bounded by two empirical sources: curriculum analysis, and fieldwork with observation and interviews.

The case is also theoretically located within a sociomaterial framework. How religious learning is conceptualized has consequences for how the research is conducted, the research design, and the analytical strategy. For this dissertation, religious learning is theoretically conceptualized as mediating practices with material tools, an idea that underpins the rationale for employing ethnographic fieldwork as a research method.
5.1.3 Focusing on the unit of analysis

To define the unit of analysis is an important way of bounding the study and thus to specify what the study is actually analyzing (Yin 2009). The unit of analysis in this dissertation is theoretically grounded by Vygotsky’s argument from *Thought and Language* (Vygotsky et al. 1986). Any analysis needs to take the relational and processual character of a phenomenon into account. Vygotsky was highly critical of much contemporary psychology because of the way a complex phenomenon was analyzed as separated parts. He compares this to the study of water: to study water in its parts, it not only loses the characteristics of water, but changes the whole phenomenon. Water changes from being something that is able to put out a fire, to hydrogen, which will burn, and oxygen, which will keep the flame burning. To study language as just one element, in terms of grammar and words, without taking into account its complex social character is the same as studying water and only focusing on $\text{H}_2\text{O}$. The same chemical compounds are found in a raindrop as in the ocean. Similar constituents, but different wholes (Vygotsky et al. 1986:4-5). Vygotsky’s seminal proposal of a holistic approach to research raises important issues about the unit of analysis, or research object, in research. If the researcher analyzes only parts of a given phenomenon, he or she will not only produce too narrow an insight, but could also run the risk of studying something completely different.

Accordingly, a sociocultural analysis offers a balance between a reductionist analysis where the unit of analysis is the individual actor, and the dilemma of methodological holism where the individual actor disappears in the system (Matusov 2007; Wertsch 1998). Matusov raises an important point about how scholars define the unit of analysis differently: as an activity system (Engeström, 2001), event (Rogoff 1990), or mediated action (Wertsch, 1998). Matusov argues that the unit of analysis should be shaped by the purpose and the material of the study (Matusov 2007:308). His critique is aimed at sociocultural studies which often run the risk of defining the unit of analysis too broadly due to a fear of reductionism. The unit of analysis should be defined appropriately. It should be established according to the demands of the current study, not independently of the study (Matusov 2007:8). For this dissertation, the focus is on religious learning in confirmation. As an article-based thesis, each article has its own unit of analysis, while the dissertation has an overarching unit of analysis to include all three articles.
In order to define the unit of analysis, I focused the study’s research question, the theoretical framework, and the empirical field. The people and the material tools are part of the practice of confirmation, as is the curriculum for confirmation. I include the curriculum as a way of broadening the unit of analysis by widening its time and space trajectories. Plans are sites of negotiation extending the immediate face-to-face interaction (Nespor 1994:10) and are thus an important part of the case study of religious learning in Norway. This study’s main unit of analysis is the learning processes of three groups of confirmands and confirmation workers, together with their material tools, working within the curriculum for Christian education in the Church of Norway.

5.2 Research question

Yin defines research questions as having both the substance and form of the research study, making the research question the most important element of a study (Yin, 2009, p. 10). For this study, I began by deciding that the topic focus would be a project about learning and knowledge trajectories, and I selected a field, confirmation training in the Church of Norway. Later, the research question was subject to conceptual and methodological change. Regarding the concept of trajectory, I realized early in the fieldwork that it would be difficult to follow a few confirmands closely enough to analyze a trajectory. I had initially planned to use shadowing as a method. Shadowing would have entailed the selection of a few confirmands with me as a researcher following them around in their daily lives. This proved to be difficult with respect to sampling: neither I nor the workers knew the confirmands well enough to establish the necessary trust in a short time to enable me to follow these young people closely. Hence, I decided to follow the confirmands as whole groups, not some few individuals, and I observed the groups during their confirmation sessions in church and at camps. The change in methods also changed my research question: I moved from learning as outcome to learning as a process. I was not able to follow the confirmands after confirmation, thus I was not able to account for lasting change months after they had

\footnote{The two professional learning projects in Letra used shadowing as a method: Reite’s study of pastors’ professional learning, and Nygaard’s study of deacons. A considerable difference between the projects and this study was that they followed four or five adults, whereas my study involved three groups of around 30 teenagers plus three to five adults in each group. (For discussions on shadowing see Kusenbach 2003, McDonald 2005).}
finished. Hence, the conceptual focus on the processes of change in the study’s research questions, are a response to the interplay between the empirical field and theoretical concepts. Hammersley describes ethnographic research as usually characterized by the interplay between the substantive, the topical, and the formal, and that the research question may change during the course of research (Hammersley et al. 2007:25).

The main research question of the thesis is:

What characterizes religious learning in the practice of confirmation in the Church of Norway?

A research question has to address a particular problem, and it has to be formulated in such a way that is it capable of being answered. The problem in this study is large and fuzzy; the phenomenon of religious learning. I developed the main question with the intention of situating the phenomenon empirically in the practice of confirmation in the Church of Norway, and to encapsulate the wider theoretical concept, namely religious learning. The main question of this study is situated within a sociomaterial paradigm and it follows an ethnographic case study design. The case is specified as religious learning in confirmation training in Norway, with two forms of empirical material: documents and fieldwork.

To answer the main research question, three subsidiary questions were developed which, taken together, contribute answers to the main question. The main question situates learning within the wider sociomaterial paradigm and the inquiry within a sociomaterial context: religious learning within the field of confirmation. The three subsidiary questions address three particular ‘problem’ areas of this field which are appropriate for ethnographic inquiry.

The three subsidiary questions are designed to investigate three different aspects of one phenomenon; together they form one study. I have already discussed how I developed the three questions in the theory chapter 4.5. I present the three subsidiary questions as they are used in the three articles. A model of the research design including the main questions and the three subsidiary questions can be found in chapter 1.4. The subsidiary questions are as follows:

Article I:
- What are the modes of religious learning in curricula for confirmation?

Article II:
• How do material tools in the religious practices of confirmation mediate affordances and constraints for confirmands? And how is the mediating process constituted by time and space?

Article III:
• In what way are spaces for religious learning constructed by material objects, confirmands, and religious educators as they participate in the practices of confirmation, and how do these spaces order logics for religious learning and religion?

The first subsidiary question addresses the curriculum documents. From a sociomaterial perspective, these texts are cultural tools which have been developed at the sociocultural sites of confirmation in Norway. The text is therefore socially constructed through negotiations between central church committees, politicians, theological researchers, and local confirmation workers.

The study’s other two subsidiary questions relate to religious learning at two other sociomaterial sites: confirmands, material tools at camp (Article II), and the spaces for religious learning with workers and confirmands (Article III). All three questions address religious learning within the field of confirmation training in the church of Norway: the particular multi-person voice found in texts in the first question, and in the two other questions, the particular actions and words of confirmands and workers with material tools.

Finally, the questions have to relate to previous research in the same field. In other words, the answers to research questions have to contribute something new to research on religious learning and confirmation. An important point is how the main question asks what the characteristics of religious learning are. With this emphasis I am aiming for more understanding of a complex phenomenon, not attempting to identify a cause or outcome. As I show in the literary review, previous studies are either theoretical or quantitative, or do not address the issue of materiality in religious learning.

5.2.1 Research design for the articles

Table 1: Overview of the three articles

50
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Article 1</th>
<th>Article 2</th>
<th>Article 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum documents for confirmation in Finland and Norway</td>
<td>Field notes and transcribed interviews from two confirmation camps</td>
<td>Field notes and transcribed interviews from teaching sessions with confirmation workers and confirmands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit of analysis</td>
<td>Modes of religious learning in curricula for confirmation</td>
<td>Confirmands’ religious learning processes with material tools</td>
<td>Religious logics in the practice of workers, confirmands, and material objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research question</td>
<td>What are the modes of religious learning in curricula for religious education and confirmation in Norway and Finland? And how do the modes of learning constitute religion in the texts?</td>
<td>How do material tools in religious practices of confirmation mediate affordances and constraints for confirmands? And how is the mediating process constituted by time and space?</td>
<td>In what way are spaces for religious learning constructed by material objects, confirmands, and religious educators as they participate in the practices of confirmation, and how do these spaces order logics for religious learning and religion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>Participative observation and interviews</td>
<td>Participative observation and interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical strategy</td>
<td>Thematic and comparative: subject-tools-activity</td>
<td>Thematic: Affordances-Constraints part of timespace activities</td>
<td>Thematic: Material logics in different spatial practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Sfard and Wertsch</td>
<td>Wertsch, Schatzki</td>
<td>Law, Møl Sørensen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 My role as a researcher

In any research, and especially in ethnographic studies, the characteristics of the researcher matter. My academic background is in practical theology and youth ministry. Prior to the Ph.D. project I worked at MF Norwegian School of Theology as a lecturer in youth ministry. I have also been part of Christian youth work and confirmation programs for several years as a voluntary participant. This background made me to some extent an insider in the empirical field. The insider/outsider role has been a topic of debate in ethnographic studies (Hammersley et al. 2007:86-87). According to Hammersley, the debate revolves around the researcher’s relation to the field. A pure insider stance asserts that it is only as an insider that the researcher is really able to understand the dynamics of a particular practice. The opposing outsider view argues that only the outsider role offers the objectivity necessary to conduct ethnographic research. Hammersley finds the dichotomy problematic, and supports Style’s criticism of the insider/outsider roles as myths (Hammersley et al. 2007:86). Style argues that the insider/outsider debate is like a myth because it is used as moral rhetoric, with each side claiming exclusivity in research (Hammersley et al. 2007:86). Nevertheless, Hammersley allows that the outsider or insider has access to different types of information and so each is presented with different methodological challenges (Hammersley et al. 2007:87). The outsider researcher runs the risk of misunderstanding what is being observed because of insufficient knowledge of, or sensitivity to, the field under observation. The insider researcher is in danger of becoming too close to certain groups or being limited by insider relationships in the field (Hammersley et al. 2007:87).

These are the methodological challenges I had to be aware of. As a theologian and developer of youth ministry I do wish to improve practice. However, the main aim of this study is to describe and analyze practice, not to develop new practices. During the fieldwork and analysis I had to be conscious of my role as a researcher, not a youth worker. However, I will argue that my previous experience with young people made it easier to develop a rapport with the participants. The young people participating in the study were in the process of forming their identity and were quite new to the practice of confirmation. These factors sharpened the need to establish trust and rapport, a vital consideration in any ethnographic study (Hammersley et al. 2007:109).
5.4 Sampling

The material was obtained from two sources, curriculum documents and fieldwork from three confirmation programs. In the following section I outline how the samples were selected and the rationale for the selection criteria.

5.4.1 Single case sampling strategy

The aim and main research question for the study is to contribute to a sociocultural understanding of religious learning, which entails a study of religious learning in-depth and in context. With this in mind, I used a strategic selection sampling strategy in order to maximize the utility of a single case. Hammersley discusses how Glaser and Strauss use the term ‘strategic selection’. They argue that the selection of cases should be designed to produce many categories and properties of categories in order to facilitate the emergence of patterns (Hammersley et al. 2007:33). I found this rationale similar to Flyvbjerg’s information-oriented selection of single cases (Flyvbjerg 2001:79). The criterion’s rationale seeks to sample a case which would expect to provide enough information.

5.4.2 Sampling of the curriculum documents

The first source of empirical material was the curriculum (Article I). I chose a comparative analysis in order to relate the Norwegian curriculum to a broader strand of research. I considered England first, but confirmation is not as widespread in the Church of England and they do not have any developed plan for confirmation work (Christensen et al. 2010:181). The Finnish curriculum seemed a more suitable candidate. Confirmation work in Finland shares several characteristics with confirmation in Norway. They both have relatively high percentage among young people, Finland 88% and Norway 66% of all 14 year olds. These two countries are the only ones that have developed curriculum documents for confirmation. At the same time, they are different: the Finnish plan has a more traditional theological approach and an elaborated pedagogical stance, while the Norwegian document focuses more on inspiration and serving as a resource. The documents that I sampled were the official English translations of both the Norwegian and Finnish curricula.
5.4.3 Sampling of the confirmation groups

The second source of empirical material was the fieldwork with the three confirmation groups. I could have chosen almost any congregation in the Church of Norway for my project, because almost every church offers confirmation training. Location was one deciding factor; the congregations had to be within reasonable traveling distance in order to carry out the fieldwork. This narrowed the choice of congregations down to the east of Norway, not too far from the capital, Oslo.

My study was also part of the larger Letra project. We discussed sampling criteria and methodology in the group during the first months of the project. We looked for relatively homogenous congregations in order to get enough data that could be analyzed across the different sites. We discussed what we considered to be appropriate homogenous aspects, and decided that one important criterion was that all congregations had to have pastor(s), catechist, deacon and some volunteer workers. A staff consisting of all three professions would entail a quite large and active parish.

The three congregations needed to have Christian educational programs (Trosopplæringstiltak). This criterion indicates a high number of activities and programs and that the congregations had developed their own educational programs. In other words, we strived to find congregations with a range of activities and resources.

The Letra group met with the Church Council and presented the various criteria. Three congregations were chosen and they invited our research groups into their daily life. In this thesis, I have given the following pseudonyms in order to preserve the anonymity of the groups: Countryside Church, Suburban Church and City Church. The names reflect the demographic context of each congregation.

The sampling criteria for the interviews, and how they were conducted, are discussed under 5.6.1.

5.5 Conducting the fieldwork

The fieldwork spanned a period of approximately one year, from June 2011 to June 2012. I followed three confirmation groups in three different congregations. The congregations were situated in the eastern part of Norway. My initial contact with all three congregations was through a telephone conversation. Here I explained the project’s aim of understanding the learning processes of confirmands. During the
conversing I explained that the methods would involve participant observation and interviews, and how I would sit and observe some of the teaching sessions and attend the confirmation camps. I also explained that I wanted to interview members of staff in charge of the confirmation work. All responses from the congregations were positive about the study and I was welcomed as a field researcher.

Table 2: Overview over fieldwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congregations</th>
<th>Number of confirmands</th>
<th>Participant observation at teaching session</th>
<th>Participant observation at camp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countryside Church</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>One weekend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Church</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>One weekend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Church</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>One week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In my first encounter with the confirmands I explained my role as a researcher. I informed them that their involvement was voluntary and that every written account would be anonymized. I told them that I would not take notes about anyone if they had any objections. I further explained the interview process, emphasizing that the interviews were voluntary and that the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) had approved the study. All the confirmands were informed about the study; according to the NSD I only needed the parents’ written consent for the confirmands I interviewed. The responses from the confirmands and their parents were positive. All but one boy said yes to take part in group interviews.

I followed the confirmands at two main sites, teaching sessions and camps. The teaching sessions were quite similar in all three congregations. Like pupils, the confirmands sat and listened to the catechist’s or the pastor’s lecture of different topics. During the session I sat with a small notebook and took field notes. After each session I wrote up the notes in more detail on my computer. At the Suburban Church, the confirmands usually sat in the church pews. The Countryside Church held the sessions in another building several kilometers away from the church building. The City Church
used a room next door to the church for the teaching. All the churches put different emphases on the teaching sessions. Suburban Church had the most liturgical approach. Each session started with a liturgical prayer and the lighting of candles on the altar, followed by a lecture on a topic such as baptism, the church’s deacon service, and so forth. Both Countryside and City Church used drama as part of the teaching. Countryside emphasized the Bible, using movement and drama to help students remember the Bible’s structure. City Church had selected some narratives about Jesus, and the confirmands had to create a small play based on these stories.

The camps were a very different environment compared with the teaching sessions. I was able to spend longer with both confirmands and staff. At the two weekend trips I was in a room by myself, but at the week-long camp I shared a large room with all the boys. I participated in most of the activities, sharing meals and games with the confirmands. The camps proved to be useful in terms of observation since I was able to spend a lot of time with the confirmands. Yet this kind of field work was tiring. I was simultaneously observing, paying attention and participating socially. I was sometimes able to take notes during the activities, but often I had to find other places to do this.

To enter the field of confirmation training was a peculiar experience because I entered this field at the same time together with the confirmands. To a certain degree, I was also a novice in this context. For almost all of them, the experience was completely novel and they had little prior experience in the church or with other religious practices. I got the impression from the confirmands that they felt alien or out of place during the majority of the sessions. They seemed to struggle with the language, symbols and practices they encountered during their confirmation training period. However, the camps marked a transition. Over just one weekend the atmosphere changed rapidly. All the churches pointed to the camp as a significant turning point. But my impression that the confirmands were confined to a different world, separate from the staff, remained throughout the project. The distinct spaces that seemed to be established played a significant part in the later analysis and the two articles.

A recurring theme expressed by the confirmands was how grateful they were for the confirmation program. They did not regret that they had chosen confirmation in church. The camp was by far the most popular event of the confirmation period, and the fellowship between the confirmands was something that they expressed as being most important.
Confirmation training is an arrangement of activities that differ from the confirmands’ everyday activities. The camp was one of those different experiences. During the interviews, the confirmands expressed how the camp was new and exciting, and I realized that going on outings was not common for the majority. The experience of sharing everyday activities like going to bed, eating meals, and so on seemed very special to them. Confirmation training involved activities that touched upon personal issues; some of these involved their faith and how they practiced religion, while others touched on their personal relationships. Through some activities, such as lighting candles, they invoked their parents, family, and friends. Since confirmation is still a common cultural practice, each confirmation group usually comes from the same school, and during fieldwork I observed how social dynamics were transported from the classroom. Comments, jokes, as well as difficult issues like bullying and isolation were all brought into the confirmation program.

I positioned myself as informed insider in the field of confirmation, as a social researcher and not as a youth worker. Obviously this implies that I entered the field with certain presuppositions. However, several events did surprise me. I include these reflections as way of being transparent about the fieldwork. The way the confirmands enjoyed acting as ministrants was one surprise—I had assumed that they would find this activity either boring or embarrassing, and it was compulsory. But the confirmands felt that they were being included in the church, and they felt noticed as they were visible to the congregation.

While I had been aware of the issues of ethnicity and religion beforehand, this theme proved to be more salient than I had imagined. When I asked why they chose a Christian confirmation, confirmands answered in terms of identity and their Norwegian ethnicity. All of them had friends in school from other religions and different ethnic identities e.g. Muslim or Hindu. The confirmands in my study argued that it was natural to be Christian because they were Norwegians. Their national identity was seen as the reason for their religious faith. Some of the confirmands expressed a concern for the future of the church, because the church is part of being a Norwegian and they wanted their children also to experience the church. Baptism was also spelled out as important to their religious identity. The confirmands line of reasoning was usually; I am a Christian because I am Norwegian and I am baptized.

Also unexpected was the way the confirmation program was organized. Contemporary confirmation resembles youth work rather than school teaching, or at
least that is the ideal of contemporary confirmation training. I was surprised how much time was spent lecturing on different topics. I realized that this was a dilemma for the confirmation workers. They wanted to spend more time getting to know the confirmands, but because of time pressure they acted otherwise.

5.6 Conducting the interviews

Interviews are a vital complement to participative observation. Through the interviews I was able to hear the young confirmands articulate their experiences in their own words. This was vital because they were able to describe the various practices with words other than those I would have chosen. Since I was an insider to a certain extent, I knew about confirmation work, its history, theology, and pedagogics. The confirmands however describe this from a stranger’s point of view. Likewise they would be very blunt and upfront about things they found strange or weird. They viewed the Bible as totally uninteresting, but church, and the Christian community, was extremely important for their identity as Norwegians. Through their words I was able to see the fieldwork from several perspectives. Equally important were the interviews with the workers. Here, I got to hear about their motives for teaching confirmation and about their ideals. This was important because what they articulated sometimes deviated from their practice. Hammersley writes that to use what people say can tell us something about their perspective; it can offer us the material as well as the analysis (Hammersley et al. 2007:98).

The interviews played an indispensable part in the effort to understand confirmation training from the confirmands’ perspective. At the same time, some of interviews revealed how difficult it was for some of them to talk about religious topics. The interview addressed topics that rarely occurred in their daily life (Eder et al. 2001:181). The decision to incorporate the confirmands’ voices in the data material was made both for ethical reasons and to increase the validity of the fieldwork. Eder and Fingerson (Eder et al. 2001:181) argue that one reason to interview young people is that it allows them to give voice to their own interpretation, young people does seldom get an opportunity to articulate their everyday life experiences.

Both confirmands and staff were interviewed. I conducted four group interviews, two in Countryside, one in Suburban, and one in City. My initial aim was to conduct only group interviews with the confirmands. This was my preferred method because it
can redress the power imbalance between me as an adult researcher and them as young and new to the practice of confirmation. As Eder and Fingerson point out, it is essential for the researcher, as an adult and an expert, to be sensitive to power dynamics (Eder et al. 2001:182). However, at the beginning it was difficult to arrange groups of confirmands. Following the theoretical stance of learning as change, I aimed to conduct interviews at the beginning and near the end of the confirmation program. But the confirmands were easier to talk to after some months into the program. I also chose to conduct some individual interviews near the end of the program, three at City Church and one at Countryside Church.

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis give several accounts of the benefits of focus group methodology (Kamberelis et al. 2005). Focus groups can be a good way to acquire empirical material in a relatively short time. They can highlight collective processes and memories, while unarticulated norms and normative assumptions are often revealed through the group dynamic (Kamberelis et al. 2005:903-04). At the same time, this dynamic can be challenging. People tend to vary in how comfortable they are participating in group discussions. This was certainly true of one of the group interviews at City church. I only managed to get boys for this interview and they struggled to articulate anything more than yes and no. The group dynamic closed the dialog between the boys and me.

The interviews were semi-structured. I divided the interview guide into two columns, one for everyday language and the other for theoretical concepts. This way I could follow the conceptual themes during the interview. These are practical matters which relate to validity in terms of research craftsmanship (Kvale et al. 2009:253).

5.6.1 Sampling the interviews
The main sampling criterion for the interviews was that the confirmands were able to articulate their experiences. This may seem obvious, but the interview method requires articulacy in order to produce material. The second criterion was that the confirmands had not been previously active in the congregation; this was in order to reflect the study’s definition of learning as involving some sort of change. The third criterion was to recruit both boys and girls, although gender is not an explicit focus in this study.

All the interviews were recorded digitally and later transcribed. I hired another person to do the transcriptions. In order to ensure the validity of the interviews, I reread
the transcripts as I listened to the recordings. Notes were made in the transcript of laughter and other off-topic remarks and three dots were used to indicate when interviewees were silent.

Table 3: Overview of the interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congregations</th>
<th>Confirmands</th>
<th>Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countryside Church</td>
<td>Two group interviews with two girls and three boys. One individual interview with one boy.</td>
<td>Pastor and religious educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Church</td>
<td>One group interview with two girls and one boy.</td>
<td>Pastor, catechist, religious educator, one volunteer leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Church</td>
<td>One group interview with four boys. Three individual interviews with one girl and two boys.</td>
<td>Pastor and catechist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.7 Analytical approach, techniques, and strategy

At the beginning of this chapter I described the research strategy of ethnographic case study and design. In the previous section I clarified how I conducted the research, the methods I used, and how I gathered the study’s material from fieldwork and document texts. The concluding part of this chapter addresses how I analyzed this material. Although the term analysis signifies the phase following the fieldwork, the analytical phase for this study was in some respects initiated at the very beginning of the project. As Hammersley points out, in ethnography the analysis of data is not a distinct stage of research (Hammersley et al. 2007:158). The process of analysis connects with conceptual work both prior to and during fieldwork observations.
First I will outline the analytical rationale for a deductive compared with an inductive approach; second, I will present the analytical strategy of themes, and finally I will address the analytical process used in each article.

