


# Contextualising religious education – Different understandings of teaching in Sami confirmation courses

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For the last 30 years, the Church of Sweden, along with other institutions, has offered special confirmation courses for the church's young Sami members. The organisers and teachers involved with these Sami confirmation courses all stress the necessity of adapting their teaching to fit Sami contexts. Their views are supported by various steering documents, but the wording of these documents leaves room for differing interpretations, which has resulted in multiple understandings of what concrete adjustments should be implemented in the teaching.

The overarching aim of this article is to analyse the differing views of how to adapt the teaching in Sami confirmation courses so as to better fit the Sami contexts. In particular, I examine whether these different views can be traced to differing understandings of what contextualising Religious Education entails.

Ten interviews with people involved in teaching or organising the courses were analysed, along with archival material, using qualitative content analysis and theories regarding contextual theology, religious education and indigenous education.

To capture these different theoretical perspectives, I suggest the concept of contextualised religious education and three central analytical questions: (1) 'who is the teacher?', (2) 'how is the teaching organised?' and (3) 'what is the content of the teaching?'

My in-depth analysis of the interviews and archival material, the sorting of the different views voiced in this material (based on the three questions above), together with inspiration from models of contextual theology, resulted in three new categories: dialogical contextual religious education, context-driven contextual religious education and faith-driven contextual religious education.

**Keywords:** Christian confirmation; Sámi people; The Church of Sweden; Religious education; Indigenous education; Contextual theology.

## Introduction

Sami people are the indigenous people of northern Sweden; they also reside in Norway, Finland and north-western Russia. This is the land of the Sami, called Sápmi. Nowadays, the Sami are a minority population, with the exception of the inland area of the Norwegian county of Finnmark, and certain parts of northern Sweden and Finland (Haetta 1996:10–12). Historically, Sami culture is a part of circumpolar cultures. Some important elements of the Sami tradition include hunting and trapping methods, construction techniques, methods of transport, their languages and the traditional Sami religions. Reindeer are extremely important to a large proportion of the Sami population, mainly as a cultural symbol, although reindeer herding is still an important Sami occupation (Haetta 1996:13–15).

The Church of Sweden is an Evangelical Lutheran national church, and represents the largest religious community in Sweden. All 14-year-olds in Sweden receive an offer from the Church of Sweden to participate in confirmation courses. In the Church of Sweden, the confirmation service is a special service that marks the end of a period of education in the Christian faith and provides the confirmand opportunity to understand and interpret their baptism (Bosbach, Edqvist & Nordström 2000:11–12, 28–30). The education that precedes confirmation can be conducted in different ways. Two common options are having the teaching conducted for one semester at the confirmand's home congregation, or with a more condensed education occurring over a few weeks at a camp (Bosbach et al. 2000:19–21, 26–28).

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For the last 30 years, the Church of Sweden, working with the Sami (non-church) youth organisation Sáminuorra and other groups, has offered special confirmation courses for the young Sami members of the church. From the beginning, the goal of this special confirmation courses was to provide a confirmation camp that included Sami cultures and languages (Lundmark 1984:12). The Sami confirmation courses are organised in the form of summer camps, at alternating locations, but mainly in (what usually is considered) the geographical Sami core area (Ekström & Schött 2006:45). Issues concerning land rights, identity, decolonisation, reconciliation, indigenous rights and historical justice are addressed in the teaching in these courses, as these issues are seen as crucial in the relationship between the church and its Sami members (Ekström & Schött 2006:85–86).

From the start of these course offerings, the Church of Sweden has been responsible for the concluding confirmation service, but in providing the education, the Church cooperates with other organisations. The Sami youth organisation Sáminuorra has participated as an organiser in the courses since they began to be offered, providing them with young Sami leaders. The former chairperson of Sáminuorra, Mattias Harr, reported that the leaders from Sáminuorra, with knowledge of the Sami culture, have helped the confirmands to process their own Sami identity (Schött & Engvall 2012:37). However, because of discontent with the Church's ability to adapt properly the courses for Sami participants, Sáminuorra ended the cooperation in 2014 (Partapuoli 2015:9). *Svenska Missionssällskapet Kyrkan och Samerna* [the Swedish Missionary Society, the Church and the Sami] was also a partner and financier of the courses from 1985. They concluded the cooperation when the organisation dissolved in 2001. Since 2014, the Sami confirmation courses have been held at Edelvik folkhögskola in Burträsk, a village in the northern part of Sweden. Edelvik folkhögskola (literally 'Edelvik's Folk High School') is a residential adult education college and has since 2014 been a partner and providing accommodation, catering, and also teachers and administrators.

