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Environments

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Transforming Faith-based Education in the Church of Norway: Mediation of Religious Traditions and Practices in Digital Environments

The mediated life-world of children and youth in contemporary, media-rich societies raises challenges for Christian education. The specific 'digital environments' of communication and social interaction with digital devices on digital networks make a critical context as well as new opportunities for religious education. In 2003 the parliament in Norway decided upon a reform of religious education outside the schools. The Christian churches, other religious communities and organised humanists were invited to make their own training programmes, to be funded by the government. In the white book to the parliament the government stated that use of digital technology and the Internet would be 'a natural part' of the new faith-based education reform in the country. Digital environments challenge and transform the faith-based education. However, this new programme itself transforms religious education in Norway.

BACKGROUND¹

The faith-based training programme is meant to replace the former confessional teaching and practice of Christianity within primary schools, which was formally abolished in 1969 due to international conventions on freedom of religion. This former school programme was related to the Evangelical-Lutheran base of the Church of Norway as a state church. Membership in the Church of Norway is acquired by baptism as newborns. Besides the separate confirmation programme, the religious education in schools until 1969 was regarded as the baptismal education of the church as well.

To keep a baptismal training, the following years the Church of Norway

developed new confirmation plans and practices as well as some other educational programmes for various age groups to replace the former teaching in schools. However, they never gained a similar coherence. Within the population as well as in church and schools, many were not aware of the change in religious education that was defined by the relevant committee of parliament in 1969 due to freedom of religion. The growing pluralism throughout the 1970s and 1980s changed this.

Although debated since then, the Church of Norway is still a state church. However, religious education in the country has undergone considerable changes. This is due to the transformation into a more multi-cultural and multi-religious society since the 1970s. The first modest wave of non-Western and non-Christian immigration into Norway came in the first half of the 1970s with Muslim workers from Pakistan. In 2004 a total of 78,000 persons or 1.7% of the population in Norway is registered with Islamic groups; in the Oslo area it is 5.9%.² This is the largest non-Christian religion in the country. In Norway there is also a strong non-religious life-stance community. The continued state church in a growing pluralist society fuels these organised humanists.

From 1970 until the mid-1990s, the Norwegian school system ran a religious education with broader introduction to other religions but still with a very strong base in Christianity. Besides this religious education there was a parallel and alternative non-religious subject in the public schools, promoted by the life-stance community. However, the problems posed by the multiplicity of cultures led to the creation of a new religious education for the primary school (1st–10th grade).

In 1994 the Minister of Education and Church Affairs, Gudmund Hernes from the Labour Party, took the initiative to create one joint school subject on religion and world-views. He wanted children and young people with an emerging multi-cultural and multi-religious background to be able to share a joint discourse on existential and ethical matters. At the same time he abolished the thesis within the Labour Party of religion as a private matter. This led to a broad committee, producing a green paper on 'Identity and Dialogue', defining a role for cultural diversity in the education.³ They focused the identity development of young people on their sensitivity to achieve clarity for themselves regarding the meaning of their lives and of the world for which they will some day take up responsibility. Religion, in this green paper is a collective or individual concern for or commitment to the significance expressed in systems of faith, worship, belief, custom, attitude and value. The proposals on 'Identity and Dialogue' were meant to nurture this diversity across religious traditions.

Following their recommendations the government proposed a new obligatory school subject on 'Christianity, Religions and Life Stance' (KRL), adopted by the parliament in 1995.

The KRL-subject was a cultural-religious compromise: All children living in Norway should be familiar with the majority Christian tradition in the country and learn the variety of religions and life-stance movements. As part of this compromise it was a precondition that the specific traditions or religious groups at a later stage should have the opportunity to create their own education alongside the joint programme in the schools.