5.7.1 Analytical approach

The analytical approach used here is to some extent open and versatile, although the approach follows certain frames and paths guiding the analysis.

The analytical approach is open in the sense that I wanted the data from the fieldwork and documents to establish the analytical categories. At the same time, I aimed to keep the analytical approach in line with the larger paradigm of sociomaterial studies. This means that I approached learning and religion openly, not a priori to the fieldwork or text. I was interested in how these concepts were established and constructed in the practices of confirmation training and confirmation texts. In this sense, my approach to the analysis phase is less formal compared to discourse analysis, content analysis or conversation analysis.

Following methods from ethnographic case study research, I wanted to provide ‘thick descriptions’ from the fieldwork, combining this with the comparison of two curriculum texts. Both approaches aimed to generate enough data to be analyzed further. I then chose a deductive approach through the use of sociomaterial theories. These theories, both sociocultural theories and ANT, provided a way of looking at the relations between people and material objects. At the same time I took an inductive stance as I allowed the observations, interviews and texts to open up categories from the field work. Combining the more conceptual deductive approach with the empirical inductive approach can be called an abductive process (Alvesson et al. 2008:55). The abductive process is a continuous dialog between the conceptual framework and the data or material (Alvesson et al. 2008:61). I found that the abductive stance enabled me to keep the framework dynamic. I was able to begin the study with some conceptual points of departure without freezing the continuous research process. The dialog between concepts and material allowed me to maintain some movement in the study, which helped when I needed to adjust the research questions, unit of analysis, and research design.

Following this rationale for analysis, I chose the analytical technique of coding and thematic analysis as a strategy.
5.7.2 Analytical techniques and strategy

The analytical technique I employed in the thesis is coding. I used Atlas.ti coding software on the field notes, interviews and curriculum documents. I chose coding as a way to manage the vast quantity of material. The Atlas.ti software helped categorize the material and search for possible patterns or connections in a manageable way. Hammersley endorses coding of ethnographic material as the categories can provide important infrastructure for search and retrieval later (Hammersley et al. 2007:152). However, some critics argue that the use of coding software decontextualizes the material and categories from the field notes too fast (Hammersley et al. 2007:156). This is certainly a danger in the analytical process. Coding is more than a categorizing technique, it is part of the analytic process (Miles et al. 1994:56). Nevertheless, I found that coding with Atlas.ti for this study was a useful way to organize a large amount of material. The coding processes started as a form of low-level analysis; according to Yin, studying outputs from coding software is one way to determine whether meaningful patterns emerge, although these will usually be on a more primitive level than the how and why of the research question (Yin 2009:128). The codes were both concept-driven and data-driven.

When the analytic process started to develop larger themes, I re-read field notes and listened to the interviews again.

A thematic analysis follows the abductive rationale of inference; it is a continuous analytical dialog between data and theory. The themes are data-generated in the way that the categories and coding are identified through the data. The themes are also conceptually driven as they relate to the research questions, with theoretical concepts used as springboards for themes. (Bryman 2012:580). In everyday language we say that a movie has a certain theme, or we talk about the theme in a song or painting (Ryan et al. 2003:87). According to Ryan and Bernard, this is also true of thematic analysis. They understand themes as abstract expressions linked to text, image, or sounds and so on:

You know you have found a theme when you can answer the question, What is this expression an example of?” (Ryan et al. 2003:87)

The weakness of a thematic analysis is its lack of clearly specified procedures (Bryman 2012), compared to for example conversation analysis which focuses on language or
content analysis which focuses on the quantification of categories (Kvale et al. 2009:197, 203).

Bryman argues however that a thematic analysis is often used within of qualitative methods i.e. thematic analysis is described in line with content analysis, but has had few clear technical description (see Franzoni 2009:550). The strength, on the other hand, is how thematic analysis enables the research to see how utterances and action relates to the patterns and themes. A theme is mostly induced from the data material, through repetition. Here, coding is useful as a technique to manage a large quantity of data and material, and to identify repetition to identify larger themes. At the same time, theoretical concepts are used in a dialog with the induced themes.

In addition to this outline of the analytical techniques and thematic strategy, I will give a more detailed account of how I conducted the analysis in the three articles. I will not repeat the parts of the processes I have already described, but the format of a journal article is dense, so I will use the following paragraphs to give some additional information.

5.7.3 Final stage of the analysis: analysis of material and writing of articles

In the previous paragraphs describing the analytical approach, I addressed the overall strategy and technique for this thesis. In the following paragraphs I will elaborate on the final stage of the analytical work, the writing of three articles. This process involved moving from the main research question with its main unit of analysis to the three subsidiary questions and each unit of analysis. Another important aspect is that the analytical process also involved journals with their editorial interests and peer reviews. This is an important way in which an article-based thesis diverges from a monograph; the analysis and arguments in the articles is in constant dialog with the larger research community.

Article I

For the document analysis I employed a comparative approach (Article I). Comparison is a way to be sensitive to the similarities and nuances of difference in the complex data material (Bryman 2004:637). The material for article included two curricula for confirmation: “God Gives - We Share: Plan for Christian Education” (2010, Norway),
and “Life-Faith-Prayer: Confirmation Training Plan” (2002, Finland). Both documents were scanned digitally and I used Atlas.ti as the coding software. This article is written together with my supervisor, Professor Geir Afdal. During the first coding process, a theme concerning abstraction began to emerge. The texts focused on tools, but the same tool was both concrete and abstract. For example: baptism as a practice and baptism as to live in. Baptism is first understood concretely as the pouring of water on an infant’s head and then theologically abstract; as a hope which embraces all of life. From this initial analysis we then focused on Wartofsky’s conceptualization of artifacts or tools existing within a three-level hierarchy: primary as in use, secondary as instructions, and tertiary on an abstract level. However, it seemed that some of the main study’s focus on religious learning was missed and we chose to tune the analytical processes to the study’s focus on religious learning.

From this point we used Sfard’s metaphors of learning as a larger conceptual frame. We developed an analytical model with the concepts of tool-subject-activity, all of which are important elements for learning. The analytical processes now followed these concepts in (1) identifying what kind of tools for religious learning were presented in the plans, (2) identifying how the plans describe the subject for religious learning, and (3) identifying what activities are used in confirmation or religious learning. Through this thematic analysis we identified certain modes of religious learning. This helped us to confine the unit of analysis to the modes of religious learning in the texts.

**Article II and III**

The abductive strategy was potentially challenging, given that I had developed a deductive approach before starting the fieldwork. I entered the fieldwork with a clear conceptualization of learning as material-mediated processes. I used Wertch’s notion of mediated action, but I also had a stronger interest in mediation as mastery or internalization. This meant that my initial focus was on the learning outcome: how the confirmands learned from the experienced leaders to master certain tools during the confirmation training. From a sociocultural perspective, the focus would have been on internalization, or how they mastered certain tools. During the fieldwork, however, I realized that the process was much more complicated. About halfway through the fieldwork I came close to the conclusion that that learning did not take place at all. I could hardly see any change in the way they articulated faith, and I did not see them gradually mastering the different tools in use, such as the Bible, services, or prayer.
Nonetheless, the confirmands enjoyed their time because they were satisfied with the sense of fellowship they experienced with their peers.

Through the coding it became clear how separate the confirmands were from the practice of the workers. I started to code the range of tools in use. The tools included explicitly Christian tools, such as crosses, Bibles, and chalices, but also everyday tools like chairs, pens, cups, etc. I reread the field notes in order to see how the tools were part of different situations. During the coding I could see a recurring pattern of misunderstandings from the confirmands point of view. I also found a pattern of how tools were part of different participating processes. Confirmation consisted of different activities i.e. teaching activities or ritualistic activities, all of which involves some sort of tools. The theme that emerged was how the confirmands was involved in these activities and what type of mediation did the tools play? The mediation was more characterized as different processes, not as a final learning product or outcome. Here the flexibility of the abductive approach was a resource. I was able to revise the main concepts as a result of the data analysis. I altered the unit of analysis from learning outcome to learning processes of participation in practices during confirmation training.

Following this, I developed a thematic strategy based on Wertsch’s theory of affordances and constraints as mediating properties; this helped me identify different themes of affordances and constraints, and the themes of time and space also emerged. The coding processes revealed how the confirmands’ participation related to past and future events and other people—all of which extended the immediate face-to-face interaction. I combined Nespor’s study Knowledge in Motion (Nespor 1994) with the concepts of affordances and constraints derived from Wertsch. But after the first major revision of the article, Schatzki’s concept of timespace activity (Schatzki 2010) was introduced by one of the reviewers. This helped to establish the argument that time and space are constitutive of the mediation processes.

For Article III, I followed the same thematic strategy, but with a different focus. In the overall research design of the thesis, I had confined religious learning to three areas. The two preceding articles focused on religious learning from curriculum texts (Article I), and confirmands’ religious learning processes (Article II). The third area was confirmation workers’ approach to religious learning. Here I used a more inductive approach and commenced coding when material tools were used in teaching or other sessions during the confirmation program. During the coding I started to look for meaning-making statements and how these were connected to material tools. I used a
rather open framework from Law’s *Modes of Ordering* (Law 1994), and the perspectives of modes steered the analytical processes towards patterns, logics or mini-discourses in connection with, or as effects of, material objects. From this I started to identify themes about Christian knowledge and learning from the pastors, catechist and religious educators. The theme of tension or contrast between different ideas of what constitutes Christian knowledge started to emerge. At this point in the analysis I discovered Sørensen’s study of material learning. She had utilized more recent work from Law and used his concept of spatial metaphors. Sørensen had developed a concept of learning as growth in material knowledge spaces. I confined the unit of analysis to material objects and workers’ and confirmands’ practice during the confirmation program. This conceptual move from modes to material spaces helped to make apparent the different spaces for religious learning; these spaces were constituted by different logics or motivations for learning and religion.

5.8 **Validity, reliability and generalization**

Validity, reliability and generalization are, within qualitative research, certainly contested concepts (Seale 1999:2). Traditionally the terms indicate certain forms of measurement and a means of ensuring standards in the quality of research. The tensions and arguments about whether these are useful terms to apply to qualitative research have been well documented in several books on methods (Hammersley et al. 2007:5-13; Kvale et al. 2009; Seale 1999; Silverman 2006:271-314). I will not elaborate on the debates and I am aware that several contributors within the sociomaterial paradigm may reject the application of such terminology to their research. Nevertheless, I would argue that all research should be open and accessible to other researchers as far as possible. Seale (Seale 1999) and Kvale (Kvale et al. 2009) point out that these terms can in fact be used in qualitative research, but they need to be translated (Kvale et al. 2009:249). I choose to use validity, reliability, and generalization in order to reflect upon the strategies I have employed, and, hopefully, strengthen the quality of my study.

5.8.1 **Reliability**

Reliability has traditionally been the criterion to assess to what degree it is possible to replicate the study. Would another researcher be able to generate the same findings if
the entire study was replicated (external reliability), or could the data be matched using the same constructs of a study (internal reliability) (Seale 1999:140)? With ethnography, however, reliability has to address issues other than replication. First, it is not feasible to replicate every detail in ethnographic fieldwork because it involves too many interactions which are inextricable from the specific context. Furthermore, I don’t view research as an entirely objective enterprise. Scientific studies, as learning practices, are also mediated actions, they are not fully controllable. Here I will interpret reliability according to Kvale’s translation of the term: reliability relates to the consistency and trustworthiness of the study (Brinkmann et al. 2009:245).

In order to establish the study’s consistency, I will focus on the key elements of the study’s research design and how they connect to use of theory, the research question, and the methodology. Seale calls this approach to reliability a reflexive account of the logical steps of a study (Seale 1999:157).

For this study, it was imperative to establish a rationale to ensure that theory and methods were compatible. At the start of the theory chapter and this method chapter, I identified sociomaterial studies as the overall conceptual frame or paradigm for the theories at the operational level. I have discussed how sociocultural theories and ANT perspectives are compatible in the way that they regard materiality as integrated with the creation of meaning and with human action. I am aware that the two traditions differ on the agency of materiality, though I have argued that this point is compatible through Wertsch’s own reflections on the tight connections between agent and tool. Furthermore, the material-mediated stance from sociomaterial theory relates logically to an ethnographic methodology. When learning is understood in situ, the researcher is compelled to go out and see how learning takes place. A final vital element concerns the research question and unit of analysis. I believe the research question has to relate to the field and to the main theoretical concepts; this meant that the research question and unit of analysis was a continuous process.

The comments from editors of three different journals and the peer reviews of the articles raised additional questions about the study’s consistency, or internal reliability (Seale 1999:148). Their reading of the articles helped me identify any apparent inconsistencies. The peer review dialog also involved validity issues regarding the ability to communicate the research. Within the tight frame of a journal article, I had to be able communicate research question, how I analyzed the material and how I trough the findings could deliver a valid argument.
5.8.2 Validity

Validity within positivist tradition would refer to criteria that finally can assess if a study is regarded as correct or true (Seale 1999:34). This study however, follows more constructivist stance to research, (see chapter 4 on research paradigm). This does not imply an anything-goes approach to research. I support Kvale’s position on validity where he understands it as the strength and soundness of a statement. Seale takes a similar stance where argues that validity relates to the study’s trustworthiness (Seale 1999:43).

Combining observations and interviews was one strategy that strengthened validity. I understand this as triangulation in a wide sense. Triangulation has traditionally involved combining qualitative and quantitative methodology, but Seale views triangulation as a way of including different sources and perspectives in order to test the researcher’s assumptions and arguments (Seale 1999:53-54). This study used observations to describe what people did in the confirmation training environment. The interviews allowed these participants to articulate their practice. Curriculum documents provided a third data source. These different sources together produced a richer range of material than one method would have been able to do, and meant that I was able to analyze the phenomenon of religious learning from different perspectives.

To expose findings and analysis to a wider research community is a recognized way to enhance validity; Kvale calls this strategy ‘peer validations’ (Brinkmann et al. 2009:255). The collaboration with the Letra research group had an important role in the peer validation of this study. The Letra group studies different groups within the same subject area, and we shared field observations and interviewed some of the same people. We met approximately once a week to discuss field notes, field experience, and interviews. Feedback and critical comments on my field notes and interviews provided additional perspectives which were important in strengthening validity.

Feedback also contributed to the process of identifying the appropriate unit of analysis, which was another key to establishing the validity of my study. Matusov refers to this as ‘construct validity’ because the researcher could be interested in one thing but actually be studying something thing else (Matusov 2007:314). This is an important aspect that I have thoroughly discussed under the heading of unit of analysis. I
continually worked on the unit of analysis, making sure that it was in line with the research question, the data material and the theory I have used.

A final point concerning the issue of validity is the use of participants’ validations or ‘member checks’ (Seale 1999:45). At least one person from each congregation read drafts of the articles, including analysis and findings. These people were employees, either pastors or catechists. The response was positive: they said that I presented an accurate description of their confirmation work. Even in the cases where confirmands did not understand the teaching, or when things had not gone according to plan, feedback was supportive. I have also presented the analysis of the curriculum texts to central developers of the documents in both Norway and Finland. Their response affirmed the analysis and they were supportive of the perspectives. Sadly, I have not been able to contact the confirmands in the final stage of this research. This was partly because they were anonymous—I only had their first name and I felt it was not ethically correct to try to locate them after they had finished their confirmation training.

5.8.3 Generalization

Generalization refers to a how new insight from a research study can be transferred to other areas, or generalized to the wider population. One stream of research argues that for the findings of a study to be considered useful and generally applicable, the study has to be statistically representative or involve large samples. Small samples are said to generate too little statistical significance, or too little insight into a phenomenon to be generalized25 (Flyvbjerg 2001:74-75). Single case studies have been criticized for the lack of generalizability, but Flyvbjerg argues strongly against the view that single case studies are not able to generate enough insight to make generalization possible. Flyvbjerg suggests that the generalizability of the single case study depends on the type of case and how it is chosen. A single case study selected by strategic sampling can contribute new insight and understandings to a larger field. I follow Flyvbjerg’s reasoning on the use of case studies as it coincides with the epistemology of the sociomaterial paradigm (Lave 2009; Law 2007). The present study is not statistically generalizable, but it can be read as an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon of

25 Flyvberg refers to Giddens where he says: “…small- scale community research of fieldwork anthropology – are not in themselves generalizing studies. But they can easily become such if carried out in some numbers…” (Flyvbjerg 2001: 73).
religious learning. The findings on the mediation of material spaces, and on how participation was mediated through affordances and constraints, can provide insight for other areas. The study can also be generalized to activities beyond religious practices, especially the findings on the mediating processes affecting young people as they are introduced to established material practices.

5.8.4 Ethical perspectives

Silverman questions why ethical discussions are sometime neglected in the effort to identify the correct methodology and ways to analyze the data (Silverman 2006:315). Research is a social practice and it involves as many ethical perspectives as any other social practice (Hammersley et al. 2007:209). On one level, ethics relate to following a certain protocol. I have followed the ethical guidelines provided by the Norwegian Social Science Service (NSD). According to NSD, questions about religion are categorized as sensitive questions. The confirmands were under the age of 15, which is the age of religious independence. I was obliged to obtain written consent from the parents before I conducted the interviews. As noted in 5.4.2, all the parents were informed about the study. The information included the starting date and closing date for the study, the purpose of the study, the institutional affiliation was MF Norwegian School of Theology, that the interviews were voluntary, and that everything was anonymized. The audio files were held on a computer at MF and not connected to Dropbox or any other online filing systems.

These are all important ethical considerations. However, because this was an ethnographic study in which I followed large groups of young people, several other ethical issues were important. I believe that an ethnographic methodology entails more serious ethical issues than interviews. I spent a lot of time with both the young confirmands and the workers. I got to know several of them, I gained their trust, and they were open about their lives so that I could conduct this study. Silverman addresses two crucial questions concerning this aspect of ethics: what are the motivations for research and do we want to help and protect the people we study (Silverman 2006:315)?

My motivation for doing this study stems from my background as a youth worker and practical theologian. As I have already stated, this made me somewhat an insider. I care about youth work in the church and confirmation training, and I hope that this study will contribute to further development. This motivation was also important.
during the fieldwork because it helped me build trust and rapport with both the confirmands and the workers. At the same time, I was there as a researcher, not as a leader, and this was important in relation to the issue of informed consent. As Hammersley reflects, it is not uncommon for participants to forget that the ethnographer is a researcher when they get to know the person (Hammersley et al. 2007:210). During the fieldwork I had to underline the fact that I was there as a researcher.

This raises the issue of how my involvement—what I actually did or what I chose not to do—affected the study. As a participating observer, I was also involved in the confirmation program to some extent. I was always visible and both confirmands and workers knew who I was and why I was there. However, I chose to avoid direct intervention. In Article II I describe how one of the camps was in my opinion poorly organized. I chose not to give advice on how to keep the confirmands quiet, or to advise the leaders to pay more attention to the confirmands when they were not attending the program. During the camp with City Church, I shared the sleeping facilities with 18 boys. I was there as a researcher, but in the eyes of the confirmands I was like a leader. However, I did interfere when I saw someone was neglected, isolated, or picked on. Although I had to be aware of my role, in my view it would have destroyed their trust in me if I was too passive in these situations.

This is relevant to Silverman’s second question. I cared for the confirmands. It was important for me that they felt safe and welcomed during their time as confirmands. I followed several of the young people quite closely and I was able to see their insecurities, their longing for fellowship, joys and sorrows. I have not recorded or used episodes where I believed the confirmand’s identity could be exposed. However, during the episode with the prayer note described in Article II, I felt concerned about the ethical aspect. The confirmands were confused about whether the notes were to be read or not. The pastor shared some of the topics in the notes with me. Still, it was impossible to connect the topics or the notes to the individuals who had written them.
6  Summary of the articles

In order to answer this study’s main question, I have studied three areas of confirmation as one case and written three articles. Each article has its own particular focus on religious learning in the field of confirmation: 1) religious learning modes in the curriculum of confirmation, 2) religious learning processes with the confirmands, and 3) religious learning practice by the staff and leaders, that is, the confirmation workers. In this chapter, I provide a summary of the thesis’ three articles. I will give a short outline of each article’s aim and how I operationalized the conceptual framework and each article’s argument.

6.1 Article I: Modes of Learning and the Making of Religion- The Norwegian and Finnish Curricula for Confirmation

This article was written with Professor Geir Afdal, my supervisor, with me as first author. We analyze the modes of religious learning in two curricula for confirmation, God gives-We share, Norway 2010, and Life-Faith-Prayer, Finland 2002. Whereas the following two articles analyze field observations, Article I analyzes documents that are vital for the field of confirmation. The curriculum is a site where religious learning has been negotiated by various groups: central church councils, political committees, and both social and theological research groups. Subsequently, the curriculum is an important part of the study’s case. A comparative strategy was used as one way of identifying these modes, because the two curricula bear similarities and differences. The learning modes are not explicitly formulated in the curricula, but are implicitly part of the text. Sfard’s (1998) two metaphors of learning are part of the conceptual framework: learning as acquisition and learning as participation. With these views of learning, we established an analytical model with the concepts of subject, tool, and activity. These sensitizing concepts were the means of identifying certain implicit modes of religious learning. We argue that how religious learning is understood also configures a conceptualization of religion. In other words, how religion is learned constructs religion itself. The modes of religious learning are discussed with recent contributions from religious studies (Bender et al. 2013; Cadge et al. 2011).

In the Finnish document, the subject is an individual rational subject. The tools for confirmation are mainly the Catechism, which signifies an overall logic for the
Christian faith. The activity is mainly school, which means that confirmation as an activity is a school of the congregation. The confirmand is to be socialized into the congregation through the confirmation training. According to the Finnish plan, religion is negotiated as a logical set of belief statements, which is the traditional conceptualization of religions (Woodhead 2011). We identify a mode in which we label for the logic of belief. This mode signifies that religious learning consists of accumulating a religious subject matter. Learning is fundamentally an individual enterprise. When the individual confirmand has processed the subject matter in his or her mind, then learning has occurred.

The Norwegian document, the subject is a collective, it is a “we” that learns religion, as opposed to the Finnish plan. The tools are explained as experiences, meaning that it is through experiences that new insight or change occurs. The text emphasizes the experience of wondering and mystery. The activities of religious learning are leisure activities; really, any activity that can be opened up to the children’s or confirmands’ participation. Hence, in one sense, religion is established through participation in various activities. It is a much looser and more open approach to religion than being confined to a set of belief statements. However, religion is also understood through faith experienced. In this sense, religion is established through mystery or experiential learning. In the Norwegian text we have identified two modes that are in some sense in tension with each other. We have labeled these modes for the logic of participation and the logic of faith.

6.2 Article II: Learning religion: Exploring young people’s participation through the timespace and mediation at confirmation

In Article II, I explore religious learning processes at confirmation camps. Camps are common events in many confirmation programs. Sweden and Finland have a long history of confirmation camps as central educational strategies. In Norway, the trend is growing (Høeg et al. 2010:164). In Article II, I analyze two central episodes from two different camps within a sociocultural framework. Using the conceptual framework from Wertsch (Wertsch 1998), I specifically focus on the confirmands’ participation processes, and in particular, employ his category of mediation as affordances or constraints on participation. I combined Wertsch’s mediated action with Schatzki’s (Schatzki 2010) concept of timespace as a unified feature.
In Article II, I provide a thick description of two events or episodes at each camp. The first episode involves a meditative walk on a path with candles. The findings suggest that the mediation of material tools establishes a sacred space for the leaders, but the confirmands are constrained due to the leader’s past. Time, as past, present, and future dimensions, is also part of the different notions of space. In the second episode, the material tools of candles and paper notes mediate the affordances. The affordances are characterized first as participation in the practice of prayer notes and candles, and second, by invoking family and close relationships through the prayer notes.