## Aim

The overarching aim of this article is to analyse different views of what it means to adapt the teaching in Sami confirmation courses to fit Sami contexts. A more particular aim is to examine whether these different views can be traced to differing understandings of what contextualising religious education means.

## Research problem

Many of the administrators and teachers involved in Sami confirmation courses stressed during interviews the necessity of adapting the teaching to fit Sami contexts. Their views are supported by steering documents composed by the Church of Sweden that addresses this need (e.g. Stiftsstyrelsen i Härnösands stift & Stiftsstyrelsen i Luleå stift 2011:1–2). By adapting the education in the confirmation courses, the Church aims to promote the Sami culture, identity and

language and to provide the knowledge of Sami history (Stiftsstyrelsen i Härnösands stift & Stiftsstyrelsen i Luleå stift 2011:1–2). However, the wordings in the steering documents are rather general and leave room for differing interpretations. This state of affairs results in the transfer of decision power, on how to adapt the teaching, to the individual teachers. This has in practice led to multiple views amongst the individuals and organisations involved on what concrete additions or adjustments should be implemented.

One could even say that there is a struggle, more or less explicit, regarding how to adapt the teaching. A clear example is the conflict between Sáminuorra and the Church of Sweden. When Sáminuorra decided to suspend its cooperation with the Church of Sweden, its members felt that the Church did not take their criticisms of the teaching and the organisation of the confirmation courses seriously. Their criticism concerned a lack of Sami competence, both linguistically and culturally, amongst representatives of the Church (Partapuoli 2015:9). To analyse these multiple views, or struggle between views, amongst the individuals and organisations involved, I use several theoretical perspectives. Sami confirmation courses are a complex occurrence that can be linked to theoretical perspectives within religious education, indigenous education and contextual theology. As a conceptual framework, I draw inspiration from these three perspectives and focus on their common features.

## Religious education

In this article, my understanding of didactics is in line with the continental understanding. According to this view, the main purpose of *Didaktik* is to provide teachers with an orientation for their activities in classroom practice. Didactics, or the didactic method, has different connotations in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, where didactic method signifies the teaching of moral contents (Biesta 2011:183). This main purpose of *Didaktik*, in line with the continental understanding, can be addressed through three questions (Hartman 2000:241–242): 'what is to be learnt and taught (the content aspect)?', 'why should something be learnt and taught (the goal aspect)?' and 'how are we to learn and teach (the means or method aspect)?'.

Religious education in the Swedish context has a strong connection with *Didaktik*; the Swedish concept used for religious education is *religionsdidaktik*. Swedish researcher Löfstedt (2011:12) views religious education as the part of Religious Studies that deals with religion and teaching from different perspectives. According to her view, religious education as an academic field encompasses theoretical reflections on education and hands-on reflections on teaching. Löfstedt (2011:12) and Berglund (2010:17) determine that, essentially, religious education is dependent on the choices of teachers.

## Indigenous education

There are indigenous peoples all over the world, living in different contexts and conditions (eds. Jacob et al. 2015:8). However, on a general level, indigenous education denotes

knowledge that is generated, obtained and adapted to fit the historical contexts and needs of indigenous peoples. Jacob et al. (eds. 2015:3) understand 'Indigenous Education' to be a concept that covers more than formal schooling. It includes all of the educative means through which individuals gain knowledge and meaning from their indigenous heritage. Indigenous education is therefore viewed as a lifelong process with continual feedback loops that occur in interaction with others. Indigenous education is communal and communitarian, and is shared across generations. While adults generally lead the indigenous education process, every age group is seen as important contributors (eds. Jacob et al. 2015:3).