The new Minister of Church Affairs, Jon Lilletun from the Christian Democratic Party took the initiative to prepare the construction of a faith-based training programme. He appointed a committee to prepare the reform. Their green paper mainly aimed at the needs of the Church of Norway in a new societal situation, to replace the former baptismal education within the public school.⁴ His successor from the Labour Party did nothing more than receive the green paper. However, the following Minister of Church Affairs, Valgerd Svarstad Haugland, took up the proposals. Coming from the Christian Democratic Party she was keen to meet the needs of the main church. However, when the plans were put before the parliament the rights to faith-based education for all traditions and the right to spiritual development for all children were part of the proposal.⁵

THE REFORM AT PARLIAMENT

The reform on faith-based education in Norway, as decided by the parliament (Stortinget) on 27 May 2003, was another national compromise on religious education. All parties, except the liberalist Progress Party, supported the reform, although with somewhat different argumentation.⁶ In this alliance, the lines of thought on cultural and religious diversity and identity formation from the green paper on 'Identity and Dialogue' are prominent. The reform on faith-based education for all, then, introduces something new and is not just a replacement of the former baptismal training of Christianity within the public school.

The parliament strengthened the reference to the human rights and underlined the right of the children to have spiritual development (according to Article 27 of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child). However, this is regarded as the job of the religious and life stance organisations, not of the public schools. The new faith-based training programme adheres to freedom of religion in an emerging multicultural

society. At the same time it finds support for religious socialisation in the resources of the respective religious traditions in the country.

The reform includes all children and young people up to eighteen years. Hence, it encompasses the age groups beyond confirmation as well. In Norway, confirmation programmes are run by the churches but are also offered as a secular alternative by the life-stance organisation.

The parliament of Norway wants children and young people to have an opportunity to learn about their own faith tradition and to acquire life skills from this faith base. This should be done in programmes made by the religious groups, but funded by the national government. This is possibly the only case in the world of such state intervention outside schools. The parliament is strict on the distinction between the obligatory schools and the voluntary faith-based training. The latter is not allowed to take place in school buildings, not even within after-school programmes.

The Norwegian faith-based training programme is an ambitious reform. The government and parliament would like most children and young people to take part on a voluntary basis. The initial aim stated by the church and seconded by the government was to involve 70% of all children and young people in the faith-based education, stipulated to 315 hours of programme for each person throughout the eighteen years of childhood. This aim may not be realistic, given the voluntary character, the usually weak attendance in programmes within the Church of Norway where the main part of the population belong, and the restrictions on use of localities and time-periods reserved for schools and after-schools. However, the degree of success is yet to be seen, as the reform has just been launched. So far, the Church of Norway is the only organisation to start implementation.

THE REFORM WITHIN THE CHURCH OF NORWAY

The Church of Norway, where 85% of the approximately 4.6 million people belong, has embarked on a five-year initial experimental and developmental phase, to find suitable methods and practices for the faith-based education within the church. Since such a large majority of Norwegians belongs to the Church of Norway, the scope of the reform will mainly unfold within this institution. The full-fledged religious education within the Church of Norway will be shaped on the basis of the experiences gained from congregations in the present developmental phase, running until the end of 2008.

The parliament has requested that the reform should be adapted to local conditions. The central secretariat at the Church of Norway in 2005 has

140 of the 1300 congregations in the country involved in a variety of developmental activities. The total funds allocated to the reform within the Church of Norway in 2005 amount to NOK fifty-five million (approximately five million GBP). A full-scale faith-based training programme is estimated to cost NOK 250 million per year.

The reform has already brought plans and strong expectations throughout the church. More than half of all the congregations have applied for grants. Although most of them did not obtain funding, they have been looking into a range of innovative activities for children and young people across the country. The church puts great emphasis on the role played by the home in the religious education.