A significant part of my argument is how time and space play a constitutive role in the mediation processes. In the first episode, the time dimension became a focal point. Metaphorically speaking, the leaders’ past became a fence for the confirmands instead of a scaffold into the religious practice. In the second episode, I argue that the affordances for religious learning were rigged in an interface of space and time features, which included the physical space of the confirmation camp, the material tools connected with the personal stories of the confirmands, and actors that were not physically present. Through these complex connections of tools, space, and time, religious learning was practiced through the new material tools of paper notes and candles.

6.3 Article III: The Material Logics of Confirmation

In Article III, I explore the logic or motives of religious learning for confirmation. In other words, it is a broader focus compared to Article II, which analyzes religious learning processes as the confirmands with tools. In Article III, the main focus is on the practice of the religious educators with the confirmands in confirmation. To phrase it in an everyday vocabulary: What is the point of confirmation? The analytical approach for this article grew inductively from the fieldwork experience. I observed a divide between the staff and the confirmands, and during my fieldwork I realized that the reason or purpose for confirmation varied among both educators and confirmands. I employed a material semiotic framework and especially the spatial metaphors from Law (Law 2002), Law and Mol (Law et.al 2001), and Sørensen (Sørensen 2009) for the analysis.

I argue empirically that the material things of confirmation establish different notions of space and within these spaces different logics of religious learning take place. I use the term “logics” in plural to signify different spatial forms: regional space and
fluid space. A dominant logic or reason from the religious educator’s point of view is religious learning as a coherent narrative. The logic of “coherent narrative” implies that confirmations’ main goal is to fill in the gaps of the confirmands’ fragmented knowledge of the Christian story. This logic establishes a certain notion of space: regional space and I develop an argument of materiality as a constitutive part of establishing regional space. The findings show how the material tools of Bible text are fragmented and compressed down to small digits. These digits signify meaning and coherency only inside a regional space.

A second logic expressed by religious educators focuses more on the experiential dimension. The goal of confirmation is to promote faith, and faith is understood as something beyond knowledge. Faith is a mystery that needs to be experienced through wondering. Although this logic differs from the coherent narrative, “faith through wondering” also establishes regional space. The confirmands’ motives, however, connect to different notions of space: fluid space. The confirmands display the logic of “bits and pieces.” Religious learning as bits and pieces emphasizes religion as practice. The logic is established by certain parts, namely, prayer and communion, and how these religious tools work in the everyday life of the confirmands, irrespective of a larger coherent narrative. A vital part of my argument is that these logics constitute religious practice, and in so doing, the logics constitute religion in itself. The religious educators expressed other ideals, but acted differently in practice.
7 Discussion

I commenced this research project to explore religious learning in the field of confirmation work and developed the study’s main research question as follows: What characterizes religious learning in the practice of confirmation in the Church of Norway? My preconceptions of religious learning were challenged quite early in the fieldwork. I had anticipated that confirmation was a community of practice where religious learning would be a gradual process toward a center of this community. However, confirmation was more diverse and complex than a tightly confined community. I found a variety of motivations for participating in confirmation. I also found contrasting views of religious learning: What was important to learn, how religious learning took place, and how religious learning was enacted?

In this final chapter, I will first explicate how the findings from the three articles can contribute to the overall research question. Second, I will discuss the implications the findings have in regard to previous studies of religious learning and confirmation. In the third, brief and final part, I will suggest areas for further research based on the findings from this thesis.

7.1 Findings across the articles

I followed different groups of people, confirmands and workers, who participated in one common activity they called confirmation. What emerged from my research, however, was a more diversified pattern of religious learning, rather than religious learning being one singular activity belonging to one particular group. First, the confirmands I followed did not, for the most part, participate in confirmation with the assumption that they would learn something. The confirmands did not choose confirmation in order to master new practices or to change some of their ideas. They did not regard themselves as apprentices embarking on a journey with a religious community. When I asked them why they chose confirmation, they usually answered: Because I am baptized and I am Norwegian (Article III). For the confirmands, confirmation appeared to be rather opaque and puzzling. The confirmands expressed that they were confused or simply did not understand what they were participating in (Articles II and III). Nonetheless, they enjoyed the fellowship during confirmation and they looked forward to celebrating their confirmation day with their families, (Articles II and III).
Second, I found a range of assumptions about the purpose of confirmation and religious learning among the pastors and the catechists (Articles II and III). The confirmation workers spoke highly of the confirmands and they enjoyed their company. They regarded confirmation as a positive time in which they could get acquainted with the young people in the local community. Equally, the workers saw confirmation as momentum in the way that it could also bring these young people into the fellowship of the congregation after confirmation. However, the pastors and the catechists had diverse approaches and diverse understandings of what the confirmands should learn and how the confirmands could learn (Article III). This diversity was also evident in the confirmation curriculum (Article I). I found a divergence between how they articulated their ideals for learning and what was actually taking place. Both the pastors and the catechists expressed a level of frustration and conflicting feelings: agreeing that the confirmands should learn something that they remembered. The best method, according to some of the pastors and catechists, was traditional teaching or lectures, arguing that that the confirmands lacked sufficient Christian knowledge (Article III). At the same time, the pastors and catechist anticipated that the confirmands should experience faith and participate in different rituals, and that faith was something more, than cognitive knowledge (Articles I, II, and III).

I found that confirmation does not consist of tightly arranged educational activities, instead it is rather messy. Using the term “messy,” I do not discredit the confirmation workers for being poorly organized or the quality of their work, but it is messy due to mediation. The mediation with material objects affected the practices in ways that were not always foreseen or controllable (Article III). Together with the mediation of tools were also different notions of space and time. Sometimes the workers’ past history disconnected the confirmands’ participation, and sometimes the material objects connected to the personal lives of the confirmands. These connections extended space and time outside the immediate face-to-face interaction and time space constituted the mediation processes. (Article II).

Throughout this thesis, I have taken a sociomaterial stance to learning. This implies that I am interested in how learning processes are identified through the interaction with mediating tools and what kinds of practices are developed (Fenwick et al. 2011:6; Sfard 1998; Säljö 2006:195). The sociomaterial analytical language was useful in regarding religious learning because it helped to identify the complexity of the symbolic and the material of religion. I found that religious learning, as in relation to
mediating tools, can be identified within three different overlying patterns. The common aspect of the three patterns revolves around how religious learning makes sense.

Across the three articles, I argue that religious learning is configured within different logics. Within the logics, materiality is mediated differently: The same material things of religion are perceived and practiced differently, which constitutes different religious learning processes which in turn ultimately changes the religion itself. I use the term “logics” in plural because I understand logics as different patterns with different aims and drives. There is not one, singular logic or pattern of confirmation. The different patterns revolve around different approaches to religious learning. Each of the patterns has a common drive or motivation, and an inner logic, which designate primarily a mode of interacting and secondary they relate to reasoning. These logics do not simply signify good ideas for religious learning but they connect the doings and interactions of learning with what makes rational sense of religious learning. Each of the three different logics defines religious learning differently and situates religious learning in different ways. Furthermore, these three logics operate across the entire field of confirmation. They interchange and sometimes tensions occur between the logics.

The three logics of religious learning are identified as: 1) Religious learning as Belief; 2) religious learning as Practice; and 3) religious learning as Faith. In the following section, I will specify the recognizable components of each logic.

7.2 Logics of religious learning

7.2.1 The logic of Belief

I chose the term Belief because it resonates with a category some scholars of religions use to define religion as the modern and more cognitive oriented. Religion in this sense is defined as a belief system with an emphasis on doctrines and core texts (McGuire 2008; Vásquez 2011; Woodhead 2011).

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26 Logic is somewhat similar to concepts like pattern, mode, culture and discourse, and habitus, all of which represent vast bodies of work (e.g., Foucault 2002 [1972], Bourdieu 1977, Law 1994). Bourdieu has written extensively on field and practice and the logics of practice (Bourdieu 1977, 1990). In particular, I found Law’s argument about understanding modes of ordering as discourses cut down to size to be fruitful and inspiring (Law 1994).
The logic of Belief is first identified in Article I. This logic is evident in the Finnish confirmation curriculum. In this logic, the motivation of religious learning is to select subject matter in order for religious learning to take place. Learning is located as processes in the brain and comprehension is vital for religious learning. Within this logic, memory and the ability to remember are important. Subsequently, it makes sense to develop methods that provide affordances for comprehension, because the outcome is steered toward understanding, the conviction of statements, or a certain mindset.

An interesting point is that the logic of Belief is only found in the Finnish and not in the Norwegian curriculum. However, in the actual practice of Norwegian confirmation training, I observed the logic of Belief. In Article III, the logic of Belief is recognized through the use of a coherent narrative. The Christian story or the biblical narrative is selected as the subject matter for religious knowledge. Remembering the coherent story becomes important, because religious knowledge is measured according to a linear Christian narrative. Forgetting parts of the story is regarded as gaps in religious knowledge. Consequently, religious knowledge is distilled into certain core stories that focus on certain central texts, and the ability to articulate this narrative becomes important. The logic of Belief operates with an acquisition type of learning. When the subject matter is identified, it can be acquired independently of context. Religious learning is decontextualized in the sense that any part of religion can be learned about irrespective of place or situation.

The logic of Belief also constitutes religion in a specific manner. The system of dogmas is obviously important. With a tight time frame of eight months, it makes sense to develop topics that will encapsulate the most important parts of the religion. Thus, comprehending certain selected parts is part of what it means to be religious.

7.2.2 The logic of Practice

I have called the second overlying pattern the logic of Practice. Whereas comprehension was the vital drive in the logic of Belief, within the logic of Practice, participation in activities is a primary motivator. In the logic of Practice, religion is learned through participation. The term “logic of Practice” shares, to my understanding, a common approach to religion that is more loosely constructed, and not a cohesive belief system (see (Bender et al. 2013; McGuire 2008; Woodhead 2011).

Religious knowledge is emphasized as embodied or situated in activities. The rationale of religious learning in the logic of Practice is much more open and diverse
than the logic of Belief. The type of learning is learning as participation. In Article I, I found that the logic of Practice is first identified in the way the Christian fellowship is presented in particularly the Norwegian curriculum. The Christian fellowship is constituted through participation, not a statement of faith or central creeds. The Norwegian curriculum focuses on participation in a wide range of activities, and all of these activities establish the Christian fellowship as the larger “We.” For the confirmands, practice is given primacy over the ability to remember a certain core or subject matter. I found a similar pattern of practice in analyzing the data from the fieldwork (Articles II and III). The confirmands connect with the tools that are dogmatically loose, open, and versatile. These tools mediate the personal issues in the confirmands’ lives as opposed to the tools that emphasize belief statements. Also in Article III the analysis shows that confirmands related to the religious tools they could use, not just in the church but also in their everyday lives. Through the confirmands’ use, religion is practiced, but only as various bits and pieces. With the confirmands’ use of religion, religious learning is decentralized, distributed, and even fragmented. Within this logic, religion can be disconnected from a wider encompassing system. It makes sense to utilize parts of religion. To put it differently, religion consists of parts that can be used in school, at home, or in a church. Religion is transfigured from a system of belief statements into transportable parts.

A final aspect relates to the confirmands’ ethnic identity as a reason to choose confirmation. The confirmands expressed a rationale of ethnicity and a desire to preserve the Norwegian heritage through confirmation. Hence, to practice confirmation was a way of assuring that the church would continue to exist, and in doing so they practiced their ethnicity.

### 7.2.3 The logic of Faith

The logic of Faith identifies religious learning in between Belief and Practice. Sharing some similarities with the two preceding logics, the logic of Faith has its own particularities.

Within the logic of Faith, the motivation for religious learning is to experience the mystery of religion. To learn religion is to encounter a religious story like a parable of Jesus, or religious activity like communion or prayer. The aim for the logic of Faith is that such an encounter shall lead to a process of wonder about the religious mystery. This wondering is regarded as a catalyst for the opening of faith or new religious
insight. Subsequently, the material context is there to produce awe or wonder with the aim to let faith grow or blossom. Faith is understood as somewhere inside the individual. Faith is abstract in the sense that is “something else” than knowledge (Article III). Learning religion within this logic resonates with experiential learning because the motivator is the experience, which in turn changes the individual’s faith.

Conversely, religious learning is not based on comprehension or on the utility of religion. Religious learning is characterized more as spiritual experiences. These experiences should lead to wonder, awe, or some sort of mysterious encounter. They are intended to help open up the individual to faith, which is situated within the individual learner. The term “Faith” resembles Belief because they both identify religion through certain core elements. However, the logic of Faith is not concerned with the understanding or remembering of certain religious core elements. Religious elements must provide an experience of religion. The logic of Faith appears to have a similar approach to participation in religious activities as in the logic of Practice. But they have different aims and different evaluations of the practice. As opposed to the logic of Practice, where practice is the goal in itself, the logic of Faith understands practice as a method that makes assessable the experiences of mystery or wonder. Within the logic of Faith, practice is a means to an end. The aim for religious learning, within the logic of Faith, is placed inside the individual. The “inside faith” resembles more of an inner realization of who am I, or who God is, or what religion means. The rationale is directed inwards into the inner life of individual, whereas in the logic of Practice, the aim is to utilize the religious tools and to participate in a religious collective.

The analysis in Article I identifies how the Norwegian curriculum advocates that experience is a key in religious learning. Religious learning takes place when experience opens up new insight, and through the children’s own exploration and sense of wonder. Articles II and III also show how religious learning within the logic of Faith takes place. Through the analysis, I found that the confirmation workers arranged practices with different material tools, for example, candles, wooden figures, and colored pearls. The aim of all of these practices was to give the confirmands the experience of awe or wonder. The goal was the confirmands’ inner feelings. This type of learning neither fits easily within the acquisition, nor within the participation metaphor of learning. The conception of learning is more similar to experiential learning and in line with, for instance, Jarvis’ (Jarvis 2008; Jarvis 2009) theory of existential learning. Faith is to leap out into nothing; it is the mystery beyond the
observable practice. This establishes a form of religion that emphasizes religious experiences. Religious knowledge in the shape of experience may be difficult to articulate. In Article III, it is clear that faith is conceptualized as something beyond knowledge, and in all the articles faith is connected to emotional experience.

7.2.4 Tensions

The logics of religious learning are not isolated. They co-exist, and there are tensions between them. Article III shows how both a pastor and catechist struggle with the tension between two logics: Is the most important issue in confirmation the comprehension of some core texts or is it participation? Tensions may appear through a discrepancy between the articulated ideal of confirmation and what is actually taking place. The ideal in this case seemed to be participation in the congregation, but the actual learning activities seemed to take place within the logic of Belief. This shows the complexity of religious learning and demonstrates how actors act on different logics, and sometimes on a logic other than the one to which they explicitly subscribe.

Table 7.1 presents an overview of the three logics. In the table, I have summarized the different structures of religious learning within each logic. Religious learning is structured around the motivation of learning, or how the religious knowledge is characterized. Finally, I present what type of learning metaphor is found within these overlying patterns or logics.

Table 4: Overview of the logics of religious learning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logics</th>
<th>Motivation/Drive</th>
<th>Religious Knowledge Characterized as</th>
<th>Learning Metaphor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Comprehension, fill knowledge gaps</td>
<td>Core elements, coherent narrative</td>
<td>Acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Utility, participate in activities</td>
<td>Open, versatile, bits and pieces</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Experience of awe, mystery</td>
<td>Hidden inside</td>
<td>Experiential learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


7.3 Discussion of the findings

In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss how the findings contribute to new perspectives on religious learning. I will be in dialogue with the existing research on religious learning, which was introduced in the literature review.

7.3.1 Religion changes in the hands of the confirmands

I commenced this study with a participation view to learning and I used sociomaterial theories to operationalize this stance. This implies a broad analytical lens, because learning is understood as a radical collective activity mediated by different tools. Initially, I held a broad view of learning, but a narrower stance of religion. I approached the fieldwork study with a tool-oriented lens, but I had preconceived the tools of religion too narrowly. Religion was in my mind more or less a system of tools with fixed meanings that had to make changes in the minds of the confirmands.

However, during the fieldwork and later analysis, I found that religion was practiced much more differently and diverse by the confirmands than I had first anticipated. The main argument of this thesis is that when religion is negotiated by the confirmands, religion is changed. I argue that when the confirmands encountered the words, Bible verses, paper notes, camps, and teaching sessions, which from the catechists or pastors’ perception were parts of a belief system (the logic of Belief) or intended to give experiences of faith (the logic of Faith), religion was changed, following another logic. The religion was changed into bits and pieces the confirmands could use in their everyday lives. This religion was not a part of a cohesive dogmatic narrative, or the encounter of faith experiences, rather, they used the parts that connected to their everyday lives.

This raises an important issue of how to identify religious learning. As a researcher, I failed at first to recognize this issue because my concepts of both learning and in particular religion were too narrow. This point relates to the research by Collins-Mayo et al. (Collins-Mayo et al. 2010) on how Christian faith is expressed by British youth. Their study exemplifies how religion or Christian faith is part of young people’s lives, but in different ways than the traditional understanding. Collins-Mayo et al. (2010) point at the fact that young people approach religion with an interest in “how it works for me.” The young people pieced together a working spirituality. Collins-Mayo
et al. (2010, pp. 32-33) call this an immanent faith, which they distinguish from traditional Christianity. Again, the young people take the parts of religion and change it.

This re-creation of religion also relates to the contributions of “Ordinary Theology” (Astely, 2002). Astely’s (Astley 2002:57) concept of “ordinary theology” advocates the personal expression of theology, a theology that is learned outside academia. Astely’s (2013) argument is theoretical, but some scholars have used this notion to empirically explore the everyday learned theology. Christie (Christie 2005; Christie 2007) interviewed churchgoers without a formal theological education on their “Ordinary Christology.” She found that the dogmatic concepts like the Trinity and Jesus being fully man and fully God are really not important in the everyday Christology of the churchgoers. The dogmas felt more like technical terms that did not relate to how Jesus was part of their personal faith (Christie 2007:182).

To my understanding, the British youth’s “immanent faith” and the “Ordinary Christology” resemble the logic of Practice. In both immanent faith and the logic of Practice, Christian faith is easily fragmented into the parts that work. The findings from my study suggest that religious learning takes place, but differently than what I anticipated. My initial view on religion was colored by the logic of Belief. During the process of analysis, I realized that religion in confirmation was done in a manner that broadened my initial understanding. There was religion “under the radar” of the analytical apparatus I established, based on the traditional concepts of religion. The point I argue is that young people approach religion in new ways within another logic.

The different logics uncover important dynamics of how a leader, teacher, or pastor think he or she is communicating one message or doing one particular practice, but what takes places are multiple messages, practices and even multiple logics and realities. This raises important issues about the complexity of educational practices and that in the case of confirmation, the pastors and catechists failed to recognize the established logic among the confirmands.

Both the studies from Mayo and Christie document that religion is configured differently to that of the official dogmatic versions. However, they have investigated these changes by means of analyzing the interviews of the youth or the churchgoers.

27 I follow Law’s argument on reality as in between singular and plural; it is multiple. Law argues starkly against a dualist choice of one reality or many: “But there is a third option, or a family of options, in-between. It is possible to observe, in one way very matter-of-factly, that the world, its knowledges, and that various senses of what is right and just overlap and shade off into another. That our arguments work, but only partially. (Law 2004: 62)
thus focusing only on their articulation, , (Christie 2007:181; Collins-Mayo et al. 2010:29). This present thesis uncovers how the material mediated interaction of confirmands and confirmation workers establishes different religious logics. What I have empirically shown is that as the logic of practice challenges the pastors and catechists’ perception of religion. Thus, they fail to see the confirmands’ negotiation of the logic of Belief, Faith and Practice, and how through this negation, the confirmands follow primarily religion within a logic of Practice.

7.3.2 Identifying religious learning, and methodological and theoretical discussions

The findings from this thesis raise issues concerning the methodology and theoretical framework for studies of religious education. As I explained in previous section paragraph, the confirmands’ practice of religion remained unnoticed at first because of my too narrow approach.

As shown in the literature review, one of the largest research projects on youth and religion is the European comparative study on confirmation work (Schweitzer et al. 2010). With its broad, quantitative design, the study provides a valuable map of confirmation work in Europe. When the project investigates religious learning, however, the scope is somewhat narrow. Religious knowledge is measured by the percentage of who knows the Lord’s Prayer, the Christian Creed, and the Ten Commandments by heart (Schweitzer et al. 2010:248). The report claims that through these variables, the actual knowledge of the confirmands is encapsulated (Schweitzer et al. 2010:248).

Furthermore, to my understanding, religious practice is also investigated narrowly through either prayer or thinking about God. A variable that measures practice through how often a confirmand thinks about God reflects the notion of religion as located inside the mind. The variables that are used in the questionnaires pertain to a logic of Belief approach to religious learning. With these variables, religious learning is reduced to a memory test of a small selected area of the Protestant Christian faith. This reflects a conceptualization of religion that is highly logocentric. Religion is foremost situated in some central texts, in this case the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments.
This thesis’ findings show that religion is not necessarily situated in central texts, but in things like prayer notes, candles, and the processes of interacting with these things. Furthermore, the findings show how the confirmands use religious tools in their everyday practice, and that the tools need to be open enough to connect with their lives.

Religious learning within the logic of Practice is perhaps difficult to account for through a questionnaire. Statistics allow for the larger overview, while ethnographic studies enable the detailed in-depth approaches. This raises an important issue on how different methodology enables different results. The ethnographic strategy I used in this thesis was vital because I was able to study what people actually did, not just what they said in the interviews. Furthermore, the case study design was helpful in enabling the sampling of practices across sites, and in constituting in-depth perspectives of the learning practices.

This thesis also suggests that a sociomaterial framework enables a more comprehensive study of religious learning. Through a larger unit of analysis than the individual person, sociomaterial research strategies seek to grasp, at least partly, how the complex social and material context plays decisive roles in human activity. In contrast, a number of contributions on children’s theology both in Norway and internationally (Hyde 2010; Sagberg 2012; Schweitzer 2006) focused on the inward experiences, leaving the material surroundings out of the studies. In a recent study, Schweitzer (Schweitzer 2014) used a similar children’s theology approach on the study of adolescents as theologians. Theology, according to Schweitzer, is rooted within human subjectivity as a refined process taking place in the adolescent. Theology is defined as reflective engagement with ideas, images, and convictions (Schweitzer 2014:188). Schweitzer’s study provides an interesting argument on theological inner reflection, but the picture is half painted, so to speak. How the material context or culture takes part in this theology is left out. Jarvis, an experiential learning theorist himself, recognized this problem when he critiqued experiential learning as being insufficient because the social context, where experience occurs, is not part of the analysis (Jarvis 2009:32).

A different approach within religious education is posed by de Kock (de Kock 2012:182) in the manner of a catechetical learning typology: (a) cognitive and affective goals, (b) emotions and experiences, (c) the formation of one’s own opinion and social interactions, and (d) identity development. His typology distinguishes between deductive (doctrinal), inductive (experiential), and abductive (community) approaches
to learning. De Kock (2014) argues that the typology will serve as a theoretical framework for further empirical investigations. De Kock (2014) employed these typologies in a study on the effects of catechetical practices in church communities. The study is interesting in terms of two points in my study. First, de Kock (2014) concludes that the catechists do not have a clear cut goal of learning, instead they interchange between several of the typologies: sometimes they focus more on dogma, other times on faith development, and at other times more on the social aspects. De Kock (de Kock 2014:15) argued that they switch back and forth between their ideals and preferences. This point relates to my study where the catechists and pastors changed between the logic of Belief and the logic of Faith. It shows how complex the educational practice of confirmation really is, and how the goals and ideals are interchangeable. The second point relates to methodology. I argue that de Kock’s (2014) study misses a vital aspect in terms of investigating the learning environment through interviews only. This current thesis has shown that material objects are important to the learning environment.