Indigenous education is connected to indigenous knowledge and epistemologies, which requires a practical knowledge of how to live and make a living in a particular place (McCarty et al. 2005:2). For education in indigenous contexts, this connection to indigenous knowledge and epistemologies is essential. To establish this connection, indigenous education needs, according to Porter (2015:260), to counter the underlying epistemological justifications that have kept indigenous ways of knowing at the margins. Keskitalo, Määttä and Uusiattuti (2013:95) list keywords such as 'names', 'family connections', 'concrete experiences', 'nature' and 'environment' as central for developing Sami education. Keskitalo et al. (2013:95) advocate a Sami pedagogy that not only acknowledges these historical-cultural phenomena, but also burdens relating to colonialism and the Sami position. The aim of a Sami pedagogy should be to strengthen the special features of the Sami culture via teaching and classroom arrangements (Keskitalo et al. 2013:96).

## Contextual theology

Theories about contextual theology have mostly been developed within missiology. Anglican clergyman and mission strategist Henry Venn was concerned that strategies from European missionaries would result in indigenous churches becoming missionary-dominated. To counteract this situation, Venn's aim was to establish indigenous churches, or as he called them national churches. He suggested principles for the founding of these national churches. According to these principles, the external missionaries should merely be a temporary part of the local church and local churches should have self-determination and the opportunity to develop, based on local conditions and character (Shenk 1983:34). Together with Rufus Anderson, Venn developed a three-self principle as a missiological strategy for establishing national churches, namely, self-governance, self-support and self-propagation (Bosch 1991:331). In the 1950s, it started coming to the world's attention that there was a shift in perspective, focusing the significance context plays in one's response to the gospel. Different movements from parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America were dissatisfied with how the theologies being inherited from the older churches of the North Atlantic community fitted into their different cultural contexts. Parallel to this criticism, there was a constructive phase,

in which different theologies more adapted to the local conditions were formulated (Schreiter 1985:1–2). According to Bosch (1991:451–452), this development needed self-theologising to be added as a 'fourth self' to Venn and Andersons' three-self principle. There are a number of different terms, besides self-theologising, used to describe this change of perspective, the most common being 'contextual theology'. The concept of contextual theology functions as an umbrella term for a variety of theological directions that view theology in a similar way. Contextual theology can be understood as a criticism of Western knowledge, and of a perception of the Western experience as universal. At its core, the idea is that there are no universal theologies; rather, each theology has a local context. Some theologies acknowledge this and are context-conscious, while others view theology as universal and disregard different contexts (Bevans 2002:5–7).

The kind of contextual theology that is most relevant to this article is indigenous theology, more precisely, Sami contextual theology. Indigenous theologies are heterogeneous, but a common characteristic among them is that they, first and foremost, aim to protect the dignity of indigenous peoples within the framework of their own culture. This is accomplished by invoking a theological continuity in relation to the cultural and religious heritage in question (Johnsen 1997:26). Since the beginning of the 1990s, inspired by indigenous theology mainly from North America, certain elements from Sami traditions have been incorporated into the theologies and liturgies of Lutheran churches in Norway and Sweden (Sundström 2016:216). It should also be mentioned that despite many similarities, the Sami community is not homogeneous, and there are differences between groups in the northern and southern parts of Sápmi (Jernsletten 2008:85). Jernsletten (2008:88) argues that Christian representatives, historically and today, from the northern Sami and southern Sami areas relate differently to traditional Sami religion which has consequences for contextual theology.

The most prominent theologians of Sami contextual theology are currently Bierna Bientie from the southern Sami and Tore Johnsen from the northern Sami, both of whom are clergymen in the Lutheran Church of Norway (Olsen 2011). Bientie's ambition is to de-demonise the Sami culture and tradition within the Church. Together with *Arbeidsgruppen för Sör-Samisk kirkeliv* [the Working Group for South Sami Church Life] in the Church of Norway, he is using the South Sami language, *yoik* (traditional Sami chanting) and other symbols in church services (Jernsletten 2008:85; Sundström 2016:216–217). Bientie has a stated goal of reconciling the Sami with Christianity by reshaping the liturgy to create an experience of belonging for Christian Sami (Jernsletten 2008:86). Johnsen (2007) has researched on how Sami culture and traditions have historically been demonised within the Church. According to him, this historical demonisation still affects the Sami church life. In his theology, Johnsen tries to revalue the traditional Sami religion. Similar to the Old Testament, the old Sami religion is seen as a forerunner of the

present-day Sami Christianity (Johnsen 2007:35; Olsen 2011; Sundström 2016:217). Aside from using conceptions from other indigenous traditions, Johnsen mixes selected Sami conceptions from different geographical areas of Sápmi, and different historical periods, in his theological teaching (Sundström 2016:224).