The reform is helping to reinforce the care and teaching of values that takes place in families and in children's and young people's local environment. Good role models and nurturing conversations are fundamental to good religious education. ... Many families have everyday traditions based on their Christian faith. The ecclesiastical year's rhythm and ceremonies provide a framework for celebrations and spiritual togetherness it says.⁷

The Church of Norway presents the aims of the reform by referring to the parliament who

wants religious education in the Church of Norway, as is the case in other religious and secular communities, to stimulate the development of one's own identity and understanding of one's own culture and traditions in a society where the mix of different religious and secular communities is becoming increasingly richer. Bringing up children and young people who are secure in their religious identity provides the foundation for respect and tolerance in interactions with people of other faiths or with other belief systems.⁸

At the same time the reform

is regarded as the church's key strategic mission for the coming years ... The Church of Norway wants to develop systematic religious education that promotes the Christian faith, teaches people about the triune God and helps everyone between the ages of 0–18 years old who has been christened interpret and master life, whatever their level of functionality. Through the church's religious education children and young people will be able to share their faith and sense of wonder, and Christian traditions and values in a setting characterised by caring and generosity. The teaching will focus on the key dimen-

sions of human life. It will tie instruction, knowledge and critical reflection together with experience and participation.⁹

The Church of Norway applies general and inclusive symbols regarding the reform that may not harm anybody. In this way they are in line with expectations from the parliament and relate to the broad and diverse membership of the church, where just a smaller portion are used to a more specific Christian teaching. A logo for this reform on religious education within the Church of Norway refers to 1 Corinthians 13:13: 'There are three things that last for ever: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of the three is love.'¹⁰

The religious traditions in Norway make up a context for the reform (Winsnes, 2004). Although most Norwegians belong to the majority Lutheran church, they usually do not talk much about it and just a small fraction of the church members attend religious activities on a regular basis. They may show up in church for ceremonies at the major transitions of life and death and maybe for Christmas Eve worship, but rarely beyond that. However, eight of ten newborn are christened in the Church of Norway. About half of those aged fourteen or fifteen are going for confirmation with the church. The sense of belonging to the church is strong. The church building itself is for many Norwegians an important symbol of the relationship or this sense of belonging to the church.

Even if it becomes successful, this reform could not be as strong a socialisation into the traditions and teachings of the church as when the baptismal training was part of the school. However, that was in another, more homogenous society with stronger social control, clear authority structures and less widespread media.

RE-MOORING OF TRADITION

The media, John B. Thompson argues, are 're-mooring tradition' by bringing the production and circulation of symbolic forms into wider and other contexts than what is bounded by face-to-face interaction (Thompson, 1995: 180). This has happened before. The printing press helped circulate the biblical texts, for example. Thompson coined the impact of media institutions upon society since the printing press in the late fifteenth century as a 'mediatisation of culture'. He then focuses on the symbolic forms and their modes of production and circulation as they are transformed in the technological media. Mediasation of tradition endows tradition with a new life as it is re-embedded or re-moored in new contexts. This may happen to religious education, as well.

Today, personal lives as well as cultural traditions and social relations are to a great extent mediated by a variety of technological media. This is not just about single media passing on a variety of content. Modern, pluralist societies are media-rich or media-saturated to such a pervasive extent that people and societal processes become encapsulated in a 'media environment'. It shapes social interaction as well as symbolic circulation of society.

Mediation of religious traditions and practices, in general, is both about 'passing on' these cultural and social elements and about the 'media environment' where these elements circulate and are moulded in a larger symbolic context.

Focus here is not on media in general, but on new digital media. With digital technology cultural objects can be shaped in infinite ways, and shared in multiple copies by an easy 'click'. Digital media radicalises the options for new cultural expressions – but also for the re-mooring of tradition, as the digitalisation opens for an unlimited range of data combinations and re-uses.

In the faith-based education in the Church of Norway, digital communication may be used in the shaping and sharing of the symbolic content, in re-mooring of the religious tradition. However, whether the church and local congregations make use of digital communication in projects for faith-based training or not, they will have to relate to the mediated environments making up the life-world of children and teenagers in contemporary Norway. The reform will have to relate to the digital environments familiar to the young people it approaches. Digital communication is part of their media environment. Before I go to an example of digital communication in the development of the faith-based education programme in the Church of Norway I will first look into this contextual prerequisite.

DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

Digital means of communication are becoming pervasive parts of social life. 'Digital environments' are a new and emerging kind of social contexts. The term is not sharp and well defined. It covers conditions or spaces for social interaction created through application of information and communication technologies, i.e. digital media (Couldry and McCarthy, 2004).

The term may be used on software solutions for specific purposes, like the Learning and Content Management Systems for e-learning. Such systems today usually imply collaboration on the Internet or in dedicated

intranets. Hence, 'digital environments' in this area of social activity more generally appear as 'Networked Learning Environments' (Wasson, Ludvigsen and Hoppe, 2003). 'Digital environments' may denote various 'online' or 'virtual' communities, or patterns of social exchange and resources on the Internet. The term, in general, may point to the wider proliferation of digital media into social interaction, for a variety of purposes. By the appropriation of the digital technology into knowledge building and social exchange the technologies become part of the social contexts. This article has this broad sociological perspective.

Such new contexts emerge and expand day by day. These are global changes. However, the unjust distribution of resources is reproduced in these spaces of globalisation. It does not give much meaning to talk of 'digital environments' in all those localities around the world where telephone still is rear. However, in Norway and in other media-rich parts of the world 'digital environments' are taking shape. Most people have access to and actually use cell phones, computers and the Internet. More and more social activities take place via and in these networked media. E-learning, Internet banking and online shopping are just a few areas.

It is not that all social interaction is transferred digitally onto the 'Net'. Rather, people apply and incorporate new digital networks or media into their known social contexts. These social environments may become more and more 'digital' as these means and devices are appropriated into daily life. People may find some activities easier to perform on 'the Net' than queuing up in physical offices or shops. However, in most social areas there will be a blend of face-to-face and digital, mediated activities. This is the case with E-learning as well as with net-shopping. People learn when it is suitable to check the Internet mall rather than go downtown to a store.

The users develop competence on digital media as part of a more general media literacy (Buckingham *et al.*, 2005; Livingstone *et al.*, 2005), even 'multiliteracies' (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000), either in formal training or informally (Sefton-Green, 2003; Colley, Hodgkinson and Malcolm, 2003). In interpersonal communication people are becoming clever, distinguishing when it is appropriate to send a SMS or to e-mail, when to call, and when to go talk. Habits are changing. Digital networks and digital devices are becoming part of everyday life. Rather than entering some new 'digital environments', the known social contexts are gradually digitised and thus transformed.

THE MEDIATED LIFE-WORLD OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Digital media, then, are becoming a 'natural' part of the social and cultural environment of young people (Livingstone, 2002, 2004; Livingstone and Bovill, 2001). Young people develop a capacity to act as active participants and interpreters in relation to their digital environment. Even when they do not use them, these media are known as options for social orientation and interaction among children and youth.

Such contexts, in general, appear in all media-rich societies. An example from Sweden may illuminate the transformations: 'Lunar Storm' is a site entry to a range of Internet activities in which 1.3 million young Swedes, or 88% (!) of all those 13–19 years in Sweden, are members. Every day Lunar Storm has 327,000 unique visitors, i.e. young persons with individual names. On average each of them logs in two times and spends forty-two minutes every day in this digital meeting place. Here they chat with friends, play games, and obtain news. They discuss politics – as well as religion and faith issues – much more extensively than adults otherwise observe.¹¹

However, there are variations in use. A Norwegian study of 'Digital Childhood?' confirms that four out of ten children (7–12 years) are uninterested in these new technologies, despite wide access even at their age. There are considerable differences between boys and girls, with boys being the most active users (Endestad *et al.*, 2004). A similar study among 9–19 year olds in Britain shows that middle class teenagers and those who have spent more years online tend to use the Internet more often, spend more time online per day and, consequently, have greater online skills (Livingstone and Bober, 2005).