7.3.3 Religion as practice or to practice the religion of the community

Hermans’ (2003) study on participatory learning is important to the discussion on religious learning. Hermans theorizes on religious learning from a sociocultural stance on learning. He employs some of the same theoretical perspectives as this thesis, for example, Wertsch’s (1998) notion of mediated action, and to a larger degree he uses Lave and Wenger’s (1991) “legitimate peripheral participator”. Religious learning is, according to Hermans (2003), processes of participation where a novice enters religious practice as a legitimate peripheral participator (Hermans 2003:263,67). He emphasizes the responsibility of the expert has to guide the novice into the intentionality of a religious practice.(Hermans 2003:318). He says : “Learners (novices) have to discover this intentionality if they are to gain insight into the meaning of a religious practice.” (Hermans 2003:318). The novice needs the expert to help her or him to discover meaning to the given religious practice.

The findings presented in my study support some of the theoretical claims made by Hermans (2003). They show how participation was complicated for the novice confirmands. The confirmands often struggled to participate in some of the activities during confirmation, and as novices they were in need of guidance. Hermans (2003) uses the term “discover meaning.” This vocabulary resembles the logic of Faith, which
has the drive toward experiences of religion and that these experiences opens up the religious meaning. However, Hermans (2003) confines religious practice to an intentional community of practice. The people who participate in a practice have to share a common intentionality, combined with the mediating tools. He further confines the mediating tools of a religious practice to sacred objects that have to assign some perspective of transcendence. (Hermans 2003:191). He says that:

A religious (Christian) status relates to the binary code: transcendence –immanence . . . when we speak of religious practice (as opposed to an economic, political, medical, judicial or therapeutic practice) our answer is that religion refers to meaning assigned in a perspective of transcendence. (Hermans 2003:196-97)

Still, Hermans is equally supportive of Wenger’s notion of participation as negotiation (2003, p. 224). The novice enters the community, and part of the learning processes involve how the novice negotiates the practices. But Hermans argues that religious learning is only possible through participation, and participation is finally a matter of appropriating the correct meaning. This is a task for the expert insiders and it leaves little room for negotiation:

Without conscious introduction into religious practices there is a real danger that learners will acquire false knowledge rather than true knowledge. A common problem is that learners’ prior knowledge may be “inaccurate” or even “false.” They may have appropriated inaccurate information about prayer on an earlier occasion. Or they may mistakenly assume that they already know everything about prayer. (Hermans 2003:318-19)

In this quote, Hermans fixes the meaning of the religious practice, as the learning processes revolve around finding the correct meaning. In the first paragraph, Hermans’ (2003) view resembled a logic of Faith, however this argument steers religious learning toward a logic of Belief. Practice becomes a method to be guided toward the correct meaning. He establishes further boundaries for what kinds of practices can be qualified as a religious practice:
A mass by Bach is not a religious practice when it is performed in a theater... if it was the cathedral staff (and not a musical society), we would be inclined to see it as a religious practice. (Hermans 2003:191)

Hermans develops a theory of religious practice for well-defined communities of practice. They are, according to him, intentional communities with tools that mediate transcendence. This community establishes a clear “we,” it is open to the novice outsider, and the expert insider has a responsibility to show how the tools mediate transcendence. However, I would argue empirically that the participation processes are more complicated than the theoretical argument presented by Hermans (2003). The theoretical argument made by Hermans (2003) works well on paper, but not in practice. The crux where Hermans’ (2003) analysis fails is in his reading of the material mediation. The findings from my study show that the religious tools did not mediate transcendence only; neither was the community a clear cut “we” group. Both confirmands and confirmation workers used the same material tools, but the tools mediated differently. In Article II, the tools mediated sacred space for the leaders, but for the confirmands the mediation divided them from the leader’s group. Hence, the experts (leaders) failed to include the novices’ (confirmands’) everyday experiences into the religious practice; the confirmands familiar everyday relations were cut off. In Article III, the analysis shows how the tools established different spaces with different logics: either a close regional space or a fluid space. It is fair to say, based on the empirical findings, that the tools of confirmation established a different time and space, which divides the whole group. Confirmation was not a common intentional project with a clear recognizable center, but more fragmented, with logics going across each other.

To my understanding, Hermans (2003) views religious learning mainly as a one-way direction: the newcomer needs to accept the terms in order to learn. In so doing, the expert fails to see how religion is changed in the hands of the novice. The empirical findings from this thesis show that the experts wanted to guide the novice confirmands, but they failed. As described in Articles II and III, the different logics made confirmation more porous than in a joint community of practice with a recognizable center. I also argue that the newcomers contribute a new approach to religion that is different than the experts’ notions, but still important. I believe that the confirmands could teach the experienced leaders how they use religion in their everyday lives.
7.3.4 Summing up

This study has found that religion is learned through different logics. These logics have different aims for religious learning: The cognitive belief system, utility, and faith through experiences.

Within these logics, religion is configured in three different ways:
1) Religion is something to talk about, and is derived from a text. The aim of learning is to formulate topics of religion in a convincing manner, or to find a method that makes it easy to remember these topics.
2) Religion is something I can use and practice, and through practice, religion is configured. Religion does not have to be an all-encompassing large system, and religion is better if it is small in order to fit into everyday activities.
3) Religion is there to meet the inner needs. Religion has to be mysterious or must somehow touch me on an emotional level.

The main argument for this thesis is that religion changes through the confirmands’ negotiation between the three logics of religious learning. The confirmands encounter religion as newcomers in confirmation. They navigate and negotiate between the logic of Belief, the logic of Faith but they follow another logic, the logic of Practice and through the intersection of these patterns and logics of religious learning, religion is configured to utility parts in their everyday lives.

7.4 Implications for further research and concluding remarks

Further research on religious learning would benefit from broadening the analytical perspective in order to understand how religion is used and produced. Through this thesis, I have argued that religion changes in the “hands of ordinary people.” This argument follows some of the new studies on religion (Bender et al. 2013; McGuire 2008; Vásquez 2011). However, these studies emphasize the everyday practices of religion outside of congregational life. I would argue that further research on how religion is changed in the intersection of the congregational life and everyday practices is needed. This study provides important perspectives on the complexity of the insider and newcomer dynamics of learning. As this case study shows, confirmation in Norway is a border practice, although the borders are fuzzy. The newcomers entered the new
practice of confirmation. Yet, the practice of confirmation did not have a clear center in which the insiders could guide the newcomers. In fact, the insider themselves struggled between different directions or aims. Hence, I believe there is a need for further research how these different connections and negotiations establish new religious practice and change the everyday theology of the people in the congregations.

The studies of ordinary theology (Astley 2002; Christie 2005) certainly address these issues, but these studies would benefit from an ethnographic methodology to broaden the analytical scope. The limited scope implies that these studies emphasizes on people’s understandings of religion through their ability to articulate. Further research is required on how people practice religion, not just on their articulation. First of all, I believe it is necessary to include people’s actions with how they explain their understandings communicate, but finally I do argue that the people’s actions should be analyzed as interactions with the material relations, because religions are always material practices.

It is interesting to note that ethnographic studies on ecclesiology are expanding through the Ecclesiology and Ethnography network,28 although to my understanding, there has been little emphasis on the sociomaterial aspects of religion. I hold to include that the perspectives on the sociomaterial gained my ethnographic approach in order to better see the complexity of religious practices in congregations. Both concepts of mediation and materiality were vital for this study in order gain insight into how the same material things actually mediated different religious learning processes. Including the interactions with material things, I was able to see how the pastors, catechist and confirmands used the same religious tools quite differently, but also how the material tools also affected their practice of religion.

I conclude this thesis with a final question: How does this thesis challenge the educational practice of confirmation? I believe one way of answering this is to recognize that religious learning involves more than the transmission of a religious message or experience and recognize that through the learning processes the confirmands also changes the religion, in this case Christianity. In order to approach this complexity, I argue that it is vital for pastors, catechists, and religious educators to research their own educational practices. By research, I mean to explore investigating why confirmation workers do what they do and to inquire into their motivations for

28 https://ecclesiologyandethnography.wordpress.com/ (Downloaded December 8 2014)
religious learning. This could broaden our understandings of learning and knowledge to include more than just the processes in lectures. Furthermore, I believe it is vital to acknowledge that practice changes religion. The challenge presented before us is to recognize these changes. An important aspect of this is to actually listen to the confirmands, and to investigate, not only, how they use the Bible verses, prayers, or fellowship they encounter during confirmation but also how they connect this to their everyday lives. Pastors and catechist could together with the confirmands explore how the material mediation of confirmation might also change the congregation.
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Article I

Modes of Learning and the Making of Religion
The Norwegian and Finnish curricula for confirmation

Abstract

The article examines religious learning in curricula documents for confirmation in Norway and Finland. In the article we ask two questions: (1) What are the modes of religious learning in curricula for religious education and confirmation in Norway and Finland? (2) How do the modes of learning constitute religion in the texts? The article is based on a comparative analysis of two Nordic curricula for Christian education and confirmation. From: Norway: God Gives-We Share (2010) and from Finland: Life-Faith-Prayer (2002). The findings show that the Finnish document has a dominant logic of belief and establishes a cognitive mode of learning. This mode negotiates a logocentric notion of religion. The Norwegian document has two conflicting modes: the logic of participation and the logic of faith and learning are either a situated practice or inward faith experiences. These modes negotiate religion as practice or religion as an existential issue.

Keywords: Religious learning, curriculum, confirmation, religious education, modes of religion, modes of learning, religion as practice

Introduction

Lately, attention has been given to 'religion on the edge' (Bender et al. 2013) and how religion is practiced differently in politics, health, law and education. These perspectives have consequences for the rethinking what religion may be. The practice of confirmation is interesting in this context, due to its ambivalence as a border practice between a faith community and the larger society. Confirmation is simultaneously a key educational activity for churches and a significant public and private tradition
In this article, we ask how religion is constituted and conceptualised (Woodhead 2011) in confirmation, by analysing religious learning in the confirmation curricula in Finland and Norway. That is, how is religion done in an ambivalent border practice? Initially, we assume that religion is not an entity that is learned; religion is shaped and done in different ways in the process of learning. Different modes of religious learning frame and construct what is assumed to be religion. Religious learning does not only change participants, it also changes religion (Afdal 2013).

One area where religious learning and religion are constructed and negotiated is the curriculum for confirmation. As official documents in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Church of Norway, the curricula for confirmation and religious education are sites for encounters between church policies, religious interests groups, political aims, theological and social science research and the civil society. The texts are tools used in development of educational materials and in educational practices. Although there is no causal or linear relationship between curricular texts and educational practice (Afdal 2006), the curricular texts are interesting as conceptual negotiations and textual ordering of reality and, in this case, religion.

The article is based on a comparative analysis of two Nordic curricula for Christian education and confirmation: God Gives-We Share, Norway (The Church of Norway National Council Council 2010) herby abbreviated (NC 2010) and Life-Faith-Prayer, Finland (The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland Publications of the Church Council 2002) abbreviated (FC 2002). In both cases, the educational practice of confirmation has seen a substantial development with the production of curricula for confirmation and religious education. A comparison enables analyses of similarities and differences between the curricula as well as complexities within each curriculum. In the article we ask two questions: (1) What are the modes of religious learning in curricula for religious education and confirmation in Norway and Finland? (2) How do the modes of learning constitute religion in the texts? As a theoretical entry, we use the metaphors of learning developed by Sfard (Sfard 1998) and the concepts of the learning subject, tools and activities as sensitising devices in the analysis of modes of religious learning. In the analysis of how religion is made, we use the typology by Woodhead (2011) and the contributions by Bender and others (2013). After reviewing the literature to clarify our theoretical perspectives on learning and religion and discussing methodology, we
analyse modes of learning in the Finnish and Norwegian curricula. Finally, implications for the concept of religion are discussed, as is the relationship between modes of learning and the making of religion.

The choice of the confirmation curricula in Finland and Norway as comparative cases was done because they are the two Nordic countries with a high level of national regulation and directed aims towards confirmation (Petterson 2010:225). Furthermore, they are the only Nordic countries with an official curriculum for Christian education, and they share a relative high percentage of confirmation. They are both similar and different enough to make a good comparison.

**Research on confirmation**

Research on confirmation has predominantly focused on the ritual perspectives of confirmation (Høeg 2010; Salomonsen et al. 2005; Salomonsen 2007), how confirmation work is experienced by the user group, i.e. the confirmands and parents, and how church employees reflect on confirmation work (Krupka 2010; Schweitzer et al. 2010). Ritual studies of confirmation certainly capture some of the intersection of religious practice within civil society. Salomonsen (2007:169) argues that the rite of the family celebration, as a unique Scandinavian tradition, is one of the reasons why confirmation has such a strong position in Norway today. One could argue that any research on confirmation is an inquiry of religion in the public sphere due its widespread cultural acceptance in the Nordic countries (Christensen et al. 2010; Krupka et al. 2010). The first contributions to curriculum research in Christian education in a Norwegian context were Ulstrup Engelsen's extensive report (Engelsen 1998). It is an analysis of epistemology and didactics of the various national plans for congregations. The latest contributions is Holmqvist's analysis of different views of learning in religious education curricula (Holmqvist 2012) and Haakedal and Fuglseth's analysis of local plans (Fuglseth et al. 2012). These are all studies of Norwegian curricula. A comparative analysis of Nordic plans was conducted by Innanen (Innanen 2010). The study shows how curricula are used by the leaders and professions in congregations. These are all valuable studies, yet a comparison of modes of learning in two official
documents for religious education and the consequences for the conception of religion has not been conducted.

**Learning and religion: Theoretical aspects**

*Learning* is an elusive, complex and multi-disciplined concept, belonging to the family of frequently used but fuzzy words like *religion, culture* and *politics*. Several authors (Greeno 1998; Säljö 2006), however, argue that one can identify a standard account of learning. On this account, learning is an individual and cognitive process. Knowledge is a given substance, epistemic, and is integrated into representative, individual cognitive structures. This account corresponds to the first of Sfard’s famous two metaphors of learning: *learning as acquisition* (Sfard 1998:4). The school is the explicit or implicit paradigmatic location and model of learning as acquisition.

Sfard's second metaphor is *learning as participation*. The work place, organisations or leisure activities are paradigmatic locations and models for this understanding of learning. Learning is taking place in action and inter-action. This means that learning is extended from the brain to the whole body and from the individual to the collective. Cognition is not seen as primary, but as integrated into action and social practices. Knowledge is understood as practical, as ways of doing more than a thing. Knowledge is therefore situated to the particular social practices and distributed between the different participators (Lave et al. 1991).
Our aim in this article is not to discuss the pros and cons of learning theories as such but to use aspects of these theories as sensitising tools in order to analyse the explicit and implicit concepts of learning in the confirmation curricula in Finland and Norway. In order to do that, we will establish three analytical concepts—subject, tools and activities—based on the two learning metaphors above. Learning as acquisition emphasises how the individual subject acquires knowledge either through activities or as a passive reception (Sfard 1998:6). Yet, learning as participation emphasises how the knowledge is situated in collective activities in which the subject has to participate. Tools can be understood as something to be used by the individual (acquisition) or as mediating tools intrinsic to the collective activities (participation). These concepts are theoretically generated but are loose enough to help trace and construct the different modes of learning in the curricula texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphors of learning</th>
<th>Knowledge characteristics</th>
<th>Paradigmatic location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition</td>
<td>Identifiable entity and content. Individual, cognitive process. One-way, from teacher to pupil. School, ‘to learn outside of context’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Practical. Situated as part of the context and practice. Collective, embodied. Two way process, both teacher and pupil part of the learning process. Organizations, leisure activities, learning is integrated contextual</td>
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Using the first concept, *subject*, we ask for the learning subject in the curricula. Is it individual or collective, cognitive or acting? The second concept, *tools*, helps us ask for the artefacts that constitute religious learning in the texts. Are those educational or religious tools, conceptual or material? Using the third concept, *activities*, we analyse practices that are models or places for learning. Which actions and collective activities are described and prescribed as locations for learning?

Religion is a concept as elusive as learning, and the debate on the concept of religion is enormous. Here, we relate mainly to two rather recent contributions, the article 'Five Concepts of Religion' (Woodhead 2011), and anthology *Religion on the Edge* (Bender et al. 2013). We chose these studies because they deliver concise descriptions of various concepts of religion. Equally important, their discussions on religion resonated with our findings of religious learning. While the former contribution analyses how religion is understood in the social sciences, the latter criticises the understanding of religion in the social sciences and offers theoretical and empirical arguments of how the understanding of religion can be fruitfully expanded. Bender et al. (2013) argue that the concept of religion in the social sciences, and religious studies, has been limited by extensively using the United States as a case and context, by being captured by Christo centrism, by not paying sufficient attention to religion outside of congregations, by trying to be scientifically impartial, by not providing critical research and by seeing religion as a good. Woodhead (2011) argues that the understanding of religion in the social sciences can be understood in five conceptual categories: (1) religion as culture emphasising belief and meaning, (2) religion as identity, (3) religion as relationship, (4) religion as practice and (5) religion as power. In this article, we use these different theoretical perspectives as sensitising devices. We do not analyse conceptualisations in research, but we use these perspectives in order to analyse how religion is understood in key texts for religious practice.

**Methodological choices**

The methodological choices in this article are related to *curriculum* analysis, Finland and Norway as *comparative cases* and a thematic *analytical strategy*.

Curricula can be understood as 'the modernist enterprise par excellence' (Green 2010:452). Curricula are then seen as political texts and as instrumental for the
implementation of political reforms and scientific knowledge production. A postmodern critique led to the analysis of curricula as multi-voiced texts and discourses (Pinar 1995). However, along with Da Silva (1999) and Green (2010), we understand curricula as both poetics and politics, as textual productions of reality and as sites for power. This means that curricula are not seen as neutral means or carriers of some external reality or knowledge. Curricula in religious education are not only reproducing, for instance, educational or theological knowledge, they are simultaneously sites of, and contributors to, knowledge production (Da Silva 1999:28-29). This means that curricula are understood as performative, mediating artefacts (Da Silva 1999; Osberg et al. 2008; Wertsch 1998); they are meaning-loaded, symbolic and material tools used to act with and to create emerging reality. Curricula are not sources of educational practice as such, but one key tool in educational processes.

We chose a thematic analytical strategy combined with theoretically generated sensitising concepts, subjects, tools and activities (Bryman 2012:580). Within each of these conceptual categories, we looked for thematic variety, relationships and contradictions. Both texts were coded in Atlas.ti software with deductive (theory-generated) and inductive (data-generated) codes. The codes were then used in a search for patterns and modes of learning. The text was read both digitally and in the published forms. The software helped to manage the vast text material. We developed codes based on the analytical concepts but we also developed codes from the material. For example, wonder and experiences was some of the codes that emerged from the Norwegian text, whereas the theological foundations and a cognitive focus were evident in the Finnish text. The analysis was a constant dialog between the theoretical concepts and the themes generated from the material.

A final point which relates to the validity of the findings, the first author presented the preliminary findings of the analysis in both Finland and Norway. The findings were discussed at two occasions in Finland in front of researchers and practitioners of confirmation. In both cases the feedback was supportive of the findings but they also addressed the gap between the curriculum and the actual confirmation practice. The first author was also informed that a new curriculum was under development in Finland. In Norway, the response affirmed the findings.

Context: Nordic curricula for confirmation
Although the participation rate is declining, the majority of young people in Finland (88%), and Norway (67%) (Schweitzer et al. 2010:141, 65) choose to participate in the practice of confirmation. Confirmation is a nexus of concerns. As a traditional practice and ritual, part of civil society and a private and public practice, it is an economical event and a key part of the educational program of churches. Confirmation gathers a significant number of youth, who are more or less familiar with religious activities and resources. These features make the practice of confirmation an interesting case for an inquiry into religion in modern society. Religion has to be negotiated in the nexus and between the different concerns.

Both curricula are developed as national plans with the aim of providing frames and resources for local congregational plans (FC 2002:5; NC 2010:4).

The Norwegian curriculum was developed from three previous curricula: two confirmation curricula (1978 and 1998) and the Plan for Baptismal Instruction (1991). Changes in the formal link between the Church of Norway and the parliament brought about the religious education reform in 2003. The state's funding of religious education for all religious communities followed this reform. The reform has undertaken a new segment of education within Church of Norway, including a new curriculum in 2010. Confirmation is no longer understood as a separate activity but as part of a comprehensive Christian education. The aim of the curriculum is to provide Christian education for all baptised from the ages of 0–18. Approximately 65% of Norway's 15-year-olds are confirmed.

The context of Finland is somewhat different. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has a higher degree of autonomy, as it was formally separated from the state in 1919 and is entitled to collect taxes and appoint its own bishops (Käariäinen et al. 2009:11). Yet, the church has a status of a folk church and provides services such as weddings and funerals. In 2001, the first curriculum for confirmation training was published. The Finnish word for confirmation is *rippikoulu* which directly translates into 'confession-schools', i.e. confirmation as a school you attend for confession and learning the catechism. In everyday discourse, one would talk about going to 'rippikoulu' and not to confirmation, which would be the usual term in Norway (Innanen 2010:51; Schweitzer et al. 2010:140).
The texts we have used for the analysis are the official curriculum documents. From Norway we have used the official Norwegian curriculum, *Gud gir- vi deler: Plan for trosopplæring* (2010) and the official English translation, *God Gives – We Share: Plan for Christian Education* (2010). From Finland we have used the official Swedish text, *livet-tron-bönen: Plan för konfirmandarbetet* (2002) together with the official English version: *life-faith-prayer: Confirmation Training Plan* (2002). We have not used the Finnish text and this can present a problem regarding different use of words. However, Swedish is one of the official languages in Finland. All the quotes and references in this article are from the English versions for both Norway and Finland.

The analysis clearly reveals difference regarding the notion of learning and the activities of confirmation. Concerning these differences, it is important to contextualize the two curricula. The Finnish document (2001) and the Norwegian document (2010) are developed nearly ten years apart. Arguably, the Norwegian text has incorporated some of the changes within religious education. The context of religious education in Norway has changed with the religious education reform. Consequently, Norway has one curriculum which incorporates the age groups from 0-18, placing confirmation as one section of a larger religious educational program. In Finland however, confirmation is still regarded as one distinct phase. Another difference between the two countries is the organization of confirmation. In Norway, confirmation consists of teaching sessions at church with an additionally weekend or one week long camp. In Finland, camps are to a higher degree part of the confirmation training. However, the material for this article is the texts for confirmation not the practice.

**Curriculum analysis**

The analysis is structured in two main parts: the Finnish plan and the Norwegian plan. This is followed by a comparison of the texts. Finally, we summarise the findings and different modes of learning.

**Finnish confirmation training plan**
A separate chapter (2.2) in the curriculum explicitly explains the educational principles for the confirmation program: 'Learning only occurs when the student has processed the subject matter and organized it in his or her memory' (FC 2002:11). Here, learning is understood as an individual endeavour and as cognition. Knowledge is formulated as 'subject matter', that is, as a substance to be transported from 'outside' to 'inside'. Learning is an active process of the individual mind where the subject matter is cognitively processed and stored in the memory.

This account of learning, using the concepts of processing, subject matter and memory, has a cognitive and constructivist character. In constructivist developmental psychology, Piaget has been one of the classic theorists (see Säljö 2001). The key idea is that the human mind organises experiences into established cognitive schemes, parallel to reorganising the system of schemes. A consequence is that learning should be understood as processes of reconstructions, where new experiences are framed and constituted by existing, cognitive schemes. The Finnish curriculum understands cognition as follows.