## Models of contextual theology

Schreiter (1985:6) presents three overall models of contextual theology: the translation model, the adaptation model and the contextual model. Bevans (2002) presents six different models that are based on, and can be understood as developments of, Schreiter's classification: the translation model, the anthropological model, the praxis model, the synthesis model, the transcendental model and the countercultural model. Similar reasoning as that of Schreiter and Bevans but about different understandings of the relationship between Christ and culture is conducted by Niebuhr (2001:1). This relationship can, according to Niebuhr, assume five positions: Christ can stand against culture (Niebuhr 2001:45), Christ can affirm culture (Niebuhr 2001:83), Christ can stand above culture (Niebuhr 2001:116), Christ and culture are in paradox (Niebuhr 2001:149) and Christ can transform culture (Niebuhr 2001:190). According to Bevans (2002:37), the task of contextual theology in the translation model is to linguistically and culturally translate an unchanged Christian message to suit the local context. The main interest of the anthropological model is the establishment or preservation of the cultural identity of the believers. The premise of the anthropological model is that the Christian message is embedded in all cultures, and should not be seen as a separate, supracultural message (Bevans 2002:54–56). The praxis model is a method of formulating theology in which theology is not perceived as only existing on a theoretical level, but also as an encouragement to action. This model also concerns itself with discerning the significance of, and contributions to, societal change (Bevans 2002:70). The fourth model, the synthesis model, understands that the various parts of a culture, whether from the Christian tradition or the local context, should not be brought together by means of compromises, but rather by transforming them and creating a synthesis acceptable to everyone (Bevans 2002:90). The idea that every subject is involved in the creation of one's reality is fundamental to the transcendental model. Knowledge of what 'is' starts within the individual. Transcendental theology is not so much interested in how to design a contextual theology, as it is in the individual practitioner's religious experience and understanding of himself or herself (Bevans 2002:103–104). Bevans uses the term 'countercultural' for the last type of contextual theology. The defining feature of this model is the conviction that parts of certain contexts are not compatible with the Christian message, and therefore must be challenged and replaced (Bevans 2002:117–119).

It is relevant for the purposes in this article to understand the Sami confirmation courses from the three theoretical

perspectives of religious education, indigenous education and pedagogies, and contextual theology. All three perspectives share some essential characteristics. To capture the complexity of adjusting the teaching of Christianity to fit a Sami youth context, I combine the different theoretical perspectives and suggest the use of the concept of contextualised religious education.

## Research methods and design

Based on Religious Studies and Educational Science, in this article, I will utilise interviews and archival material from the organisations involved with Sami confirmation courses. During 2015, 2016 and 2017, I conducted 10 interviews with 10 different teachers and organisers from the Church of Sweden, Sáminuorra and Edelvik's folkhögskola. Four of them were men and six were women. The interviewees had different levels of education, some were clergymen, some had pedagogical education and some had completed a shorter education within the church before the confirmation courses. The youngest research participant was 17 years old and the oldest was over 70 years old. The interviews were anonymised and numbered from 1 to 10 when referred to in this article. Archival material was obtained from the Diocese of Luleå and the Diocese of Härnösand, the northernmost dioceses who have been involved in the Sami confirmation courses. The recordings of the interviews and the archival material were analysed using qualitative content analysis. I have structured the various analytical questions and categories abductively by combining theories and different themes that emerged from content analysis. In accordance with the research methods and design of the project, research ethical considerations have been observed. Research ethical considerations can briefly be described as striking a balance between the knowledge interest, where knowledge and development are emphasised, and the integrity interest, which relates to the individual's right to protection against various forms of harm (Hermerén 2011:10). Ethical clearing was obtained from the Regional Ethics Vetting Board in Umeå according to the *Ethical Review Act* (SFS 2003:460) and *Personal Data Act* (SFS 1998:204).