Norwegian children and youth live in mediated environments. Nearly all Norwegians between thirteen and eighteen years old have a cell phone and access to a PC and the Internet. Youth tend to be early adopters and innovative users of new, digital media. The uses of networked digital media are becoming as extensive among young people as the uses of more visible media like newspapers and maybe also television. Further, such meeting places on the Internet are becoming part of the ongoing social interaction among young people; they are mediated parts of their life-world. Children and teenagers simply are coming together on 'the Net', whether these nets are mobile phone networks or the Internet. Young people move easily between these locations on the nets and their physical meeting places.

Theories in sociology and education analyse socialisation among youth

as reflexive work on formation of identities (e.g. Giddens, Ziehe). Youth are producers (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994). Modernity makes questions of self-representation relevant and urgent. The new digital technologies offer tools to construct this self-representation in advanced ways that, at the same time, connect individuals in new social relations. Subjective identity becomes an objectified, material artefact with which others can interact and manipulate.

DIGITAL MEDIA IN THE REFORM – A CASE

In the white book to the parliament on this reform the government stated that ‘use of new technology and the Internet in the training would be a natural part’ of the development of new and expanded pedagogical tools for the various age groups.¹² The expectations in this area are not further explained, but one could assume that the churches and religious communities for their faith training are encouraged to try forms of net-based learning (E-learning) and to develop digital learning resources and ‘digital competence’ as the government does in the schools in Norway.¹³

Just a few congregations have so far applied for funds to projects involving information and communication technologies (ICT) or digital media. The project with digital storytelling on life and faith in my own congregation at Haslum outside Oslo is one of the few, and the only one of its kind. This is a developmental project from the last half of 2005 until the end of 2008. At the time of writing, then, this project is about to start. Hence there are no results to report; however, the work with digital stories at Haslum may test and try a possible methodology for future religious education among the broad membership of the church.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING

The story represents a cognitive and social basic structure (e.g. Bruner, 1990), but how stories are shaped and expressed, and with what signs, tools and media they are told, vary considerably. Digital storytelling represents fundamental aspects of communication and culture and at the same time something distinctly new. Focus here is on the use of digital storytelling for self-representation, where people apply digital tools to create stories from their own life or immediate environment to share with others.

Self-representation in digital storytelling emerge in a variety of forms, e.g. in blogs (weblogs) and personal home pages or diaries on the Internet, produced in designated workshops for television, museums and groups, or told with picture cell phones to be shared among friends. Digital and

networked media offer new means and modalities for the creation and communication of stories. 'Storytelling' here implies shaping as well as sharing the stories with others. In these digital stories people who tell them act as producers. The kind of stories as well as the digital means and modes to make them may vary considerably. The wide range of available modalities of expression or articulation is a characteristic of the digital media.

Why is there a renewed interest in telling stories? Joe Lambert, head of the Center for Digital Storytelling in California, speculates that there 'are no ends to the variety of ways that our modern cultural and identity predicaments bring us back to the role of story in our lives. The great irony of information society is that the more complex it gets, the more we want to follow the thread of the familiar narrative to find our way out of the maze'.¹⁴

Digital storytelling could simply help people to have a voice in a media-saturated society. The case of digital storytelling to be reported here is inspired by the DUSTY project in Oakland, California, on 'Crossing the Digital Divide through Digital Media and Literacy: Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth', with its academic base at the University of California, Berkeley (<http://gse.berkeley.edu/research/dusty.html>) (Hull and James, forthcoming).