In the process of learning a person analyzes new material with regard to previously accumulated information. Thus, it is important in confirmation training to build upon the foundation of knowledge that the confirmand has previously acquired concerning Christian faith (FC 2002:12).

This quote is typical in emphasising the individual confirmand; it is the individual who carries a certain amount of previous accumulated knowledge. Each individual confirmand enters confirmation training with varying degrees of religious knowledge. It is the task of the confirmation work to chart the extent of this individual knowledge (FC 2002:12). Still, the learning processes also require active participation by the individual or the group. The subject matter needs to be processed, and it is important to distinguish essential features in order to help the learner in this process (FC 2002:12).

The Finnish curriculum seeks to incorporates the cultural challenges of the confirmand. The text explicates the how the everyday life of the confirmand is often marked by a search for a new identity and a growth towards adulthood (FC 2002:13-14). In so doing, the Finnish curriculum recognizes confirmand’s life world issues outside the
congregation. In the same paragraphs however, the confirmands psychological development is presented in regard to religious learning.

When a child’s thinking is still somewhat confined to the concrete, a teenager is capable of conceptualizing. This development also contributes to religious thinking. A teenager has the ability to understand the metaphors, parables and symbolics of the Bible, and thus gain a deeper understanding of Christian faith. (FC 2002:14).

The focus is on the confirmand’s ability to facility religious thinking. According to the Finnish document, the teenager has reached the developmental stage for abstract thinking. The curriculum underscores how religious thinking is important for religious learning and consequently the teaching needs to connect to religious thinking.

The Finnish curriculum also highlights the collective group aspect, but the primacy is on the individual confirmand's cognitive processes. The group aspect is important for creating a motivating factor the individual confirmand, and it is seen as the context for individual learning. The teacher needs to pay special attention to group processes in order to create a positive and open-minded atmosphere (FC 2002:15). Group dynamics are, however, instrumental in individual comprehension. The overall educational goals for the confirmand are to organise and evaluate what he or she has learned, relate this knowledge to an overall comprehension of life and discover the personal significance of faith (FC 2002:27).

Facilitating learning is understood as a one way directional process where the confirmand is at the receiving end. The curriculum does not open for the active confirmand or the confirmand as a resource for changing the church's practice or tradition. Knowledge about the confirmand's world is recognised as valuable, not as a resource but as a context to which religious knowledge can be related and connected: 'The substance of faith of the church offers the confirmand new perspective[s] in relation to his or her own values and choices' (FC 2002:24).

In sum, the focus in the Finnish curriculum is the individual. The collective is important, not as a learning subject, but as a context for individual learning. The learning individual is understood as a primarily rational and thinking subject.

Tools
The Finnish curriculum suggests both religious and pedagogical tools as the means for religious learning. They vary in character from material and action-oriented to abstract and conceptual.

The writing of a journal and the activity of repetition are suggested as fruitful pedagogical tools. Religious tools are the Bible, the text of the Catechism, the hymnal, prayer, worship and music. They are all described as tools belonging to the congregational life of the church: 'Among the basic skills of confirmation training are, for example, the ability to use the Bible, the Catechism and the hymnal, and to compose oneself and participate in worship and prayer' (FC 2002:23). These are material (Bible, hymnal) and action-oriented (worship, prayer) tools. It is, furthermore, striking that the curriculum does not describe how these tools may be used. Worship, prayer and use of Bible are more the result of using tools than objects the confirmands may use to maneuver in life.

The religious tools are ambivalent. On the one hand, they are described as something that may be used in order to create something; on the other hand, they are presented as frozen and given entities that are the goal of the educational activity. The conceptual tool of Catechism is, however, primary, not just as a text but as a structure for the confirmation program: 'The three principal parts of the Catechism—the Ten Commandments, the creed, and the Lord’s Prayer—create the structural foundation for confirmation training' (FC 2002:9). Throughout the document, the three parts of Catechism—The Ten commandments, the creed and the Lord’s Prayer—signify an overall logic for the confirmation work as life, faith and prayer. Catechism is presented as both the title and the content for confirmation training. Furthermore, the Catechism provides the structure of the content of teaching. The fundamental components in religion and religious education are life, faith and prayer. The life of the confirmands, the content of the Christian faith and prayer are like three pillars holding up the work of the church, or three baskets from which participants may pick material as they construct the overall schemes for teaching and learning (FC 2002:19). The Catechism is therefore a primary and constitutive tool in confirmation education.

29 ‘The Catechism’ in this text refers to the official booklet approved in General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 1999. It is in accordance with Luther’s Small Catechism.
In sum, the Finnish curriculum ranks the dogmatic text of Lutheran Catechism as the main tool for confirmation training. Both religious and pedagogical tools are a sub-ordered Catechism in the sense that they are meant to open or to make use of the subject matter provided by the Catechism.

**Activities**

The following analysis aims at identifying the paradigmatic learning places and models in the Finnish curriculum. In other words, where religious learning is assumed to take place is connected to the text's view of learning.

The Finnish document displays few activities. The word activity (Swedish version) is used only five times. The activity for confirmation is a school activity. But the document emphasizes an active participation in this confirmation school. Subsequently, the word participation has a higher frequency, about 36 times (Swedish version).

The Finnish curriculum encourages the confirmands to participate in the learning activities. The text highlights that the confirmands should be included in the discussion of the goals for confirmation.

> The greater the role of the confirmands is in setting the goals and developing the activities of the group, the better their commitment and motivations will be during confirmation training. (FC 2002:16)

In this quote, the text presents a contrasting view regarding learning as a purely individual and cognitive endeavour. Furthermore, the curriculum opens for both the confirmand and their parents as partners in developing the goals for confirmation because confirmation is a school for life. This is an example of how curriculums are multi voiced. However, the text reminds the reader that although it is important to include the youth and their families, confirmation is a school of the congregation where the prospects of faith in the church are emphasized (FC 2002:16).

The concept of *school* is used to describe aspects of confirmation education. Confirmation education is conceived as 'a school for life', where the needs and expectations for the youth and their families have to be met (FC 2002:16). Confirmation is a school of the congregation: 'However, it is also important to draw attention to the
fact that confirmation training is a school of the congregation where the prospects of faith in the church are emphasized’ (FC 2002:16).

The text positions the confirmand both as an outsider who needs support to be included in the regular congregational activities and at the same time includes the confirmand as an equal discussion partner regarding the goals for learning. The passages concerning confirmation as school of life and school of the congregation reveals a tension in where the base for religious learning should be. However, the main learning direction according to text is on the confirmand taking part in the activities of the congregation.

In this way confirmation training and the Confirmation ceremony guide young people into the fellowship of the congregation and into participating in its activities. (FC 2002:8) [Council, 2002 #118@8]

The curriculum emphasises that the basic practices of worship in the congregation should be considered a natural foundation for the organisation of worship life in confirmation training, so that the confirmand will also familiarise himself or herself with the common Sunday services of the home congregation (FC 2002:31).

The Norwegian curriculum

In the following paragraphs, we analyse the Norwegian curriculum. The Norwegian text is characterised with a more narrative approach than a traditional plan. In contrast to the Finnish text, which has a very structured presentation of theological and pedagogical principles, the Norwegian one presents a bricolage of various elements.

Subject

Chapter 1 and 2 outlines the basic philosophy of the curriculum. Narratives from Christian educational practices are juxtaposed with philosophical and theological statements. The text presents the foundation and characteristics of Christian education in a form that resembles slogans or headings.

The foundation of Christian education can be described from the title, WE SHARE: WE SHARE faith and wonder, WE SHARE Christian traditions and values, WE SHARE experiences and fellowship, WE SHARE hope and love (NC 2010:7).
The subject for religious education is not the individual child or youth, but a *we*. The pronoun ‘we’ is used 111 times in the document. The subject in the Norwegian text is collective, and it is a relational, interactive and moral *we*. We is, however, used in a variety of meanings, for instance, the worldwide community of the Christian church, a small group of the local congregation, the number of members of the Church of Norway, children and youth (NC 2010:7). With a collective notion, the subject is abstract in character, and the different uses make it somewhat difficult to understand who and what the learning subjects are in the text. Since the subject is not the isolated child or youth, traditional dichotomies, such as pupil and teacher, are dissolved (NC 2010:7).

The subject is not primarily a ‘thinking I’, but an ‘acting and interacting we’. The collective subject needs to be engage in an activity of exploration in order to learn:

> When we join together in exploring the sources of our faith and the ways in which it has been expressed, we are at the same time both recipients of the church’s help and care and participants and co-workers in its ministry (NC 2010:8).

The emphasis on the acting and the interacting “we,” results in an emphasis on activities. The interacting “we” are identified in and with activities to the degree that activities themselves become the subjects of religious learning. The activity itself erases the roles as recipients, participants and co-workers. According to the text, the hierarchy of newcomers opposed to old-timers, teachers opposed to pupils and adult opposed to children is levelled out through their common activity.

Two more points can be made. Firstly, the learning subject is not only on the receiving end of religious learning and knowledge, the learning we is a participating and co-constructing subject. Secondly, the activities are described as 'exploring faith'. The collective learner is an exploring and searching one, and it is searching for 'faith'. Faith seems to be the essence of religion. Faith in the Norwegian curriculum is different from the Finnish belief. Beliefs concern the cognitive content of religion, that is, convictions about, for instance, the transcendent, the world, time and the human character. Faith concerns the performative and existential aspects of religion but not its substance.

In sum, the Norwegian curriculum uses a collective notion of subject or learner. The collective ‘we’ is an acting and interacting learner who emphasises action prior to
cognition and the collective prior to the individual in learning. However, the learning “we” is elusive and abstract, and it tends to be identified with the religious activities themselves.

**Tools**

As in the Finnish case, the main learning tools in the Norwegian curriculum are abstract concepts. Conceptual tools are described as constitutive for the learning processes. They are vital for change, or change is taking place through them. Yet, where the Finnish plan presents dogmatic stringency through the concept of catechism, the Norwegian text relates processes of learning to the concept of *experience* in various ways.

In the section with a cluster of narratives (pages 6–10), experience is emphasised as a key tool for the learner to connect religious stories to understanding of religious practice (NC 2010:6). Experience is advocated by the text as a key that opens up new insight. Several of the narratives in the section present children exploring the church, the communion or liturgy. The texts assume that through the children's own, unguided exploration, religious learning is taking place. These narratives are presented as a model for Christian education (NC 2010:38). Learning happens in the immediate, unmediated experience between the learner and the religious phenomenon, with no or minimal inference of adults, pastors or catechists. As stated in the plan: 'we learn by experience and by participating without restrictions' (NC 2010:7).

The emphasis on experience pulls learning in a somewhat different direction than the account of the 'interactive learning we'. Learning by experience puts the individual in front as the learning, experiencing subject in an implicit way. The collective activities have a role as a secondary context for individual experience (Jarvis 2008). On the one hand, learning processes are framed as abstract and de-contextualised as existential encounters between the learner and religious phenomena. Learning is understood as a somewhat mysterious event, beyond educational planning and control. On the other hand, the abstract concept of experience gets a mediational role and function between the learning individual and religious phenomena. Through the recognition and facilitating of experience learning may happen: 'New experiences open up new insights into the abundance that Christian baptism contains' (NC 2010:5).
'Wondering' is emphasised as a specific form of experiences in the curricula. The text uses 'wondering' as part of the changing processes of religious learning. The curriculum argues that wondering should take place in religious education because of its ability to develop spiritual growth (NC 2010:20). Wondering is emphasised as the tool that opens a deeper understanding of mysteries: 'This was the three-year-olds' wondering around the crib. God came, unprotected and unassuming and became one of us. That day, the children showed the way deeper into the mystery of Christmas' (NC 2010:8). The children share the experiences of standing around the Christmas crib, and this experience of wondering opens up for new insight that enables them to show other religious participants the way into 'the mystery of Christmas'. The children become the teachers, and the adults become students. Religious knowledge is not an aspect that should be transmitted from one generation to the other or from teacher to student; it constitutes existential experiences that each individual can share with the collective of 'we share'. Epistemic authority is related to authentic experiences, not to scholarly competence, and personal authority is distributed between the participants, independent of formal role.

Although experience is used and understood as an overall and primary tool, other more secondary tools interact with and qualify experience. Examples are the Bible, sacraments and creeds, word of faith and symbols (NC 2010:9). Baptism is a recurring tool described as both the concrete act of baptism and as an abstract concept, as 'something to live in'. 'Christian education should equip children and young people to live in their baptism' (NC 2010:5).

In sum, the main learning tool in the Norwegian curriculum is experience. Experience also takes the shape of wondering. Other tools are also used, but these are of secondary order, establishing encounters between the learner and religious phenomena, that is, situations where experience may open up for learning. A somewhat different account of learning appears than the interactive we. It can be read partly in the light of theories of experiential learning (Jarvis 2009; Kolb 1984) and partly in the light of the romantic and naturalistic educational tradition with emphasis on inductive and unguided learning (see Säljö 2001:63).

Activity
Confirmation activities are presented as one stage in a lifelong process of Christian education (NC 2010:5): ‘Systematic and comprehensive Christian education is a continuous process in which previous knowledge and experience is related to new and deeper knowledge and experience’ (NC 2010:14). As mentioned, the curriculum concerns ages 0–18, and it prescribes a structured continuum of 315 hours of educational activities.

The continuum is divided in three stages in the curriculum, ages 0–5, 6–12 and 13–18 (confirmation training is given an own chapter.) Some of the activities that are suggested are baptism club for six-year-olds, celebration of first day at school, sleeping over in church, camps, responsibility for tasks, exploration walks, live-at-home camps, clubs and special interest groups for music, singing, dance, drama, outdoor activities, sport and digital media (NC 2010:21).

The Norwegian curriculum puts a great emphasis on activities. The word activity or activities are used 125 times in the English version of the document. A basic idea is that there should be a continuum of activities covering all age groups: 'When planning, one can begin with existing activities, then the "holes" can be plugged until there are activities for the whole age-span 0–18 years' (NC 2010:37). This means that activities become vital in themselves. The curriculum emphasises the structure and comprehensiveness of the activities more than their purpose.

So far, it is clear that the paradigmatic place for learning in the Norwegian text is neither school, nor work. Instead, confirmation is understood as equivalent to and, in a certain sense, as leisure activities. Children learn in football clubs, in music bands, in youth clubs, and they learn in the same way in confirmation activities. In some parts of the text, confirmation is more like football, that is, the confirmand is participating in order to learn a particular activity. In other parts, confirmation seems more like a youth club. There are numerous activities, and the confirmands are assumed to learn in and from the activities. Still, there is no clear purpose or direction of the activities. In football, most players practice in order to become a better team and win games. In a music band, the participants usually practice in order to play better music and to perform. The activities have a direction and a purpose, and this purpose is embedded in and directs the practices. Most of the conformation activities as they are described in the Norwegian curriculum do not have this clear purpose and direction in extending
meetings and practices. The purpose is, on one hand, to have a good time here and now and, on the other, to be involved in activities that can facilitate spiritual experiences.

How do these activities qualify as religious and congregational activities? The activities have no explicit religious purpose. The curriculum, however, uses abstract concepts that qualify them as religious. The concepts are referred to as 'elements in the content of Christian education'. Examples of concepts are: the faith and tradition in the church, interpreting life, mastering the art of living, Christian faith and practice together and the love of God in Jesus Christ (NC 2010:13-14). The Norwegian curriculum uses a much more abstract theological language compared to the Finnish text. The following quote illustrates this: 'The heart of faith, the love of God in Jesus Christ, must influence all activities, while various aspects of the contents of Christian education are expounded systematically in different activities and contexts' (NC 2010:14). The activity is a part of religious education, not because it has a religious purpose of some kind, but because it 'must' be characterised by 'heart of faith' and 'the love of God in Jesus Christ'. There is little or no reflection on how the activities educationally can facilitate the mentioned abstract theological qualities. There seems to be a schism between activities on one hand and an abstract theological language on the other. The theological language point towards individual and existential spiritual 'faith' experiences.

Curricula are multi-voiced, and two exceptions to the interpretation above should be mentioned. First, the Norwegian text does argue for content in terms of the Bible, creed, the Lord's Prayer and the sacraments (NC 2010:9). Secondly, the appendix, Tools for Making a Local Plan, presents themes for activities and key bible passages according to age groups. In both of these cases, the religious character is less abstract than in the rest of the text, and it resembles parts of the Finnish curriculum.

In sum, leisure activities are the paradigmatic mode of activity in the Norwegian curriculum. The activities themselves have great significance; the ideal is a continuum of activities to all age groups from ages 0–18. The purpose of the activities is not made explicit, and abstract theological 'content' is used to qualify the activities as religious.

**Findings: A summary**

The Finnish plan follows a structured form. Theological and pedagogical principles are made explicit and serve as foundations for a coherent, logic pattern for confirmation
education and learning. Lutheran catechism, as the tool, identifies the subject matter that needs to be cognitively processed by the individual confirmand, as the subject. Learning is assumed to take place at a decontextual 'school', and the educational rationale of school constitutes processes of learning. At the same time the Finnish text address the confirmands’ lives and seeks to include their perspectives into confirmation training. In so doing, the text presents a contrasting voice that emphasizes participation in confirmation as school of life; still the primacy for confirmation is arguably a school of the congregation.

The Norwegian curriculum stands in contrast with the Finnish plan, with a more ambiguous structure, abstract argumentation and narrative approach. The subject of learning is collective interaction and participation in various activates. The main learning tool is experience, in situations where learners have encounters with religious phenomena. Learning is here seen as experiential, existential, unguided, individual and mysterious. The place and model for learning is the leisure activity. Learning is partly taking place in participation, and the activities are partly understood as external contexts that provide opportunities for individual, experiential learning.

These findings are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2 Comparison of three conceptual areas**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Norwegian</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Finnish</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collective and interactive</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Individual and cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wondering</td>
<td></td>
<td>Catechism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious abstract and material artefacts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Frozen religious tools</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Detailed pedagogical tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure activities</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>School activity, both school of life and school of the congregation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place to participate and context for individual, experiential learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Place to be socialised for the congregation.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In the final part of the article, we discuss the findings in three steps. Firstly, we reformulate the findings into different modes of religious learning. Secondly, we discuss
how religion is shaped and done in these different modes. Thirdly, we discuss how the different conceptions of religion can be understood as negotiated in a border practice such as confirmation.

**Modes of religious learning**

The mode of learning in the Finnish curriculum shares many characteristics with Sfard's 'acquisition' metaphor. Religious knowledge is understood as an entity or commodity that needs to be transmitted to and acquired by the individual confirmand. The confirmand then processes the knowledge into some kind of cognitive structure and is able to transfer this new knowledge to novel and different situations. We call this learning mode the *logic of belief*. A key characteristic of this mode is that religious knowledge is assumed to change the confirmands, but the confirmands are not changing the religious knowledge. Religious knowledge is decontextualised, codified and systematised in key texts. Learning is a differentiated activity and religious knowledge is differentiated from religious actions and from other knowledge spheres.

The Norwegian curriculum has a quite different approach to learning and knowledge. As the analysis shows, the text is complex, and different modes of learning are in play. We identify two modes. The first is Sfard's participation mode; we call it the *logic of participation*. Religious learning is understood as doing more than cognition, and learning is understood as taking place between confirmands, not within each individual. Religion is an enacted rather than a decontextual codified system. Religion is not a thing—it is done. This means that in the logic of participation activities are not done in order for the confirmands to learn religion; the activities are religion. Simultaneously, a second, partly contradictory mode is in play in the Norwegian text. We call this the *logic of faith*. In this mode, the activities are transformed to sites where confirmands may be existentially wondering and may experience faith. This also changes religion, but in another direction than the logic of participation.

**The making of religion**

How is religion made in the three different learning modes?

In the *logic of belief* mode, religion takes shape as an archetype of modern protestant Christianity. The primary mode of religion is language and texts, a religious core are
identified in historical dogmatic authoritative texts, religion is more or less internally coherent lingual system and this system represents a given transcendental reality. The textual system can be cognitively learnt, and it is an individual question whether to adopt the religious language as a representation of one's own beliefs about a transcendent reality. Furthermore, religion is in principle highly differentiated in the sense that religious texts are not interpreted as more valid in spheres other than the religious. They are beliefs about God and transcendence and about the mysteries and borderlines of immanence, not authoritative texts for politics, economy, health or science. However, internal authority is related to key texts and to professional or personal competence in interpreting these texts. There is a teacher and there are students; there is a more or less given religious content and there is the life world of the confirmands. In the Finnish text, there are few if any traces of authority going from students to teachers and from life world to religious content.

Such a making of religion does of course not exclude other characteristics of religion, like actions, interactions, emotions, aesthetics and so on. The point is that texts and language are primary. This account of religion resembles Woodhead's (2011:123) category 'religion as belief', and definition of religion as 'sincerely-held religious, moral and ethical beliefs' or 'as beliefs asserted in an authoritative sacred text' and 'classic formulations of doctrine and practice' (Sullivan 2005 in Woodhead 2011:123). We would like to emphasise that this mode of religion is based on a textual construction. How religion is made in Finnish confirmation activities is another empirical question.

In the logic of participation mode religion is best understood as practice (Woodhead 2011:132–134). Religion is not a thing or an encoded textual core, but something that is done, made and enacted. Texts are understood in use as are rituals, interactions, symbols, buildings, music and so on. Religious practices are where religious tools or artefacts are used in different activities. For the Norwegian curriculum, it is vital to facilitate sites and activities where religion can be done and where participation is possible for confirmands. This means that religious artefacts are not understood as representations of some transcendent reality, but as tools used in order to navigate the world. At the same time, the religious tools and artefacts can expand the world and dissolve the separation between a transcendent and an immanent reality. Authority is distributed between the participants; everybody is simultaneously student and teacher. Practices and participants constitute religious artefacts, and religious artefacts constitute
practices and participants. This mode of religion as practice is related to the understanding of religion as everyday life (Ammerman 2013; McGuire 2008). In the Norwegian curriculum, religion as practice is limited to congregational activities. However, religious tools and artefacts are used in a variety of activities and at different sites. In this sense, religion is done (differently) in for instance politics, health and law and in schools, jails and hospitals.

In the logics of faith religion is made into an existential issue. Religion is purified, emptied for content and placed in the unempirical inner depths of the individual. This means that pure religion can only be described in abstract and non-empirical terms. Religion is loosely connected to religious artefacts and tools. This mode of religion is of more general and universal kind, constituted by human wondering about the depths and mysteries of life and related to inner, individual experiences of true existence; that is faith. Authority is located in the individual. This mode of religion is related to 'spiritualities of life' (Heelas et al. 2005), even though this concept is constructed as a contrast to religion. It is also related to the understanding of religion as individual experience (Jarvis 2008; Woodhead 2011).

**Negotiation**

Our final argument is that these modes of religious learning and of religion are conditioned by negotiations. In these curriculum texts, religion is negotiated in the context of a border practice, i.e. confirmation. How is religion negotiated between confirmation as a civic event on one hand and as a key religious educational activity on the other? It is possible to argue that two kinds of negotiations are taking place in the two texts?

In the Finnish curriculum, the negotiation has resulted in a religion that is differentiated and put at a distance. On the one hand, religion is delimited and does not interfere extensively with other spheres in people's lives. However, this negotiation involves a tension with some parts of the text emphasizes the confirmands lives, but the primacy is on a religion which is confined to the congregation. The confirmands get a decontextual education of religion and the choice of further participation is left open. The Finnish solution is a combination of a strong religious core and decontextual participation.
The Norwegian curriculum negotiates religion differently. Religion is not differentiated in the same way as in the Finnish text; religion is put in a hybrid mix with walking tours, dance and dinners. Religion is not put at a distance—religion is participation. However, the activities are open—they have no explicit religious purpose and do not involved extensive religious tools and artifacts. Religion, as activity, is for everyone. The same goes for religion as faith. Faith is the existential, human wondering—a common human question. The Norwegian negotiation can therefore be understood as in many ways as the opposite of the Finnish one: extensive participation framed within religion as common and general.