The archival material consists of documents stating, for example, the aims and conditions of the confirmation courses, and also minutes from meetings. The interviews were individual qualitative interviews, which means that the approach to this research project included interpretative aspects (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014:43–45). The research participants were asked broad and general questions, allowing the interviewees to share their views relatively independently of the researcher's perspective. In qualitative interviews, the interviewee's descriptions and perceptions are the main focus, while the researcher interprets the meaning of the phenomena described (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014:43ff.). The interviews for this study were semi-structured and based on an interview guide. The interview guide was structured around some general themes, and questions were asked regarding the teaching (content and structure), the teachers' competence and the different reasons for organising Sami confirmation courses.



Sami confirmation courses are a unique phenomenon. The courses are offered once a year, and there are therefore not many people who could qualify as research participants for this research project. I have chosen informants who have in-depth knowledge and experience of the phenomenon being studied (in this case, Sami confirmation courses). In other words, the sampling method can be termed ‘purposive sampling’ (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011:156–157).

The transcripts from interviews and archives were analysed using content analysis. Content analysis was performed to identify categories that summarise the collected material while highlighting particularly interesting content. In practical terms, this means that by coding I organised the material into different categories (Drisko & Maschi 2015:86). The categories were created using the theoretical perspective in the article. Amongst the original categories emerged, based on the presence of the material and theoretical interest, I prioritised where certain content has been sorted out.

As mentioned earlier, organisers and teachers have stressed the necessity of adapting the teaching in the Sami confirmation courses to Sami contexts, but the understanding of what such adaptation means differs amongst the individuals and organisations involved. To highlight these different understandings, I chose three central analytical questions, questions that are also, in one way or another, shared by the different theoretical perspectives. Berglund (2010:17) states that the didactic questions – ‘what should be taught?’, ‘why should it be taught?’ and ‘how should it be taught?’ – are central to religious education. These three didactical questions have been developed in different ways, and new questions have been added. As an example, when Christina Osbeck (2006:96–98) mapped religious education in Sweden as a field in her dissertation, she highlighted the question ‘by whom should it be taught?’ Within indigenous education, speaking back to colonial powers and the idea of a universal truth are central. This is done by raising different questions about education, such as ‘which knowledge is valued and embedded?’, ‘does the teaching emanate from a local or a general context?’ and ‘is there self-determination and an indigenous voice in the teaching?’ (eds. Jacob et al. 2015:19–21). In similar manner as in religious education and indigenous education, some questions are central when Bevans distinguished his models of contextual theology. His questions are as follows: ‘what is the starting point in a specific contextual theology?’, ‘how should contextual theology be formulated?’ and ‘who should formulate contextual theology?’ (Bevans 2002). Inspired by questions from these theoretical perspectives, the analytical questions in this article are the following: ‘who is the teacher?’, ‘how is the teaching organised?’ and ‘what is the content of the teaching?’ These three questions will be used to differentiate various attitudes towards the teaching in the Sami confirmation courses.

## Ethical considerations

This study has been approved for ethical vetting of research involving humans by Regionala etikprövningsnämnden

i Umeå [the Regional Swedish Ethical Review Authority in Umeå].

## Results

My in-depth analysis of the interviews and archival material, and the sorting of different views voiced in this material (based on the three questions above), together with inspiration from mostly Bevans’s models of contextual theology and also theoretical perspectives from religious education and indigenous education, resulted in three new categories of contextual religious education. Bevans (2002:29) constructed his models as tools for theologians to develop theology; however, in this article, I, writing from a non-theological perspective, will use Bevans’s models as tools to structure different views. These categories are (1) faith-driven contextual religious education, (2) dialogical contextual religious education and (3) context-driven contextual religious education. The first category acknowledges the importance of the local context, but emphasises the gospel and Christian tradition as the most central factor. The second category strives for the local context and Christianity to merge. The third category is primarily based on local experiences. I argue that understanding why and how the need to adjust the teaching in Sami confirmation courses will differ depending on which one of these three categories the administrator or teacher leans towards to. It is important to point out that just like other theoretical models, the categories are constructions. The categories do not reflect reality but are simplifications that allow me to structure a reality that is more complex and varied. Below are the examples from the interviews and the archival material illustrating these three categories.