A set of paradigmatic principles for self-representational 'digital storytelling' was formulated by the Center for Digital Storytelling (www.storycenter.org) in the 1990s (Lambert, 2002). Their self-biographical mini-films build on the basic idea that everybody has a story to tell, and that computers could help tell them. These ideas were picked up and applied for the Internet and later for television by the BBC in the 'Capture Wales' project (www.bbc.co.uk/wales/capturewales/), as well as in 'Telling Lives' in England (www.bbc.co.uk/tellinglives/).¹⁵

Numerous applications of such simple forms of digital storytelling have emerged. However, the case to be presented here, relates closely to the ideas and methods of the Center for Digital Storytelling as introduced in workshops in Norway by the small production company Flimmer Film AS in Bergen from October 2004 onwards (www.digitalefortellinger.com). This research, then, does not delve into the wide range of genres of digital storytelling. Rather, it concentrates on one case that explores the paradigmatic ideas for a specific purpose, namely digital stories related to faith and life interpretations taking account of a religious tradition.

PLACE AND SPACE

Digital storytelling invokes the issue of space. The actual scale of distribution is an interesting aspect of storytelling. Oral storytelling is bound to where it happens. The historic shift from the space of the small-scale pamphlet to the mass-produced newspaper and book expanded the scale. Digital stories are linked into a quite new space of exchange via the Internet. However, for privacy reasons the project at Haslum refrains from putting the digital faith stories openly on the web. Even if the project aims at controlled distribution of the faith stories to be produced, they may easily be spread, e.g. as an attachment to an e-mail or copied onto CD-ROMs, as they are digitally available on a computer. They enter a 'mediaspace' (Couldry and McCarthy, 2004) where the original place can be 'pluralised' in and by electronically mediated communication (Moore, 2004).

At the physical outset, Haslum is a place in a suburban environment outside the capital of Norway. This is an area with a relatively high level of education and income. Haslum is not a locality with naturally identifiable borders, as it flows into the larger municipality of Baerum. The Haslum congregation of the Church of Norway makes one kind of delimitation. In 2004, a total of 11,300 inhabitants lived within the borders of this congregation, and 9,443 of them (84%) were members of the state church. Additionally, 132 were born in this area, ninety-nine of them (74%) were christened in the local church – a well kept building from the Middle Ages.¹⁶ Although most church members may feel of sense of belonging to this old church, no more than an average of 147 persons came to the main Sunday morning worship in 2004, and even fewer to other kind of services. However, in this local church the youth transition rite of confirmation is still popular. Ninety-five took part in confirmation ceremonies in 2004,¹⁷ i.e. eight of ten baptised came for confirmation at the church. In Haslum an aim is to integrate the method of digital storytelling in the religious education prior to confirmation.

DIGITAL STORIES IN FAITH

This specific project on digital faith-based stories at Haslum is managed by the youth minister together with the catechist, with further support within this local church. Selected youth, 14–18 years old, will produce self-representational mini-films with scanned personal photographs and other material for the story they are telling in their own voice over. They will work under supervision. The stories will be on aspects of faith and life

that are important to the participants. Aside from the said principles of digital storytelling there is no set formula on how to shape these stories. To follow which stories will be chosen and how they are framed and phrased is a part of this research, as well as the reasons participants and supervisors give for their choices. The project management at Haslum summarises the project description:

The background for the project is the strength of a told story. To hear, everything from small everyday stories to more comprehensive and complete life stories, touch us! The method we want to apply is called 'digital storytelling'. We want to use this method on 'digital FAITH stories'. They may be presented for others and give a point of departure for conversation. By SHAPING as well as by SHARING these self-biographical mini-films we make space to interpret and work up own life experiences in relations to faith questions. We want to give young people help to master their lives, to experience a sense of belonging, and to be met with respect in the church they became christened into.¹⁸

An aim is by means of digital faith-based stories to be able to share and transfer experiences to other congregations in the Church of Norway as part of the national programme for faith-based training. The case at Haslum relates to various contexts. Some are more specifically related to the locality at Haslum. They invite comparative studies in other localities. Other contexts are more general.