In sum, the analyses of both curriculum texts show that religion can be done quite differently when constituted by different modes of religious learning. The Finnish plan pertains to an individualistic mode of religious learning. It is the individual confirmand's mind that needs to process the subject matter of Catechism. Religion becomes a logical and rational belief system. It is opposed by a strong collective mode of religious learning in the Norwegian text, which establishes religion through participation.
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Article II

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Learning religion: Exploring young people’s participation through the timespace and mediation at confirmation camp.

Abstract
This article explores how material tools mediate affordances and constraints in young people’s participation in the religious practice of confirmation. Learning is understood as a process of participation in a religious practice in which the majority of the participants enter as subalterns. Analyzing the material established by ethnographic field work from two confirmation camps, the findings suggest that timespace as unified features played a significant role in the opening or closing of participation.

Introduction
This paper explores how young people learn religion. The paper follows a sociocultural view on learning as changing participation in cultural practices (Lave 1993) and the developing of mediating tools (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005; Sfard, 1998, Wertsch 1998). More specifically, the practices in question are confirmation camps in the Lutheran Church of Norway. In Norway, confirmation is a major cultural tradition and involves approximately 65% of Norway’s 14-year-olds. Although the majority of teenagers choose to participate in a religious training program, for most of them confirmation is an unknown terrain. As newcomers, groups of 14-year-old confirmands enter historical-cultural activities that are led by an experienced group of leaders who have developed and mastered certain material tools (Wertsch, 1998). Nevertheless, as was evident from the field work in this study the confirmands struggle to participate with novel religious symbols and tools. This is an empirical study, theoretically informed by sociocultural theory and practice theory. This study examines how participation is mediated at the intersection of newcomers, tools, and experts at confirmation camps. The paper describes two pivotal participating episodes involving confirmands and material tools at two camps. More specifically, the focus is on how the process of mediation provided various degrees of affordances and constraints for
participation. In addition, different notions of space combined with certain time features played a significant role in mediation and, thus, time and space were constitutive of participation as well. The episodes are analyzed using Wertsch’s concepts of affordances and constraints as mediating properties of mediating action (Wertsch, 1998) and Schatzki’s concept of timespace activity (Schatzki, 2010).

This paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, I situate this study in relation to previous research within a larger sociocultural practice framework. In the second section, I present the conceptual framework I employ from Wertsch and Schatzki and discuss how these are used. In the third section, I outline the study’s methodology; I show how I established the data how and the strategies for analysis and sampling. In the fourth section, I analyze the two episodes. In the fifth and final section, I discuss the findings in relation to the research question and how the findings.

A Sociocultural Practice Framework

Wertsch’s (1991) conceptualization of cultural tools as mediated action has been used in a wide range of empirical studies. Some of the latest contributions include (Habib & Wittek, 2007; Lei, 2008; Williams, Sherry, Robinson, & Hungler, 2012; Wills, 2011), all of which are studies that focus on aspects other than religious learning.

Jurow and Pierce’s (2011) study of retreats and Martin and Evaldsson (2012) study of children’s learning of rules presents how participation must be understood in relation to affordances and constraints. These studies however, do not emphasize time as part of the mediating processes.

A number of nascent sociocultural studies has highlighted time and space (Lemke, 2000; Vadenboncoeur, Hirst, & Kostogriz, 2006). However, in this current paper, I found Schatzki’s (2011) notion of timespace beneficial. Timespace highlighted participation in relation to both time and space, as unified features. Timespace was not only in relating to participation but constitutive of participation processes which are anchored to material arrangements (Schatzki 2011).

While accentuating action as mediated with materiality, none of the above studies analyses religious practices as their subject of sociocultural inquiry. However, a few exceptions are the studies on tithing in religious communities as part of children’s mathematical development (Taylor, 2013) and on parental child rearing (Wiley, 1997).
In the field of religious education, there has been an increasing awareness of learning processes as part of the sociocultural context (J. de Kock, 2014; Haakedal, 2012; Hermans, 2003). These studies focus on the social context and communities as vital factors to understand religious learning; there is little emphasis on the mediating processes of the material things that contexts and communities are made of.

The scope of this current article is to examine the complex processes of young people, as confirmands, participating in a religious practice like a confirmation camp. The analytical aim is to sort out how these processes can be understood as religious learning processes. Using the sociocultural and practice theories as a framework, this paper raises the following questions: How do material tools in religious practices of confirmation mediate affordances and constraints for confirmands? How is the mediating processes constituted by time and space?

**Conceptual framework**

The conceptual point of departure is Wertsch’s basic claim of human action as mediated action (Wertsch, 1991, 1998). Mediation, as Wertsch indicates, has been developed both in Vygotsky’s own work and by several sociocultural theorists (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2007). Wertsch’s study emphasizes how action is affected by the entanglement to cultural tools (1998). Our actions are never pure, or just our own, they interact with various cultural tools as mediational means. Hence, our actions are mediated and part of semiotic processes which are open for a multitude of mediated characteristics and meaning-making (Wertsch, 1998).

In the complexity of young people’s participation, I found Wertsch’s claim of mediational means’ affordances or constraints particularly useful (Wertsch, 1998). Wertsch expands on the Gibsonian notion of affordance (Gibson, 1979) in proposing

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30 Wertsch argues for the following basic characteristics of mediated actions. 1) mediated action is an irreducible tension between agent and mediational means, 2) mediational means are material, 3) mediated action typically has multiple simultaneous goals, 4) mediated action is situated on one or more developmental paths, 5) mediational means constriction as well as enabling action, 6) new mediational means transform mediated action, 7) the relationship agents of mediational means can be characterized in terms of mastery, 8) the relationship agents of mediational means can be characterized in terms of appropriation, 9) mediational means are often produced for reasons other than to facilitate mediated action and 10) mediational means are associated with power and authority (Wertsch, 1998).
how cultural tools both enable or limit forms of action (Wertsch, 1998). The category of affordance and constraint place the analytical focus on how material tools are part of initiating or hindering participation.

However, mediated action does not occur in a vacuum. Mediating tools are developed as part of cultural activities with historical trajectories. Thus, space and time are inherently part of mediated action. For a study of learning, understood as participation with mediating tools, not only is the physical site significant, but also the actors and tools involved, where they are coming from, and where they are aiming to go. Schatzki’s (2010) theoretical contribution enhances our understanding of human practice in (Schatzki, 2010) time-space as unified processes, anchored in material tools; thus, time and space are constitutive of social life and activity (Schatzki, 2010). Combining the analytical concepts from Wertsch into the larger theoretical argument of “timespace” from Schatzki was a fruitful way to open up the empirical data. Sociocultural theory and practice theory share several important philosophical positions i.e. human action or practice encompasses more than the individual actor and that materiality needs to be taken into account (Schatzki, 2002; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & Savigny, 2001; Wertsch, 1998) 31.

For my study of confirmands, Wertsch’ concepts of mediated action provided a detailed analytical apparatus towards material tools. It enabled me to empirically identify learning processes through concrete tools in use and to conceptualize mediation with tools and confirmands. Although Wertsch (1998) certainly understands human action as part of a larger historical and cultural space (Wertsch, 1998) the strength of his framework is towards these small scale processes of confirmands-with-tools. Through the analysis of the religious practices it was evident how that the tools were connected to places and persons extending the immediate interaction. Subsequently, Schatzki’s more pointed analytical language of time and space features expanded the analysis of confirmands tool. A particular gain was the constitutive element of time and space for mediated action.

Building on Heidegger’s (1962) concepts of space-time, (Heidegger, 1962) Schatzki (2010) develops his rationale of human activity as fundamentally teleological(Schatzki, 2010). Social practice is an open, organized array of doings and

31 The anthology The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory (Schatzki et al., 2001) is an example on how authors work interdisciplinary to develop the understanding of practice. Among the contributions are disciplines from philosophy, social theory, practice theory and posthuman theories. A common stance is that practice is an embodied activity and materially mediated (Schatzki et al., 2001).
sayings and is always motivated toward something. Space is understood as the place for human practice including arrangements of 1) places and 2) paths anchored to material objects. Connecting these spatial arrangements are also temporal features. Schatzki’s conception of time rests on Heidegger’s “existential temporality.” In this sense, time is dimensional: past, present, and future are dimensions of human activity and occur at the same stroke. Existential temporality differs from objective time, which is characterized by a series of successions (Schatzki, 2010). To sum up, activity timespace involves interwoven arrangements of material objects with unified spatial and temporal features. Timespace constitutes human practice as it is anchored with materiality and driven toward certain ends.

Methodology

The study is an ethnographic case study drawing on one year of field work with three confirmation groups. The research project followed the single case study approach and not a comparative design as the methodological aim was to utilize the data from three relatively similar congregations. Hence, the study’s focus was not to compare group differences, but to analyze practices across three confirmation groups. Flyvbjerg (2001) argues that knowledge is context dependent. Consequently, religious learning is not de-contextual, but has to be empirically researched in particular social practices. Results from case studies have external validity beyond the particular case and this validity must be argued theoretically.

Sampling

Access to the confirmation training program came through the LETRA project’s request on a central church administration level, followed by contact with local churches. Three churches welcomed my study: one situated in a large city, one in the suburbs, and one in the countryside. I observed 21 teaching sessions in the local churches and participated in 3 camps. Two of the camps were two weekend trips and one was a week long. However, it was particularly the two weekend camps that proved to be good sites for an in-depth analysis to answer the research questions. Group 1

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32 With the concept of ‘activity timespace’ Schatzki has change the analytical language from practice to activity. Although the difference between practice and activity is not always clear. Both practice and activity are theoretical laden concepts. I have chosen to use practice to avoid confusion. In this study, I use Schatzki’s argument of timespace as unified and constitutive features for practice.

33 The study is part of a larger project, LETRA, which examines learning and knowledge trajectories in congregations.
consisted of 30 confirmands and 15 leaders and group 2 had 25 confirmands and 6 leaders.

From the total data, I selected two episodes that are analyzed in this paper: 1) the path of candles and 2) the aluminum cross with candles and paper notes. Although the episodes are different they bore some similar traits and the selection was based on the following criteria. The episodes can be read as representatives for a reoccurring pattern of participation, where the confirmands acted as newcomers with cultural and material tools. They were developed by the educators as collective educational practices for the entire group of confirmands. The intentions were to include every person regardless of prior knowledge of the confirmation program. Both episodes involved specific material tools that were modified to arrange the specific practice. The practices were developed locally over time using material tools from other religious practices, for example, candles, cross and bible verses. And finally, both episodes were intended by the leaders as pivotal practices to mark some sort of peak point at the camps.

The methods I used were participatory observation and both informal and semi-structural interviews. I participated in the same activities as the confirmands: eating, teaching sessions, games, and leisure time. Usually, sat at the back of the room or along one of the sides, taking notes in a small notebook. Together with observation from the camps, I conducted two group interviews sometime after the camps for further analysis. One interview was conducted during one camp. The first interview consisted of three confirmands, two girls and one boy; the second interview consisted of five confirmands, two girls and three boys. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. I began the field work with participatory observations that turned out to be a constructive way of building rapport with the confirmands before the interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

After the field work and interviews were completed, the analytical processes of coding the data commenced. The unit of analysis was theoretically established as the confirmands acting with mediating artifacts (Wertsch, 1998). I transcribed and coded the data using the software program, ATLAS.ti. I chose a thematic analysis as analytical strategy with the aim to identify themes or patterns from the coding of the data material (Bryman, 2012). A thematic strategy combines both an inductive approach with theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). For this paper, I approached the analysis with a theoretical conception of learning as tool mediated processes based on sociocultural theory. I used the conceptual framework of
cultural mediating tools in the coding process, not as strict hypotheses, but as sensitizing concepts. In the analysis, I first identified cultural tools, and then searched for patterns of change and negotiation between the confirmands and tools. During this phase the themes of time and space emerged inductively from the data. Subsequently, the themes of affordances and constraints in practices connected with time and space features was established. The interplay of theory and empirical data is also known as an abductive strategy (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008).

**Role of the Researcher**

My academic background is one of theology and the social sciences. Youth work has been both my voluntary commitment and part of my academic work. Theological studies are often concerned with issues of normativity, for example, how a confirmation camp may promote religious change for young people. In this study, I adopt a descriptive and analytical approach. My background placed me, to a certain degree, as an insider in the empirical field. The advantage of the insider role was that I was familiar with some of the dynamics that I encountered as a researcher. However, this advantage may have produced the methodological danger of becoming “blind” to important events (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I continuously reflected on my role as a researcher to negotiate the insider/outsider position.

**Ethics and validity**

All confirmands and their parents were informed of the study. The study was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), and I obtained written consent from the parents of the confirmands I interviewed.

To ensure a high quality of the study and limit personal bias, I presented tentative analyses to different research colleagues. In the early phase of the analysis, several vignettes of the material and interim summaries were discussed with the larger research group (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The study was also presented at external seminars and to other researchers. These processes were important to validate the analysis and findings.

Research studies are limited by theoretical and methodological choices. If I had chosen quantitative research design, a range of themes and topics including a larger number of confirmands could provide a wider picture of their learning processes. Furthermore, the study does not claim casual inferences or statistical generalizations. It is also beyond the scope and limits of this study to conclude on lasting changes in a confirmand’s practices. Such a focus would call for a more longitudinal research design.
Two Confirmation Camps

The following account presents an analysis of two specific episodes at two different camps. The first camp was well managed and highly organized. There were numerous planned activities and considerable staff resources and volunteers. The other was chaotic, seemingly poorly planned, with few staff members and leaders.

Episode 1: The path of candles

The weekend followed a strict schedule of teaching sessions during the day, devotions in the evening, planned games and entertainment, and, finally, a Sunday Service. Following the various activities, I observed and experienced a physical division between two groups; confirmands and leaders. For example, the division was apparent in teaching sessions, where confirmands were positioned in the role of pupils and the leaders were the teachers. The confirmands were to acquire a certain message or practice and the leaders were supposed to transmit the content. During games and entertainment activities, the confirmands were divided from the leaders, either as spectators of the leader’s performance or as performers for the leaders. Meals were served at separate tables: two large tables for the confirmands and one large table for the leaders. Occasionally, two adults did participate at the confirmands’ table.

After the confirmands were sent to bed, there was a social gathering of the leaders. On the first night, the leaders told me about an event they called “the path of candles.” According to them, the path of candles was a meditative walk in the evening along a track with hundreds of candles on each side. Along this track with candles, the confirmands were supposed to stop and read some signs with bible verses and finally end up by a large bonfire. At the bonfire, the leaders would burn the sheets of paper where the confirmands had written their prayers. The leaders talked about the event with awe and great expectations, as one of the leaders who I had interviewed explained:

Jim: Well, you better look forward to it. Because it is...It is an experience you will hardly forget. You will probably never forget it. We make a path of candles from the main hall and out. We have lit candles along a long gravel road, so when you start at this road you will see about hundred or hundred and fifty candles along a long path. And yes, between every twenty-fifth or thirty meters are posters with the word of God and what He has said and stuff like that. Then we end up at big open place with a bonfire. At the bonfire, we keep standing, looking at the bonfire in silence and thinking. So it is a very interesting experience.
The path of candles seemed important because the tools which were used could produce emotional experiences. Several of the religious practices during the camp involved emotional laden tools e.g. candles, paper notes for prayer, symbolic figures from the bible. All of which were aimed to give emotions of awe or reverence. The leaders were concerned that the confirmands shared the emotional experiences. I observed in many of the religious practices how the leaders paid attention to the confirmands emotional response.

In general, apart from time schedules, the confirmands were given scarce information regarding the activities. They usually knew when they were supposed to participate in various activities, but rarely did they know what they were participating in. The leaders adopted a pedagogical strategy of unmediated or “pure” experience. They wanted the confirmands to experience things independently. According to the leaders, too much information would interfere with the ideal of pure experience. When I asked how prior confirmands had experienced the “path of candles,” Jim said:

Jim: In the years, I have been part of this. I have heard the confirmands when they start at the gravel road and they have just said: ‘Oh.’ It is taken very seriously. They walk in silence and calm—no yelling, no shouting. They just walk completely silent and calm. They follow the path of candles and read the posters. Then they gather around the bonfire.

However, during the actual event, the path of candles, the majority of the confirmands did not walk quietly. They moved swiftly, even ran along the candlelit path. Few, if any, stopped and read the bible signs. As we gathered around the bonfire, there did not seem to be any apparent feeling of reverence and awe. Most of the confirmands were talking loudly, laughing, and trying to keep warm. Many leaders walked around, hushing the confirmands.

The leaders seemed disappointed. One of them told me that the confirmands were not ready for this. After a while, the confirmands returned to their rooms. Now, the leaders themselves went for the silent walk along the candles. They stopped in silent reverence and read the bible signs. On their way back to the chapel, several leaders cried openly, hugging each other. Some went into the chapel; others stood outside. When I approached them, one of the female leaders told me with tears in her eyes: “Now this is the focal point of the retreat.”

The ordinary path through the small forest was transformed. The path was changed for the leaders and by the leaders. It was the leader’s practice, their doings and
sayings that established a new space: a practice of their sacred space. Enabling this practice, was their through the mediational means of candles and bible verses. Thus sacred space was materially anchored with tools, and the arrangement of tools afforded the leaders with emotional experiences which solidified their relationship.

Six months later, I conducted a group interview with three confirmands. The confirmands had experienced the path event rather differently from the leaders.

Christina: Yeah, we went out and we read those maps. I don’t think there were many that read them because it was very cold (sounds resigned). They had put up something that looked like signs, and it was a muddy road. And it said something from…

Rebecca: Bible words or some stuff, I think.

David: And it was a T, a red T. I really wondered if it was ‘Turistforeningen’ [The Norwegian Trekking Association. They are Norway’s largest outdoor activities organization, which mark their guided tours with a red T]… I think it was that.

Rebecca (in a laughing voice): No, first we thought, we thought that is was this thing where you have to remember the big letters. So we started to memorize them, thought we were supposed to make words. But when we got half way there, there were so many letters that didn’t make sense at all. And we were like: “Don’t think it is really a meaning with those letters.” I don’t think we ever really found the meaning.

Christina: ‘Turistforeningen’? (as a remark to David, sighing)

David: Yeah, it was a red T. Didn’t you see them?

Christina: Well, yeah. I did not pay that good of attention. That I can…

Rebecca: I never got to know the meaning of those big letters.

The confirmands’ quote affirmed my interpretation at the camp that the two groups, confirmands and leaders, shared the same material location and the same tools, but participated in very different practices. The confirmands expressed a high level of confusion. Furthermore, the confirmands invokes other tools and practices they were familiar with and thus connected to other timespace features: a game or Trekking in the mountains, in order to make sense of the path of candle practice.

**Episode 2: The aluminum cross with candles and paper notes**
The members of the second confirmation group were from two local high schools. As I entered the campsite, I got the impression that the camp was poorly planned. The leaders did not seem to know the confirmands as the camp was held at the beginning of the confirmation training program. The leader group was rather small—only two adults and three younger leaders. Eventually, the pastor hired two former youth workers as leaders for some of the activities at the camp. The confirmands received scarce information of the events taking place, and the pastor made several ad hoc schedule changes during the weekend. In the teaching sessions, at the games, and during the meals, the confirmands were very loud and made considerable noise. Further, in this case, there was a division between the confirmands and leaders. The division was overt on Saturday evening. The leader group sat in a food hall on the ground floor, leaving the majority of the confirmands on their own in their rooms at the first floor. To me, the confirmands seemed uninterested in participating in the teaching sessions and bible classes.

However, on Friday evening there was a distinct episode involving the confirmands. All the chairs were piled together, and all of the confirmands sat on the floor circled around a big aluminum foiled cross. Pens, small sheets of paper, and a large number of unlit tea-light candles were placed around the cross. When a voluntary leader uttered the words, “prayer and candles,” everyone in the room went quiet. It was distinct, like the turning off a switch. The confirmands seemed bewildered. Up to this point in time, the confirmands had not seemed interested or engaged in the activities. After some seconds of just looking at the candles, paper, and aluminum cross, two girls lit a candle each and began writing. After a few minutes, there was a rush to light candles and write on the papers. The same event was repeated the following day with the same level of engagement. A leader I spoke to was amazed regarding the openness and vulnerability the confirmands displayed through these prayer notes. Grave issues concerning their families were a recurring topic. One confirmand wrote a prayer expressing hope for a change in the father’s alcohol abuse. Another note shared the difficulties of the parents’ divorce and that he should not be pulled between them. Several prayed for the families of the victims of the killings of July 22. On July 22, 2011, Norway experienced two sequential terrorist attacks leaving a total of 77 persons killed. As many as 69 of the victims were young people who were attending the Workers’ Party Youth camp at Utøya, outside Oslo.

Several prayed for the families of the victims of the killings of July 22. One note expressed gratitude for the actual confirmation weekend trip. In a group interview
during the camp, the confirmands were reluctant to share what they had written on the notes. In fact, they wished that the notes were not read.

Catherine: I lit candles. And then we wrote notes.
Mary: They won’t read the notes; will they?
Catherine: No.
Tim: They said that they were to read some. And if you didn’t want them to read it, you should mark the note with an X.
Interviewer: Why did you write notes? I am not asking for what you wrote. How did you experience it?
Catherine: I don’t know…You only wrote what you hoped or wished for.
Tim: I lit candles. I thought of two things. One, that my family should be alright. And the last thing, I rather not say.

Some weeks later, I attended a confirmation training class. I had a chat with one of the confirmands. When I asked about the retreat and what she thought was best about the whole trip. She answered, “When we lit the candles.”

Further, the notes were mentioned again in an interview I conducted with the pastor some months after this weekend camp.
Pastor: The weekend trips with the confirmands have been very popular. The last two we received quite a lot of gratitude. We see this on the prayer notes that the young people have written. They write, ‘thank you’ and they wish for several weekends. It has been very positive. On the other hand, the young people wrote a bit on their loneliness; they wished to be noticed; they were worried about their families, that the families will be dissolved. Yet they have a positive…what should we say…they are not so negative or critical to the church. Some write that they don’t believe in God; some write they do believe in God. But they are positively curious. That is what you can read out of these small written phrases.

The division between the confirmands and the workers I observed during this camp was extended throughout confirmation. The religious educator affirmed this by

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35 The information regarding the reading of prayer notes was unclear to the confirmands. Some understood that notes with an X mark implied that these were not to be read. To my knowledge, it was only the notes without marks that were read. The issue of reading the notes poses an ethical dilemma. The confirmands were given information of which notes would be read. However, this was obviously not absolutely clear for the confirmands. As a researcher, I did not read any notes, but I obtained the information through the interviews with the pastor and leaders.
saying that she felt that did not connect with this group of confirmands. However, the paper notes mediated affordances for a contact between the confirmands and workers. This contact was constituted by material tools and not the immediate face to face interaction. As tools, the paper notes bypassed the established division. The small material paper notes enabled different timespace features, the past experience from the confirmands, their present appreciation of the camp and their present faith issues. The pastor did not receive this information face to face with the confirmands. The confirmands used the tools of pens, paper and writing, and established a small but genuinely new timespace. Without this timespace the pastor would not have known the personal stories from the confirmands and equally confirmands would have been deprived from a place to share their personal experiences.