### Faith-driven contextual religious education

Faith-driven contextual religious education takes its point of departure from the gospel and the Christian tradition, which, based on the context and conditions, must be formulated in such a way that it would fit the local conditions. Faith is the driving factor in this category of contextual religious education, and local conditions are regarded as secondary. Language and cultural expressions are regarded as tools to support the Christian message. In practice, this model is mainly based on the Church’s education tradition, with minor adaptations to the local context. In other words, it is a general Christian arrangement of teaching, with elements from the local culture. An example of such an attitude comes from an interview with one of the organisers of the Sami confirmation courses. She argued in the following way:

‘After all, we have a doctrine based on our Lutheran beliefs. This is our creed, this is our Lord’s Prayer. These are the commandments, this is the baptism. This is from where we always start. [...] Then we have tried to apply our faith in another way. For example, we have furnished our chapel in Edelvik as a *kåta* [the traditional Sami dwelling]’. (Participant 9, female, organiser)

In the above quotation, the participant states the creed, the Lord’s prayer, the commandments and the baptism as the foundations of her teaching. I interpret this as faith according

to her is the driving factor in the education in Sami confirmation courses. However, the faith has to be relevant for the Sami youths and has to be packaged in a different way. The research participant uses the furnishing of the chapel as an example of how they do this packaging. For approaches I have categorised as faith-driven contextual religious education, it is an advantage if the person who contextualises the teaching is a participant in the local context or has experience from the local context. However, this is not considered necessary. What is necessary is that the one who conducts the contextual teaching understands the Christian faith.

### Dialogical contextual religious education

The category of dialogical contextual religious education seeks a more veritable meeting between Christianity and culture. The idea is that neither the local culture nor the Christian message should be the driving force, with one prioritised over the other. Instead, the teaching is prepared from both perspectives, with the premise that the different parts of religious education should not be brought together in the form of compromises, but rather be transformed to create a synthesis that is acceptable to everyone. Dialogical contextual religious education uses resources from contexts other than the local culture and other theological expressions, both in content and method. The elements from a tradition of Christian education and the elements from the local culture are used side by side, or together.

An example of an attitude that could be categorised as dialogical contextual religious education is from an interview I conducted with a teacher and organiser. The person discussed the teaching in the Sami confirmation courses, and especially how different textbooks are used. The textbooks used are written with a Swedish majority perspective in mind, and the teacher and organiser argued that these have to be complemented or adjusted in some way. The textbooks are paired with books about Sami contextual theology, such as Tore Johnsen's *Jordens barn, solens barn, vindens barn: Kristen tro i et samisk landskap* (2007), or matched with traditional stories from the Sami traditions about the bear and with rituals in connection with the bear hunt (Interview with Participant 7, female, organiser and teacher). The teacher and organiser described an attitude where the material around which the teaching is built is chosen based on how useful it is in the specific teaching situation. Which tradition the material originates from is not so important according to this participant (Interview with Participant 7, female, organiser and teacher).

For education that fits under the dialogic category, it is not that important who conducts the contextual religious education, for it is through dialogue between people that good teaching emerges. Following this, everyone who participates in a dialogue has something important to contribute. Rather than requiring that the teachers have their roots in the local context, there is a strong desire for a diversity of voices.

### Context-driven contextual religious education

I categorise theologies that primarily take their starting point in local experiences as context-driven contextual religious education. For this type of religious education, the local conditions are central, and the Christian message can be used to explain or strengthen the local culture and tradition. The main interest in religious education that can be categorised as context-driven is the establishment or preservation of the specific cultural identity. In other words, the starting point is the culture in the local context. The Christian message serves as a support for strengthening and highlighting the local culture.

The examples of an attitude that I understand as context-driven contextual religious education are taken from a textbook written with the Sami confirmation courses in mind. The textbook was used for a few years, but was never published. The author is clergyman Bo Lundmark, who was one of the persons who took the initiative to start the Sami confirmation courses in 1985. On multiple occasions, he was also a teacher in Sami confirmation courses. The textbook begins with a Sami context, using references to land, language, reindeer herding, older generations and other cultural markers that are important in the Sami context. A characteristic example is the following (Lundmark n.d.):

You probably know some spring in your home area. Perhaps it is located near the kâta in the summer residence. A spring that is always fresh and clear, that never dries up or freezes! No wonder that the words for spring are important in Sápmi: aajege, gaaltije (S), ája, gáldo (L) and ája, gáldu (N). (n.p.)