The young participants at Haslum will be introduced to the principles of digital storytelling, as laid out by the Center for Digital Storytelling (<http://www.storycenter.org/principles.html>). In a workshop October 2005 eight teenagers and two leaders or supervisors from the local congregation at Haslum, will produce each their digital story on faith. They will, through practice, have to define this specific genre of digital storytelling. 'Faith' is taken as a wide and inclusive concept without a strict predefined meaning. The project will mould digital stories on faith in the encounter between the young producers, their supervisors from the local church, and the storytelling mentors from Flimmer Film. Later, this first generation of digital storytellers in the congregation at Haslum will act as mentors for younger participants who make their digital stories the following year. The project runs for three consecutive years, involving more and more young people. They will not just produce their digital stories but share and discuss them with others, as well. Within the project there will also be joint productions between several participants on topics like being young

at Haslum, on relations to each other and to God, or on dreams of ‘my church’.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research project will study possible implications of carrying this method of storytelling into the religious education or faith-based training of the church. The co-researchers both live in the local community at Haslum. Both are professors of media and communication, however, with different disciplinary background. As a folklorist by training Birgit Hertzberg Kaare is an expert on people’s stories and on storytelling as a method in research. She has also been working on ‘digital childhood’ (Endestad *et al.*, 2004). Knut Lundby has a background in the sociology of religion. He has studied the relationship between media, religion and culture. He has recently worked on design, communication and learning in digital environments.

First, there are research questions related to this specific form of digital storytelling: What are the hallmarks of digital stories on faith? What are the options and limitations of the digital form and the digital objects these stories are fitted into? Which genre does these digital stories make up compared to other stories on faith and lives that people tell within or outside churches and religious communities?

Second, Kaare discovered in her earlier research on people’s stories about their confirmation that Norwegians find it difficult to talk about their faith and verbalise their relationship to the church (Hertzberg Johnsen, 1993). Digital stories become digital objects or artefacts, physically available as computer documents, on CD-ROMs, as attachments to e-mails, or linked to websites. Will the shaping and sharing of digital stories as objects make it easier to express thoughts on faith and relationship to the religious tradition?

Third, digital stories become *mediated* stories, shaped and shared through artificial, technological, man made tools, signs or media. Stories have for centuries been mediated in writing. All told stories, oral or written, are tools or artefacts. However, digital technology opens up a range of opportunities for representation and manipulation with multimedia modalities qualitatively different from the modality of writing and the technology of print. The stories may be shaped and shared with digital tools in ways that make them not simply mediated but *mediatised*, i.e. whose form is influenced by the possibilities and constraints of their mediated transmission and exchange. Digital technology radically changes and extends options of mediatisation through re-mediation

(Bolter and Grusin, 1998) and multimodal discourse (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). In digital storytelling the digital modalities easily shape the story to an extent that makes it a 'mediatised' story. How could the digital stories on faith be understood in terms of mediation and mediatisation?

Fourth, which options and limitations do digital faith stories offer for social interaction and exchange on questions of faith and life between people in different roles and age groups in the congregation (the young participants and their leaders, in relation to those coming for confirmation as well as their parents, and between young and elders who share or discuss digital stories)? What are the differences between boys and girls? Issues of gender seem of particular relevance in studying differences in narrative agency (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001).

Fifth, what conflicts may occur between those adults passing on the religious tradition without much competence on digital communication and the young people used to digital communication yet not very familiar with the religious tradition? The mediation of religious traditions and practices in the faith-based training programme will in any case have to relate to the digital environments familiar to children and young people of today's Norway, because this is part of their social and symbolic context. There could be interesting cultural conflicts or encounters between those adults passing on the religious tradition without much competence on digital communication and the young people used to digital communication but not very familiar with the religious tradition. Whether such conflicts actually occur – and how they develop – need to be studied empirically.

Sixth, what could digital faith stories mean in the mediated environment of youth? Is this a relevant communication form for youth in contemporary digitised media society? Following which stories are chosen and how they are framed and phrased, as well as the reasons participants and supervisors give for their choices, may give indications of relevance and of options and limitations.

Finally, research in the DUSTY project in Oakland outside San Francisco shows that young people's relationship to space, place and landscape heavily influence the digital stories they make (Hull and James, forthcoming). Haslum offers a quite different space, place and landscape, and comparative studies could be illuminating. Since the relationship to church and religion for many Norwegians is influenced by a sense of belonging to the place where they live and specifically to the local church building, one would assume this to influence the digital stories on faith and life in Haslum.

CONCLUSIONS

Religious education has to be understood in terms of the involved mediation processes. These imply both the use of and the context of the actual communication. The mediation technology may itself influence the religious education. This article has delved into the Norwegian programme for faith-based education among children and young people until eighteen years, especially as this programme is being developed within the majority Church of Norway. Focus has been on mediation with digital media and in digital environments.

The digital meeting places, on the Internet or in mobile phone networks, as in the media in general, are spaces for circulation of symbolic material. Symbols and expressions of spirituality are circulating in the digital environments. They are arenas of interactivity and active interpretation of symbols, rather than of pure consumption. Even symbolic distribution in typical 'mass media' is appropriated by young people as raw material for interpretation and reconstruction in their own life situation. The more digitised these former one-way mediation processes are becoming, the more options for users to choose and combine symbolic elements from the media sphere.

Research on media literacy demonstrates the capacity of children and young people to act as active participants and interpreters in relation to their media environment. A new entry on this symbolic arena – like the faith-based training programme in Norway – will be subject to their interpreting symbolic capacity. The young participants may compare any part in this faith-based programme with their general mediated experience. The digital elements and projects of this reform, particularly, will be treated according to their general experience of digital environments.

The capacity and competence of children and young people as participants in their contemporary digital environments must be taken seriously in the performance of the reform on faith-based education in Norway. Their digital environments make a symbolic and social context that the adults who try to pass on the spiritual tradition will have to relate to. Children and youth should be regarded as digital communicators, able to shape and share their own stories in relation to the faith tradition.

Knut Lundby was born in Norway and holds a doctoral degree in sociology of religion from the University of Oslo, where he is a Professor of media studies. He was the founding director of the interdisciplinary research centre InterMedia, University of Oslo, focusing on design,

communication and learning in digital environments. He has a research interest in the interdisciplinary field of media, religion and culture.

NOTES

1. For this Background section I have had great help from discussions with Erling J. Pettersen, who was involved in the development of several of the new programmes on religious education in Norway since the 1980s.
2. Figures are from the official Statistics Norway (www.ssb.no). The percentage for the Oslo area is for the capital Oslo and the neighbouring county Akershus counties combined.
3. NOU 1995: 9, *Identitet og dialog*.
4. NOU 2000: 26, '... til et åpent liv i tro og tillit'.
5. St.meld. nr. 7 (2002–2003) *Trusopplæring i ei ny tid*.
6. Innst.S. nr. 200 (2002–2003) *Innstilling fra kirke-, utdannings- og forskningskomiteen om trosopplæring i en ny tid. Om reform av dåpsopplæringen i Den norske kirke*.
7. www.kirken.no/storstavalt/ – under 'English' (retrieved 24 June 2005).
8. Op. cit.
9. Op. cit.
10. The Revised English Bible.
11. Johan Forsberg, information director Lunar Storm, in a seminar at the University of Oslo, 11 February 2005.
12. St.meld. nr. 7 (2002–2003), *Trusopplæring i ei ny tid*, page 7, cf. page 31.
13. Programme for digital kompetanse 2004–2008, Ministry of Education and Research.
14. CDS electronic newsletter, 25 May 2005.
15. BBC 'Telling Lives' is now closed.
16. Numbers from the application, cf. note 3.
17. Data from the church statistics by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), available at www.kirken.no.
18. Application from the congregation at Haslum to the programme on religious education within the Church of Norway, 1 February 2005.

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