**Findings**

In the following account, I will explicate the affordances or constrains for participation in the religious practices. I will show that timespace not only constituted affordances or constrains but also established a division between the leaders and confirmands. The camp itself became a divided space. The division of space set the stage for the confirmands, now as collective groups entering religious practices but divided from the leaders. Furthermore, I argue that participation in these episodes is constituted by three distinct temporal and spatial characteristics: mediation and divided timespace, mediation and timespace constraints, and mediation and timespace affordances.

**Mediation and divided timespace**

Both camps in the study followed different time structures, including the starting points and exit points of the camps. The camps began on a Friday and ended on a Sunday. Other time structures were wakeup calls, mealtimes, and so forth. Part of the time structure established the camp as a distinct space. The distinct space of camp was partly set up by using material things such as buildings, roads, fields, and fences and partially by the conduct of practices. Within this space, the confirmands slept, woke up, ate meals, played games, and hung out with friends. Sleeping and eating are domesticated events and part of daily family routines. Now, the familiar routines were transported to a foreign compound of the confirmation camps. In the new distinct space of camp, the confirmands were set apart for a few days—sharing fellowship, eating together, and having fun. In other words, the confirmands were now established as a
collective in the manner that they shared meals and fellowship. The analysis suggests that the arrangement of the familiar daily events configured the camp as a new specific site for the confirmands, intensified the confirmands’ experiences, and bound them as a learning collective. They were newcomers in an unfamiliar terrain. The familiar tools and practices from the confirmands’ daily life joined them together as one group. However, the confirmands were equally unfamiliar with religious tools and practices mastered by the leader group. In one sense the camps were divided into the safe compounds of the daily events and the new and unfamiliar religious events.

Divided space plays two significant roles in this analysis. 1) In both episodes, the divided space established both confirmands’ groups as collectives participating in learning processes. 2) In addition, divided space in the first episode turned out to be a division of two groups—the leader group and the confirmands as distinct learning collectives. In the second episode the division was established more as isolation due to an absence of a leader group. Here, the confirmands were let to themselves most of the time, except during the religious events e.g. teaching sessions, bible classes and so forth.

The daily practices established the confirmands’ collective; however, it was the religious activities, particularly the path of candles, which seemed to be the primary unifying component for the leader group. In the first episode, the leaders’ past played a role in the present camp. The path of candles was the main event for the leader group during the camp. The only way to participate in this practice was to be part of the leader group at camp. To be a leader was a way to relive their past experience of former camps. The division between the confirmands and leader group was amplified as the leaders sat at their own tables and undertook several activities that did not involve the confirmands.

As a researcher, I experienced the camp as being two camps in one, a leaders’ retreat and a confirmands’ camp. A slip of the tongue from the leader, Jim, supported my perception, when he expressed gratitude for what he called the “leader’s retreat.” Recognizing his mistake, he corrected it to the confirmands’ retreat. In this sense, the leaders’ past experience partially constituted the mediational means as constraints for the confirmands. As Schatzki (2010) argued, human activity is laden with the past. These material arrangements afforded a notion of unity for the leaders, thereby solidifying the experience of a leaders’ camp and dividing the practices at camp between the confirmands as newcomers and the more experienced group. Irrespective of how divided the practices at camp were, the analysis does not suggest that the
confirmands were neglected. Enjoying the peer fellowship, the confirmands called the camp the high point during the confirmation training period.

In the first camp, the leader’s past dimension played a significantly important role in how the groups were divided. The second camp did not have the same dynamics because of the absence of a solid leader group. The confirmands were, as earlier stated, established as a collective, but without mentors. As novices, the confirmands did not have the experienced mentors to guide them. However, the mediational means played significantly parts in the confirmands participation in religious practice. In the following sections, I discuss how the participation in religious practices was constrained or afforded through mediational means.

**Mediation and timespace constraints**

Two pivotal episodes of religious practices occurred at the two camps. In the first episode, the material tools of small candles, oil lamps, and cardboard posters with bible verses were placed along a path. The religious practice of the light path had been developed by the leaders and they cherished this event, claiming it to be the main event at the camp. The leaders reminisced on their previous experiences, and expectations were set high for this year’s path of candles. The past was brought into the present. The material tools of candles and cardboard posters enabled a high level of religious experience for one group at the camp: the leaders. Candles with bible verse posters provided these voluntary leaders with a space where they could experience reverence. This space had a seemingly profound emotional impact on them. The mediation of sacred space was afforded by the candles and posters and constituted by the leader’s past. However, the same material tools mediated constraints for the other group. Despite the equal material character of the tools, the mediational means connected to different temporal dimensions and different spatial features. The confirmands lacked the leaders’ past knowledge and continued to walk on an ordinary path in the woods.

On the other hand, the leaders had, over a course of time, appropriated cultural tools (Wertsch, 1998). The tools were developed with the aim of establishing a sacred space. Since the confirmands lacked the temporal dimension of the leaders, they also lacked the aim of the practice: sacred space. Mediation changed from affordances to constraints. The confirmands invoked other time dimensions to ascribe meaning to the practice. Attempting to anchor meanings to the material tools, the confirmands recalled past experiences from their own practices such as previous game or trekking in the mountains. When the confirmands were constrained by material tools and deprived of
the leaders’ past dimension, the spatial arrangement crumbled in a certain sense, at least in the sense of sacred space. The analysis suggests that the timespace activity changed for the confirmands to such a degree that they were not participating in a religious practice. In this sense, the confirmands participated in a different activity than the leaders.

**Mediation and timespace affordances**

In the second episode, material tools such as pens, sheets of paper, tea-light candles, and a cross made out of aluminum foil were introduced to the confirmands. Similar to the first episode, the confirmands were structured as a collective at the camp. However, the participation processes were mediated differently. The confirmands were situated in a room where most of the activities took place. The room was identified by the confirmands as a religious room. Together with the spatial feature of a religious room, the confirmands were told to put the chairs away and sit on the floor. When the chairs were gone, the room transformed to a more informal space. The new spatial arrangements changed the proximity of the confirmands as they sat close together around the candles and pens. One leader explained the designated actions: to light the candles and write on the paper notes. However, the leader also indicated the religious meaning of the material tools as means for prayer. The religious aspect was open with few dogmatic rules and was overtly directed to their personal life. Despite the earlier chaos at the camp, the confirmands wrote about profound personal issues on the paper sheets they were given. The mediational means afforded the confirmands with a practice that opened up new temporal dimension and configured the space for the material tools. Persons and situations from the confirmands’ lives were made present through the writing on paper and the lighting of candles. Thus, the candles and paper notes invoked episodes and actors that were not physically present. One such episode was the July 22 killings and how their own and other families were affected. Religious learning occurred in the sense that existential experiences from the confirmands’ past were imported to a religious space. The alcoholic father and the divorcing parents were, in different ways, brought close to the confirmand in this religious and existential timespace through the materials of pens and paper.

Therefore, the teleological character and implicit purpose of these artifacts \(^{36}\) underwent a transformation as they became components in a religious

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\(^{36}\) This follows Leontiev’s notion of motive or goal as a focal part in understanding human activity (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006; Wertsch, 1998).
practice. The candles were originally designed to be lit to give light, and the pens were originally designed to be picked up to write words or draw pictures. However, as material components in a new activity, the material tools were changed semiotically due to the teleological change. In other words, different meanings were now attached to the same materials: lights to think of someone’s family and paper with deeply personal issues. The analysis suggests that it is the combinations of components—spatial features, time dimensions, and tools mediating affordances of participation—that imbued this practice with meaning and in this sense, can be understood as a religious learning process.

**Conclusion**

The main research questions addressed in this study was how material tools mediate affordances or constraints for the confirmands in religious practices, and how the mediating processes are constituted by time and space. In this section, my aim is to show how these findings may contribute to a wider discussion of learning in both the religious context and other nonschool activities. In particular, I address the issues of how the mediation processes in material timespace activities challenge a leader’s role in a learning situation. Finally, I indicate how religious learning is more than conceptual knowledge.

The analysis of the first camp identifies how the leaders had developed an activity that was open for them, but closed for the confirmands. Metaphorically speaking, instead of scaffolding the learning processes, the leaders’ practice became fences. In a sense, the leaders disconnected the confirmands from the religious semiotic aspects of the tool-mediated activity. The leader’s role and responsibility was to facilitate spaces of possibilities for learning in this practice (Afdal, 2013). The analysis points to how the leader’s dimensions of time constrained the confirmands’ spaces for participation in the present. The leader’s nostalgia became a present problem. The leader group celebrated their past, but they failed to share this past with the confirmands and the confirmation group experienced a different space. This is an example of how timespace challenges the expert group in opening up an activity of cultural tools for the novice.

Religious education has often been preoccupied with conceptual knowledge. The aim is to remember concepts like Ten Commandments, Creeds, or bible stories. (J. A. de Kock, 2014). This can reduce religious learning to a mentalistic project, that is, if
people do not have a religious intention, their practice will only be a social gathering, not a religious practice (Hermans, 2003). The analysis of the second camp shows how the confirmands actually have little conceptual religious knowledge. At a conceptual level, it is easy to discard the confirmands’ processes as unproductive or even failing, because they struggled to articulate the meaning of central concepts and rituals. However, the episode at the second camp presents an interaction with religious practice that is more material-oriented than conceptual-focused.

The analysis suggests that new mediating artifacts were developed in a collaborative practice. Despite a chaotic, poorly planned camp and an obvious lack of trust and relationship with the staff and leaders, the development of new material tools opened up deeply personal issues. The confirmands participated in a collaborative practice as creators of material cultural tools. The tools of paper notes became religious tools in a configuration of time and space. The time dimensions were the confirmands’ past longings, anxieties, and future hopes. Space was the physical space of a religious room and the collective space of the camp. In a sense, religion was rigged through this arrangement and enabled the confirmands to create religious tools.

Furthermore, the confirmands relation with the mediating tools developed a practice which connected with their lives outside confirmation. According to Säljö (2006), how the confirmands developed this practice with mediating tools and how they started this collaborate interpretation, is one way to understand learning. Hence, a sociocultural approach provides the analytical means to highlight learning processes that are beyond conceptual focus.

The analysis suggests that religious practice was not a system of abstract dogmatic concepts. The abstract concepts the confirmands were to learn during their confirmation time proved to be challenging. In this sense, they did not connect the concepts to their past and present life. Thus, the abstract concepts seemed to close for participation for the novice confirmand group. In contrast, the timespace of the material practices with the candles at camp was open. Through the configuration of time and space, the activity was open in a manner that it fostered a connection with the participants’ past and future dimension and enabled them to create new material tools.

References


Article III
THE MATERIAL LOGICS OF CONFIRMATION

Abstract:

The paper explores the material spaces and logics of religious learning processes. A discrepancy between religious educators and the 14-year-old confirmands was evident during a 1 year of ethnographic fieldwork. A material semiotic approach provides important perspectives on the dynamics between material and human actors in religious learning context. The findings suggest that different notions of space with different logics of religious learning were established during the confirmation program. The spaces and logics were constituted by the interplay with material objects, pastors, catechists and confirmands. The paper points to how materiality is part of religious learning and how materiality can open up for different ways of practicing and conceptualize religion.

Logic: a particular mode of reasoning viewed as valid or faulty

Key words: learning, actor-network theory, material semiotics, space, material learning, religion, religious learning, material logics, confirmation

The aim of this paper is to explore the spaces for confirmand's learning processes with the analytical lens of material semiotics and actor-network theory (ANT). In this paper, I use ANT perspectives on a religious educational practice; confirmation within the Lutheran Church of Norway. Confirmation stems from an era
of stern religious rule where Lutheran Christianity was the only religion approved by the King. When introduced in Norway in 1736, confirmation was compulsory for every citizen until 1911. Although confirmation was a forced practice, it had a large impact on the Norwegian society. Through confirmation, ordinary people learnt to read and confirmation became a rite of passage into adulthood (Salomonsen, 2007). Today confirmation is a voluntary 8 month religious educational program. The confirmation day is celebrated with a large family feast. Salomonsen argues that this family feast is unique in a Scandinavian context and one of the reasons of the prevailing popularity of confirmation (Salomonsen, 2007, p. 169). The Norwegian Folk Church has a large membership (77% of the Norwegian society)37 but low participation (3% at Sunday services)38. However, approximately 67% of Norwegian 14-year-olds participate in the religious practice of confirmation (Schweitzer, Ilg, & Simojoki, 2010, p. 165). In Norwegian confirmation, old traditions from a homogeneous religious society meet a complex, plural, late modernity. This places confirmation at an intersection inhabited by experienced religious "insiders" and newcomers who share and explore the same practice of religious learning. During 1 year of ethnographic fieldwork with three confirmation programs in Norway, a discrepancy between the religious educators and the confirmands was clear. Though they shared physical space, the different actors appeared to belong to different worlds. This study suggests that the interplay between confirmands, religious educators, and the material environment establishes different notions of space.

As stated by Fenwick and Edwards there are relatively few ANT analyses of educational practices but that ANT has a potential in analyzing processes that are often unmentioned (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011, p. ix).

In this paper, I explore how these spaces are categorized by different logics for religious learning and how they constitute religion as a whole. This empirical study was based on the material semiotic traditions of actor-network theory (ANT), science and technology studies (STS), and socio-material theories in educational research (Fenwick et al., 2011; Latour, 2005; Law, 2007; Law & Mol, 2002; Sørensen, 2009). The paper

37 http://www.gammel.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=5276 downloaded October 7nd 2014
38 http://www.gammel.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=5276 downloaded October 7nd 2014
also draws on recent contributions to the materiality of religion (McGuire, 2008; Vásquez, 2011; Woodhead, 2011).

**Studies on Confirmation and Religious Learning**

Studies on religious learning often focus on a formal school setting (Haakedal, 2012; Valk, 2009; Van der Zee, Hermans, & Aarnoutse, 2006; Vermeer, 2012). In confirmation, religious learning takes place outside of school and is part of local congregations' religious learning activities. A significant contribution to the inquiry of this type of religious activity was the comparative study on confirmation work (Schweitzer et al., 2010). This extensive quantitative project provided a valuable map of confirmation work in Europe. Still there is need for further research on how learning and didactics are developed in confirmation (Schweitzer et al., 2010, p. 291).

Jarvis investigated religious learning as an experiential phenomenon involving primary experiences that create disjunctions (Jarvis, 2008, p. 557). Hermans emphasized religious learning as a participatory practice (Hermans, 2003), and de Kocks argued for an apprenticeship model as the preferred catechetical strategy (de Kock, 2012). These scholars focused on religious learning as more than the ability to articulate statements of belief. Yet, the studies do not sufficiently address the complex processes of materiality in these religious experiences. Reite’s study however, on pastor’s professional learning is an example of how material networks are part of establishing learning processes (Reite, 2013).

This paper argues that the interplay of individuals and the materiality in religious practice must be taken into account. Individuals talk and act in material settings, and these settings constrict or provide affordances for individuals’ actions (J. Wertsch, 1998). There is a complex relationship between humans and non-humans in any social practice, including confirmation. The ANT/STS perspectives provided a suitable conceptual apparatus to analyze this complex relationship. Drawing on spatial metaphors as analytical concepts from Law and Mol (Law, 2002; Law & Mol, 2001) and those utilized in educational studies by Sørensen (Sørensen, 2009), the analysis disclosed critical processes of religious learning in the empirical material.

Confirmation is a complex social and material activity. Through bits and pieces, this complex socio-materiality constructs various patterns of meaning, discourses, or
logics. The study will answer the following research question: In what way are spaces for religious learning constructed with material objects, confirmands, and religious educators as they participate in the practices of confirmation, and how do these spaces order logics for religious learning and religion?

**Conceptual Framework**

Learning is a contested concept. The seminal article by Anna Sfard (Sfard, 1998) coined two metaphors of learning to classify two learning paradigms: learning as *acquisition* and learning as *participation*. Depending on the philosophical paradigm, cognitivist (acquisition) or sociocultural (participation), the answers to how and where learning takes place vary. Still, a sociocultural understanding involves a wide range of studies. Stemming from the works of Vygotsky, concepts such as situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), mediated action (J. Wertsch, 1998; J. V. Wertsch, 1991), and expansive learning (Engeström, 2001) analyze learning and knowledge as contextual, tool-mediated, and collective activity systems. Yet, the conceptual framework for this study draws on a similar paradigm to sociocultural theory: socio-materiality and STS/ANT. An increasing body of work related to STS and ANT puts a stronger emphasis on the notions of materiality in the analytic scope of learning and knowledge (Fenwick & Edwards, 2012; Fenwick et al., 2011; Sørensen, 2009). STS and ANT are not grand theories of social practice but ways of labeling a diaspora of material semiotic perspectives (Law, 2007). The term *material semiotics* implies materiality as an analytical basis for understanding social practice. A focal conceptual point is the principle of *general symmetry*: Traditional divisions, such as micro and macro, humans and things, and nature and society, are not understood *a priori*. They are all understood as effects in relation to one another and that are subject to empirical analysis (Bloor, 1976; Latour, 2005, p. 76; Law, 1994, p. 10). With this rationale, the practice of confirmation does not exist on its own; it is constructed in the participation of humans and material objects every year. This is part of the second perspective with material semiotics: All practices are complex, heterogeneous, and continuously ordered. We are not living in one world with one episteme; instead, the world coexists with multiple discourses, modes, patterns, or logics (Law & Mol, 2002, pp. 7-8). The rational bears similarities to the poststructuralist concept of discourse, yet these
Discourses are understood as empirical patterns of everyday practices (Law, 1994, p. 95).

Developing analytical concepts from the complexities of materiality, Law and Mol suggested spatial metaphors. Sørensen has fruitfully developed the concepts of space in educational research (Sørensen, 2009). According to Sørensen, space is relational, an expanded web of relations, and not necessarily geographic terrains. It is emerging formations of relationships between humans and non-humans (Sørensen, 2009, p. 75). In this study, I analyze the relations of humans and non-humans and what characterizes the emerging relations in a confirmation setting. These emerging relations are spatial features in that they construct "settings", "situations", or even "rooms". The space that is constructed or enacted is further analyzed with varied characteristics. These characteristics are: region and fluidity\(^{39}\) (Sørensen, 2009, p. 55). Using metaphorical language can seem odd or unfamiliar; yet, I argue that the different characteristics of spatial imaginaries open up the empirical material.

**Method**

**Study design**

To answer the research question, I conducted an ethnographic case study with 1 year of fieldwork among three different congregations. The fieldwork comprised participation observation, informal interviews, and semi-structured interviews, both group and individual. I used pseudonyms to indicate the geographic locations of the congregations: City Church and Suburban Church. The confirmation training programs in City Church involved a pastor, a catechist, and a confirmation group (\(N = 25\)), and in Suburban Church, a catechist, a religious educator, and a confirmation group (\(N = 30\)). I observed nine teaching sessions at City Church and six sessions at Suburban Church. I participated in the confirmation camps for 1 week and 1 weekend. In addition, I observed the churches, the staff routines, other youth work in the churches, and the local area surrounding the churches. Most of the confirmand interviews were group interviews; three were individual interviews. All the staff interviews were in individual format. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The data material was

\(^{39}\) Sørensen also uses the characteristics of ‘network’ and ‘resonance’ (Law & Mol, 2001), however in this paper it was ‘region’ and ‘fluid’ notions of space that were identified by the analysis.
coded using Atlas.ti, and the analytical strategy was thematic (Bryman, 2008, p. 554; Franzosi, 2009, p. 550). The analysis phase was inductive and deductive, a strategy of inference called abductive (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008, pp. 55-56). The start of the analytical phase is always ambiguous. Situated in a sociocultural paradigm, the concepts of mediation, tools, participation, and the situated character of learning and knowledge formed a theoretical backdrop. However, introducing a closer socio-material perspective opened up the empirical data. Thus, the units of analysis were the practices of pastors, religious educators, confirmands, and material objects.

This study is part of a larger research project analyzing the processes of learning and knowledge in congregations: LETRA⁴⁰ (Learning and Knowledge Trajectories in Congregations). Access to the confirmation program was obtained through this project, which carried out studies on the same congregations in other areas. The study was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) with written consent from the parents of the individuals interviewed. All other parents were informed of the project.

Research interviews create asymmetric power relations, particularly interviews with young people. The group interview helped to balance some aspects of this asymmetry because the confirmands were in a larger group whose members already knew one another. However, during the fieldwork, I got to know many of the participants. Building trust with the staff and confirmands was a vital element in gaining access to the field and establishing the material.

**Sampling**

The research project followed a case study design. As Yin (Yin, 2009) observed, case studies are excellent strategies for analyzing complex phenomena. The cases were sampled following an information-oriented selection where the aim was to maximize the utility of single cases (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 79). Two episodes from the two confirmation groups were analyzed. These episodes were chosen because they illustrated the patterns or attitudes that emerged during the analytic phase. These incidents were not unique but were distinct articulations or activities that signified recurring practices.

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⁴⁰ For more information see [http://letra.mf.no/](http://letra.mf.no/) Downloaded October 7, 2014.
Empirical field

First, I present an overall impression from the fieldwork to provide a background for the two episodes. Most of the confirmands seemed happy with their decisions for church as opposed to humanist confirmations. Still, they expressed confusion or disinterest in some of the teaching sessions, especially when the sessions resembled school situations. When I observed the confirmands, the majority seemed to struggle to convey meaning to the religious practices in which they participated. All the confirmands received their personal "confirmand Bible". At first, it seemed a positive experience. Yet, when I interviewed the confirmands, they stated that they were not interested in the Bible, that they rarely read it, and that they would not use it after confirmation. The confirmands also presented a range of motives for confirmation. In all three groups, a similar motive or rationale based on ethnicity was articulated. One girl explained that when her Muslim friends at school asked whether she was a Christian, she coined the term "state Christian" and explained that her religious conviction was not "personal" but was confined to her ethnic identity. Another girl argued that the church is important for Norwegian society and hoped that her children would experience it. Another motive was the family celebration after the liturgical confirmation day. Some stated that they wanted to learn more about the Christian faith. As found in the larger confirmation research study, the motives or reasons varied (Schweitzer et al., 2010). Still, in the interviews, ethnicity seemed the most salient reason.

When I asked the pastors and catechists for their aims or motives for confirmation, the answers included the individual's own baptismal vows, God's confirmation of the confirmands, and confirmation as a confessional act. Still, the main goal was to inspire the confirmands to participate in the liturgical ceremonies, church services, and congregational life. However, the pastors and catechists addressed some conflicting interests: the confirmands' lack of Christian knowledge and how to solve this problem. When I observed the training sessions, the confirmands sat in chairs.

41 The Norwegian Humanist Association arranges what is called Humanist confirmation. It is a course on ethics and philosophy without the religious dimension. The confirmation day is celebrated with the family in a way similar to the Christian confirmation. Approximately 15% of all 14-year-olds choose a humanist confirmation in Norway. See http://www.human.no/Servicemeny/English Downloaded October 7, 2014.
42 This is special version of the Bible and is widely used in confirmation works in Norway. It is the Bible with extensive comments and is pedagogically developed for confirmands.
listening to a lecture on various topics from the Christian tradition. Sometimes the lectures were combined with game activities. In this sense, religious knowledge was presented as something to be lectured about, rather than something in which to participate, and was thus de-contextualized to various degrees.

**Episode 1: City Church**

City Church had approximately 25 confirmands. The sessions were in a large meeting room next to the sacramental church room. The teaching sessions addressed topics such as Creation, the different sacraments, Jesus, and the Bible. The focus was on selected Bible stories, which were dramatized by the confirmands. In the last 5 minutes, the confirmands moved to the church room for a closing liturgical ceremony. The pastor emphasized the closing ceremony as the most important practice in the confirmation program. When asked why the most important part only occurred during the last 5 minutes, the pastor corrected her line of reasoning with the "knowledge gap" rationale:

Through the Christian education program, we see incredibly large knowledge gaps. We also want the central... that is communication of central texts of the life of Jesus. And how... to put some of the Christian narrative in place. But that is incredibly frustrating because they [the confirmands] come with extremely different kinds of knowledge. And therefore you constantly have the feeling that the ones with a Christian upbringing receive extremely little. And the ones that don't have anything before still can't locate the gospel of Mark.