Here, Lundmark takes his point of departure from the young Samis' experiences when he describes a local context that is familiar to many of them. He uses the traditional Sami dwelling, nature and the land as symbols. He then references terms from the three largest Sami language variations referring to spring: South Sami (S), Lule Sami (L) and North Sami (N). Lundmark (n.d.) continues with his own experiences:

On the hike to Hamrarna in Mittådalens sameby [a reindeer-herding district], for the annual marking of the reindeer calves, I was looking for, and found, the spring close to the path. From this very same cold-spring, generations of reindeer herders have scooped the life-giving water to quench their thirst. (n.p.)

Lundmark continues to use strong cultural markers, such as the reindeer and the connection to older generations. Finally, he (Lundmark n.d.) strengthens and connects the local culture to the Christian tradition by quoting Psalm 65:10:

David's praise to God corresponded so well with that summer morning: 'You attend to the earth and water it; with abundance You enrich it. The streams [spring] of God are full of water'. (n.p.)

In the Swedish version of the Psalm, the word *källa* is used, which translates to 'spring', which relates to the spring

Lundmark described earlier in the textbook. This differs from the English version of the Psalm where 'streams' is used.

The ordinary person is viewed in context-driven contextualised religious education as best suited to contextualise. The role of the teacher is, therefore, not to be an expert, but rather to act as a supervisor, or the one who provides the biblical and traditional background. Although the teacher is given a less prominent role, context-driven contextualised religious education requires a background in the local context. The teacher must be a participant in the local context or a person who has a very good knowledge of the local context and shares interests with the participants. Lundmark has a strong connection to the Sami context, as he shows by relating his own experiences with, for example, reindeer-herding, and fits as a teacher according to context-driven contextualised religious education.

## Discussion

The bigger aim of this article was to analyse the different views of what it means to adjust the teaching, in the preparation for confirmation, in confirmation courses to fit Sami contexts. To meet this aim, I showed examples of three different ways of adapting the teaching at Sami confirmation courses.

The more particular aim here was to examine whether these different ways of adapting teaching could be traced to different understandings of what it means to contextualise religious education. In dialogue with theories from religious education, indigenous education and contextual theology, the differences have been concretised into three different understandings: faith-driven contextual religious education, dialogical contextual religious education and context-driven contextual religious education. As noted above, the categories are simplifications of a more complex reality and the research participants express in interviews and writings understandings that contradict each other. I want to stress that the examples used to highlight the different categories do not represent their whole understanding.

Some methodological considerations remain to be discussed. The complexity of Sami confirmation courses as a phenomenon entails the combination of theories from different academic fields. In combining the theories, some portions of them have been less emphasised, while others have become more prominent.

Possibly, the analysis and results would have been different if the theories had been combined differently. In this article, Bevans's theories of contextual theology were taken as primary orientation. Even if theories regarding religious education and indigenous education have similar questions, some aspects of these theories have not been discussed in this article. For example, one of the important questions in religious education is 'why?' – a question that I did not give

any attention to. Another example is the question of power relations between indigenous people and the majority society, which has been overlooked. There is an underlying power aspect in the concept of contextual religious education, which could be further exemplified. One of the important issues of indigenous education is indeed indigenous self-determination, which could highlight this aspect of power relations. These matters were however not included in this article, but will be addressed in my forthcoming PhD thesis.

## Conclusion

My analysis of the interviews and archival materials on Sami confirmation courses has explored how a seeming agreement in the view of religious education can accommodate different understandings. These different understandings can lead to contrapositions – contrapositions that sometimes become visible – for example, in the given example of when the Sáminuorra organisation no longer wanted to continue its cooperation with the Church of Sweden. Although this article is based on a specific context, namely Sami confirmation courses, I believe that these findings can be useful for confessional religious education in other contexts as well. This would especially be in the case with religious education when the people involved – teachers and students – come from different cultural or social backgrounds and therefore carry different experiences.

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## Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

## Author's contributions

J.R.B. is the sole author of this research article.

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## Data availability statement

Archival materials are public and thus available. Transcribed interviews are anonymised and are available upon request to the author.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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