The liturgical ceremony was first categorized as the most important event during the confirmation program. A tension occurred in the pastor's assessment of confirmation practice. She deviated from the first assessment of liturgical practice as the most valuable. In the interview, she put forth the second part as equally important. This part resembled an explanatory frame for the confirmation work. In this frame, the most important activities were those that "put the Christian narrative in place". Utterances such as "knowledge gaps" and "central text", and how they were used to restore a coherent narrative were in all three churches. These words convey attitudes or expressions of certain logic that values coherency. The coherency is found in the narrative. The narrative is the unified expression consisting of certain central texts.
Thus, the text becomes vital for the narrative, which finally constitutes Christian knowledge. Following this logic, any misconceptions or misunderstanding of the coherent narrative, which is established by the text, are addressed as "knowledge gaps". Thus, it becomes a matter of communicating the text in a way that bridges these knowledge gaps. These elements signify homogeneity, which is structured around a text. These features are part of establishing what Sørensen identified as regional space (Sørensen, 2009, p. 27). According to Sørensen, regional space signifies homogeneity and boundaries, providing the region with durability and structure (Sørensen, 2009, p. 55). Confirmation inhabits regional characteristics as a structured continuum: entrance and closure, starting and ending dates, routine sessions of 45 minutes, certain obligatory elements, such as baptism, and eight church services. A particularly homogenous feature is the understanding of religious knowledge as a single narrative. Still, the analysis suggested that regional space is established by the relationship with materiality. It constitutes space in a manner of borders or boundaries with insiders and outsiders. With the logic of a coherent narrative, there was a need to remedy the knowledge gaps. The teaching strategy in the case of City Church was to dramatize stories from the Bible. A vital point concerning materiality was how the stories were presented. Instead of reading Bible stories from start to finish, the staff copied the chapter and verses on small pieces of paper. As material actors, the pieces of paper with the selected numbers had an effect on the confirmands as they tried to figure out the significance of the numbers. Chapters and verses were coded digits that the confirmands struggled to decode. To find the correct story in the Bible, the numbers had to be decoded. Thus, there was a significant technical element to be mastered. Since the confirmands struggled to find the correct story from the chapter numbers and verses, the pastor had to guide them to locate the stories. After reading the stories, the confirmands were required to act them out. The catechist’s pedagogical aim was to invite the confirmands to be active participants as opposed to passive listeners. Dramatizing was a way to engage the confirmands with Bible stories. However, the connections between the story reading and acting out seemed weak. When the confirmands performed the drama, they returned to the text in the Bible and read it aloud. Looking insecure and unengaged, the confirmands tended to read the stories rather than perform them dramatically. A separation of space took
place. There were the insiders: the pastor and catechist who fully owned the biblical stories and mastered the technology of chapters and verses; then, there were the outsiders: the confirmands who appeared uncomfortable with the drama and struggled with the technology of the Bible.

The boundaries of the regional space were amplified due to the solid structure of the biblical narrative. The narrative was never fully laid out because, for the insider, there was no need. Inside the regional space, the insiders took the coherent narrative for granted to the extent that they expected the confirmands to easily fragment it. They fully understood the fragmented small digits as they connected them to a larger narrative; yet, the connection was only possible inside the regional space. Hence, the Bible seemed to play a significant part in the relationship of the regional space. One of the confirmand boys, Victor, expressed his frustration in an interview about his experience with confirmation:

"You know, they do these kinds of learning methods. That we will learn about the Bible through drama. But you can't act out the biblical stories the way we do it. The Bible is such a complicated text. You can't just take some small outtakes like we do. We only end up reading out loud from the Bible. We should have much more time to practice. I think we would have learned more if we just read the text."

He hesitated to share his critique, but as an amateur actor, Victor shared his experiences with acting out texts and his understanding of how complicated it was to perform a play. I asked if he had ever read the Bible. Victor answered that he rarely read any books, let alone the Bible, because he felt they were complicated. He explained that he was absent from the session where the confirmands learned how to find verses and chapters in the Bible. In other words, issues of technology were connected to the Bible. The Bible has a logic of verses and chapters that differ from other books. When he missed the session during which the logic of the literary technology of the Bible was taught, he found the text challenging to use. The borders for the regional space of confirmation were not issues of faith, according to Victor, but issues of technology. Simultaneously, the materiality of books in general was an issue. Several confirmands addressed this point; they reported reading few books or that books reminded them of school. However, Victor presented a different attitude about
the subject of church service. Laughing at first because he had shirked all eight obligatory services, he became serious as he considered going to services in the future:

Victor: But never say never, it could happen. But I kinda find it a bit boring sometimes. Often you just sit there and listen and listen. But, yeah... I haven’t made concrete plans, but I think it will happen that I go there.

Interviewer: You think so? Why?
Victor: Well... it is this, when you take Communion, for example, then, you get this... Not that I have so many sins, but you get this kind of, that now you are clean. Now you can, in a way, start over again. I believe that is a good feeling to bring with you. So, yes [nodding].

Victor admitted that he had considered going to church services. Communion, consisting of bread and wine, gave Victor "good feelings". It gave him feelings of cleanliness and the ability to start over again. The materiality provided Victor with an opening to participate in services despite his reaction of boredom. Yet, there was no mention of a commitment to the congregation or other persons in the service. He only referred to his individual activity with communion. Victor's logic is categorized by means of utility; that is, communion was useful for him, and it was there when he needed it. At the same time, his attitude was loose and unconnected. Victor did not express a need for commitment or a need to comprehend Eucharist theology. He did, however, demonstrate that he recognized communion as having meaning beyond the material of bread and wine, as he connected the words "sin" and "clean". Stressing that he did not believe he had a lot of sin, he appreciated the opportunity to take part in Communion, if needed. This signified porous and permeable characteristics, which Sørensen categorized as fluid space (Sørensen, 2009, p. 55).

**Episode 2: Suburban Church**

The confirmation program at Suburban Church was in line with the two other congregations: teaching sessions every fortnight on various topics. In an interview with the catechist, she conveyed conflicting feelings toward their approach. She stated that the confirmands went into "school mode" when presented with traditional teaching. She believed the confirmands should have more experience and fewer teaching sessions, but then she paused for a moment and corrected herself: "but they have to
have some teaching, as well." At the confirmands' outing, the catechist and the religious educator arranged certain events which were more in line with her aim for confirmation, which was to provide the confirmands with an experience that might open them to faith. She explained:

We try inventing, not just to find something to do, but to show that faith is much more than training or more than teaching. Faith is more than knowledge, much more. First and foremost something else, maybe, and knowledge comes afterwards. So there is a change in the whole way of confirmation teaching, I believe. I am very happy to be part of that.

The activity was ritualistic and took place in a room during the confirmation camp. Before entering the room, one leader asked each confirmand if he or she was ready. After affirming this question, the confirmands entered quietly in groups of five and were placed around a small table covered by a green cloth. The catechist told a story about a shepherd. The story was based on one of the parables of Jesus as the good shepherd. During the storytelling, she placed different wooden figures shaped as sheep and men, and often there were moments of silence. The confirmands seemed bewildered and uneasy with the events taking place. Three confirmands addressed the learning sessions during a group interview:

Julie: We learned about, it was a story about lambs that Gloria (the catechist) had.

Interviewer: Yeah, tell me about that.

Julie: Do you remember that? [Addressing the two other confirmands]

Marianne: Yes, the one with the shepherd. It is this story from the Bible.

Julie: It is a story about a shepherd that has three lambs, and then one of the lambs disappears.

David: The one lamb vanishes.

Marianne: And then he goes out looking for the lamb and then he finds it.

Julie: And then there was someone who gave it to him or something, because he had done something wrong or something. I don't remember exactly.
Marianne: No, wasn't it something about the good shepherd and the not-good shepherd? [Asking the other confirmands]

Julie: Yes, it was something like that.

Marianne: He would like... 'oh, no I can't walk past there, it is too dangerous to walk, so I won't get the lamb.' But the good shepherd went and got the lamb or something like that. [Looking to the other confirmands]

The catechist struggled between two different approaches: teaching that promoted "school mode" and the experience that promoted faith. Knowledge is gained as a result of teaching. Her understanding was similar to this acquisition metaphor, where knowledge is an entity to be acquired. Faith was classified as much more than knowledge. It was abstracted to "something else", without being further conceptualized. The logic focused on experience as entry to faith. This experience is opposed to training, teaching, and knowledge. To create these experiences, the catechist deployed a pedagogical strategy involving material elements with a story from the Bible. The intentions seemed to be that the relationship of ritual practice, material elements, and biblical story would lead to wondering. Thus, the experience of wondering would open a way to faith that differed from the traditional teaching sessions.

Although the rationale differed from the "coherent narrative", the spatial features were similar. Each spatial feature had well-defined boundaries with a start and finish. Each was situated in a room arranged for the purpose of showing faith. The biblical story was fragmented from the biblical text and recontextualized in a new practice with wooden figures as material elements. Therefore, it signified the features of regional space with insiders and outsiders. As in the case of City Church, the narrative was confined in the regional space. To fragment the narrative with material objects functions well inside that particular space. For the insiders of the regional space, the material participants seemed to animate the story, although to the confirmands, the material participation was weak.

This incident illustrates several shared perceptions among the confirmands' during the confirmation program. They struggled to comprehend the meaning of most of the sessions. Still, the confirmands were content with their confirmation sessions, as
they enjoyed the social aspects, such as meeting many friends from school and assisting at services. Assisting at services was a positive experience because the confirmands felt visible to the rest of the congregation.

When the confirmands were asked if anything had changed during the sessions, several addressed prayer:

David: I haven't been much changed or anything. But it is like, yeah, a bit like once I had a really 'down' day, or a bad day... and then I just tried kind of, just prayed, kind of. Just like... you feel a bit more safe afterwards, really. Just like, a kind of weird feeling, so you feel more safe. It is like that.

Marianne: Yes, [affirming the same experience] it is a bit strange. Because if you think about it... like, 'should I try it today?' then you feel more calm.

David: It is relieving, a bit...

Marianne: I have also experienced that once. When we kind of, everything is just stress and stuff, and I'm like... 'Why not?' Just like that: 'Help me now,' kind of. So I felt that I became more calm in that situation I was at.

Interviewer: Was this here at confirmation class, or was it at home?
David: No, it was at home. When I did it, anyway.

Marianne: No, it was at school or something. And when there is a lot of projects and stuff. And you are put as a leader or you take on a role as leader, a lot is going on at the same time. And then it becomes like, 'Can everyone be quiet around me now?'... yeah, in those stressful situations.

The practice of prayer was the only aspect of change expressed during the confirmation period. Confirmands experienced prayer as a positive element that contributed to feelings of safety and relief and produced a calming effect. This sentiment resembled Victor's rationale, who shared that Communion provided a feeling of cleanliness and a new start. At the same time, prayer differed in terms of materiality; it resembled concepts more than material actors. In Sørensen's study, the principle of symmetry also included abstract concepts. For the confirmands, prayer
was primarily located in the regional space of confirmation. Most of the prayer was practiced collectively and situated in the church room. However, David's and Marianne's approaches had more fluid characteristics; prayer was as useful to them as communion was to Victor. Prayer was removed from the local collective and transferred to school or home. In addition, there was no mention of God or Jesus in their prayers; thus, the confirmands demonstrated a porous and loose understanding. Similar to Victor, they took bits and pieces from the regional, solid confirmation practice. Their fluid approach permitted such logic.
**Table 1**

*Overview of different logics, their material practice, and spatial characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logics</th>
<th>Material practice</th>
<th>Spatial characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coherent narrative</td>
<td>Paper with verses, fragments of stories</td>
<td>Regional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bits and pieces</td>
<td>Bread and wine contribute feelings of cleanliness, new start</td>
<td>Fluid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prayer: used as relief, security, feeling good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith through wondering</td>
<td>Structured play with wooden objects</td>
<td>Regional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

The material logics in the analysis varied. One strove for a coherent Christian narrative with the aim to fill knowledge holes through the placement of this narrative. The logic of the coherent narrative produced more fragments, as the confirmands struggled with the borders structured by the small paper with Bible verses. The verses were coherent inside the regional space, but contributed to more confusion in the confirmands' porous space. The second approach followed experimental logic, with the aim to provide experiences of wonder, wherein faith might emerge. This logic, although different from that of the first, provided the same regional space. The ritual, small wooden figures were meaningful inside the region. The confirmands' practice with the material tools established a more porous and fluid space with the logic of bits and pieces. In this space, religious learning is not about a whole but about the practice of certain religious parts.

**Discussion**

Religious learning usually has a cognitive focus, an experimental or more situated approach to how youth gradually find meaning toward a center (de Kock, 2012; Jarvis, 2008; Schweitzer et al., 2010). These are all valuable aspects of young persons' experiences with religious practices. However, this study suggests that to
include materiality on the same analytical level provides important perspectives of the processes of learning. As in the case of confirmation, the confirmands entered the activity of confirmation as subalterns. Using situated learning theory, their position can be described as legitimate peripheral participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The confirmation programs were processes of moving from the periphery to a gradual center of community. Still, for the confirmands in this study, there was no recognizable center for the practice of confirmation. Confirmation training was not a structured community with a clear aim. It had various events; that is, teaching sessions with different material objects and different goals. However, the practice with the different elements only made sense in different spaces and with different logics. I argue that materiality contributed significantly to the construction of regional spaces with logics with which the confirmands struggled to connect. This study suggests that these logics and regional spaces constitute religious learning, which has implications on religion. Contemporary debates among scholars of religion have contributed to more diverse concepts of religion. Linda Woodhead (2011) published five concepts of religion: culture as beliefs and meaning, identity, relationship, practice, and power. From the analysis of empirical material, religion as belief was the predominant expression of religion from the pastors and the catechists in both episodes. This implies that religion has to do with believing certain things, an assertion of the authoritative sacred text, and the existence of supernatural forces (Woodhead, 2011, p. 123). However, the religion in Suburban Church was expressed more as religion as experience (Woodhead, 2011, p. 132). Through the confirmands' fluid space, religion was something else. They expressed religion as practice. The porous logic was less interested in the coherent narrative. Religion to them was not confined by formal theology or as a coherent system; religion was bits and pieces that were useful (Woodhead, 2011, p. 133). These perspectives are in line with Manuel Vásquez' understanding of religion as rematerialized, embedded in diverse human practices (Vásquez, 2011, p. 289). This also follows Meredith McGuire's (2008) concept of lived religion. It is a religion that, to be useful, does not require logical coherence, but only to make sense in everyday life (McGuire, 2008, p. 15). For the confirmands, their common approach to religion was to utilize the pieces they found helpful. Communion provided a new start, and prayer provided security, which was enough. Acknowledging this way of practicing religion,
McGuire (2008) argued for the need to "grapple with the complexities, apparent inconsistencies, heterogeneity and untidiness of the range of religious practices that people find meaningful and useful" (McGuire, 2008, p. 16), and further stated that "...it is mainly intellectuals who care about apparent inconsistencies." Perhaps it is the pastors, the catechists, or even the academics of religious studies that need a logical coherent system?

This study suggests that practice should be at the forefront in religious learning, but the participants should be part of the practice, not removed to other sites. As suggested by Afdal (Afdal, 2013), religious learning is about creating spaces of possibilities. Religious learning must include the practice of the different pieces of religion.
References


Appendices
Appendix 1

Translations of confirmation terminology

The Norwegian terminology used in confirmation posed some translation challenges. I have followed the European study’s terminology regarding the term ‘confirmand’ or ‘confirmands’. Another alternative was ‘confirmation candidate’, but the European study term ‘confirmand’ is easier in use and also its use has been establish with the other studies. However, I depart on the terminology of ‘confirmation work’. This is used by the European study as an English translation for the confirmation training program. I have, for the most part, used ‘confirmation’. This is the widespread term uses in the USA both in churches and research. I emailed Katie Douglass, the co-director of the Confirmation Project she explained that confirmation signifies the whole processes with teaching sessions and also the confirmation day. 43

In the study I use confirmation workers or workers to signify the both the staff and voluntary leaders in confirmation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Norwegian terms</th>
<th>English translations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Konfirmant</td>
<td>Confirmand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konfirmansjon</td>
<td>Confirmation: this implies the whole training process and also the actual confirmation day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prest</td>
<td>Pastor, confirmation worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kateket</td>
<td>Catechist, confirmation worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trosopplærer</td>
<td>Religious educator, confirmation worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2  Request for consent to participate in the research project:

Til ungdom og foresatte. Mars.2012

Mitt navn er Morten Holmqvist og jeg arbeider som doktorgradsstipendiat ved Det teologiske Menighetsfakultet.

Jeg arbeider nå med et forskningsprosjekt rundt konfirmanter og læring. Prosjektet er en del av en større studie om læring og kunnskap i menigheter i Norge og kalles LETRA. Med denne undersøkelsen ønsker jeg å finne mer ut av hvordan ungdom opplever konfirmanttiden, hva de lærer og hvordan den preger deres holdninger, valg og livssyn. I den forbindelse ønsker jeg å intervjuere noen av årets konfirmanter.

Temaene som vi vil gjerne snakke med din sønn/datter er:

- Deres syn på venner og felleskap. Vi vil blant annet komme inn på ungdommens forhold til sine venner.
- Deres fritidsinteresser.
- Deres opplevelse med kirken og konfirmantarbeidet.
- Deres opplevelse med de ansatte og frivillige i kirken.
- Deres tanker om framtiden.
- Deres tanker om omkring den religiøse dimensjonen.


Hele prosjektet er finansiert av Det teologiske Menighetsfakultet og Kirkerådet. Resultatene av undersøkelsene vil danne grunnlag for vitenskaplige artikler og til slutt som en del av min doktorgradsavhandling. Intervjuundersøkelsen er tilrådd av Personvernombudet for forskning ved Norsksamfunnsvitenskaplig datatjeneste.

Hvis du har noen spørsmål om undersøkelsen er du hjertelig velkommen til å kontakte undertegnende på telefon 22 59 06 06 eller mail: morten.holmqvist@mf.no

Vennlig hilsen
Morten Holmqvist

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Samtykkeerklæring.

Erklæringen leveres til xxxx, kateket i xxxx menighet. Erklæring kan også sendes til Det teologiske Menighetsfakultet v/Morten Holmqvist. Adr: Postboks 5144 Majorstuen, 0302 OSLO

Som foresatt for:........................................................................................................................................................................

Godkjenner jeg at han/hun er med på intervjuet til prosjektet om konfirmanter og læring, og dermed utgjør en del av datagrunnlaget for denne undersøkelsen.

Dato og underskrift:..............................................................................................................................................................
Appendix: 3
Intervjuguide gruppeintervju konfirmanter [interview guide for groupinterview confirmands]

1. Fortell meg om xxxx (området de bor)
3. Hva er viktig i livet ditt?

Konfirmasjon og læring

4. Hvordan har dette året vært? Hva har dere gjort?
5. Hva har dere deltatt på?
6. Hvordan var undervisningen? Beskriv hvordan. Satt dere passivt, var dere med på noe?
7. Ville dere gjort dette annerledes? Hvordan ville dere gjort det?
8. Er det noe som har endret seg i livet ditt gjennom konfirmasjon?

Om konfirmantleiren:

9. Beskriv leiren, hva gjorde dere?
10. Gjorde dere noe der som var helt nytt?

Om resten av menigheten, praksisfellesskap

11. Har dere vært med på noe annet enn undervisningen? ungdomsarbeid, kor el.

Konfirmasjonsfesten

12. Hvordan skal dere feire konfirmasjonen?

Gud

13. Hva tenker du om Gud? (Vil du si at du tror på Gud?)
14. Har det endret seg hvordan du tror på Gud?
15. Ber du?
16. Har det endret seg hvordan du ber?

Familie og religion:

På hvilken måte er familie koblet inn på konfirmasjonstiden?
Hvordan tenker familien deres om tro?

Venner og religion:

Er religion eller kristen tro noe dere snakker om med venner? Har dette endret seg?
Appendix: 4
Intervjuguide ledere om konfirmasjon [interview guide for confirmation workers]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Om konfirmasjon:</th>
<th>Lederens syn, få fram ideologisk diskursen om konfirmasjon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hva er konfirmasjon?</td>
<td>Hvilke artefakter kan være viktige for læring?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hva mener du er viktig for konfirmasjonstiden?</td>
<td>Få fram ulike syn fra de ulike ansatte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hva er helt nødvendig for konfirmasjon?</td>
<td>Få fram hvordan leir kan fungere som artefakt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hva skal til for en god konfirmasjon?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Er det noe materiell som er viktig?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hva tenker du om leir og konfirmasjon?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hvordan planlegger du undervisningen?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aktivitetssystemer, communities of pracies
**Appendix: 5.**

**OBSERVAJONSSNOTATER – eier:**
Menighet, Dato
aktivitet, tid, sted, romtype, romorganisering, artefakter osv,
Møtets funksjon - del av helhet (start. oppfølging, plassering i undervisningsforløp, engangstiltak osv),
ansvarlig, medvirkende, frivillige, målgruppe osv

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tid</th>
<th>Observasjoner</th>
<th>Fortolkninger/ NB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Forslag til bruk av forkortelser:

Kjønn merkes med m/f
Eks. Konfirmant maskulin nr 4=Kon m4

Fri=frivillig
P=prest
SP=sogneprest
Kap=kappelan
MP=menighetsprest
TP=trospplæringsprest
Kat=kateket
MPed=menighetspedagog
Tro=trospplæringsarbeider
Org=organist/kantor
F=foreldre/foresatte
Fad=fadder
BF=besteforelder
Baby=Baby
SM=småbarn
FB=førskolebarn
SB=skolebarn
US=ungdomsskole
K=konfirmant
V=videregående
Med=ung medarbeider
UV=unge/voksne
SF=Småbarnsforeldre
KF=Konfirmantforeldre
MV-middelalдрende voksne
E=Eldre
G=Gamle
Appendix: 6

Declaration

describing the independent research contribution of the candidate

In addition to the dissertation, there should be enclosed a declaration describing the independent research contribution of the candidate for each paper constituting the dissertation.

The declaration should be filled in and signed by candidate and co-authors. Use the following pages to the extent necessary.

The declaration will show the contribution to conception and design, or development and analysis of a theoretical model, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data, contribution to drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content etc.

The Research Committee
FU-2013-10-08 Side 34
Appendix 7

Article no. 1
Title:
The independent contribution of the candidate:

Signature of candidate  Signature of co-authors

Article no. 2
Title:
The independent contribution of the candidate:

Signature of candidate  Signature of co-authors

Article no. 3
Title:
The independent contribution of the candidate:

Signature of candidate  Signature of co-authors
TILRÅDING AV BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 26.10.2011. All nødvendig informasjon om prosjektet forelå i sin helhet 25.11.2011. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

28538 Learning and Knowledge Trajectories in Congregations

Behandlingsansvarlig Det teologiske menighetsfakultet ved institusjonen iverrt leder

Geir Sigmund Afsdal

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsloven. Personvernombudet tilhe rer at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tiltak forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tild med opplysningene gitt i meldingen, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven / -helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan sette i gang.


Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 15.11.2017, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Vigdis Namvold Kvåheim

Kjersti Hvardsdøn

Kontaktperson: Kjersti Hvardsdøn tlf: 55 58 29 53

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering