"I am a Catholic Buddhist":

The Voice of Children on Religion and Religious Education in an Irish Catholic Primary School Classroom

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education, is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not, to the best of my knowledge, breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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List of Abbreviations

CSP	Catholic Schools Partnership
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CCE	Congregation for Catholic Education
CPSMA	Catholic Primary Schools Management Association
DCU	Dublin City University
DCYS	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ETBs	Education and Training Boards
ERBE	Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics
ESRI	The Economic and Social Research Institute
GE	*Gravissimun Educationis*
IFN	Inter Faith Network
IEC	Irish Episcopal Conference
IHRC	Irish Human Rights Commission
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PSC	Primary School Curriculum
RE	Religious Education
REDCo	Religion in Education: a contribution to dialogue or a factor of conflict in transforming societies of European countries
REMC	The European Religious Education in Multicultural Society: Schools and Homes in Comparative Context
SGN	Share the Good News
The Forum	The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UN	United Nations

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Abstract

Maurice Harmon

"I am a Catholic Buddhist":

The Voice of Children on Religion and Religious Education in an Irish Catholic Primary School Classroom

The study of religion and religious education (RE) has become a significant educational issue in Europe and in the wider international context. This original research study offers another voice, often absent from the conversation, that of the children in one Irish Catholic primary school classroom. Thirty-five children aged between eleven and thirteen become co-researchers in a participatory-based exploration of their views on religion and religious education. An interpretive paradigm is used, which is concerned with understanding the world as it is from the subjective reality of the individual. The study is therefore grounded in the children's own experiences and perceptions within the qualitative field of study. Children in the study are from a variety of religious and belief traditions and all did not partake in formal RE in school, as per their parent's right to withdraw then. The children highlight how their families' belief systems have an influence on how they perceive their religious selves. Many try to reconcile the different religious and belief systems that are to be found within their homes with the articulation of their own belief systems. Seventy-one percent of children who self-identify as accessing the Catholic tradition cite grandparents as the main influence in their belief system, which is significant for the future of the tradition in Ireland. All children articulate their desire to learn more about other religious or belief traditions as part of their RE curriculum in school. Identification of and respect for diversity is evident, but little knowledge is articulated in relation to the content of the others' religious traditions. Interest is shown in learning about the religious other in children's environment by engaging in what Ipgrave (Mc Kenna , et al, 2008, pp.13-25) refers to as "Spiritual Sharing" - learning the stories of religious and belief traditions beyond their own and partaking in the participatory methods employed in the study. The research findings suggest that children have a clear sense of "being" religious or having a belief system that is valued. They identify how it is to "behave" in a certain way as a result of this. Noticeably, the Catholic children struggle with a sense of belonging to communities of faith practice which is not the case for children of other traditions in the study. Irrespective of whether children access RE as an element of their curricular experience or not, all children endorse the importance of RE in the primary school curriculum. The thesis concludes by considering the implications emerging from this research in the Irish context and offers recommendations for reflection by the various stakeholders for policy and practice going forward.

Chapter: 1 Introduction and Rationale

1.0 Introduction

As set out in Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations (UN), 1989), children have the right to express their opinions on issues of conscience and religion. In an attempt to ascertain the opinions of children in a particular context, this study invites children from a Catholic primary school classroom in Ireland to become co-researchers in a participatory-based exploration of their views of religion and religious education (RE). The children became active participants in the data gathering process as well as contributing to the interpretation of the data. This participatory process facilitated the children's development as reflective interpreters of meaning. Chapter 1 provides the rationale and details the scope of this study. It states the aim of the research and sets the context from within the historical landscape of Irish education. The chapter concludes with an outline of this thesis.

1.1 Rationale and Scope of the Research

Today, in societies across Europe and further afield, the place of religion and RE engenders much discussion and debate. The study of religion, of religious identity and of religious diversity have become significant educational issues. This is partly due to a recognition of the importance of religion as a factor in relation to matters of ethnic, national and cultural identity (Council of Europe 2014; Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)/ Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) 2007; Baumann, 1999). In the past three decades, society in Ireland has become pluralist and increasingly diverse and secular (CSO 2017). In this relatively new Irish context, it is interesting to note that research on children's religion and religious identity has generally focused on minority and/or special interest groups (Faas 2017; Faas, Darmody and Sokolowska 2015; Kitching and Shanneik 2015; McGuckin et al. 2014; Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan 2010; McGorman and Sugrue 2007; Devine 2005). The ESRI *Growing Up in Ireland* study began in 2008 and follows the progress of 8,500 9-year-olds and 11,000 9-month-olds. It describes itself in the following terms:

> *Growing Up in Ireland* is a national study of children. It is the most significant of its kind ever to take place in this country and will help us to improve our understanding of all aspects of children and their development. (ESRI, 2008)

Nevertheless, this important longitudinal study does not address children's views on their own spiritual or religious identity. Dillen (2014) claims that the majority of research with children in the area of religion is built upon adult concepts and experiences, rather than those of the children upon whom the research is focused.

The present research offers a group of thirty-five children, aged between 11 and 13 years, from one Catholic primary school, the opportunity to exercise their rights as set out in Article 14 of the UNCRC (UN 1989) which recognises that:

> as children mature and are able to form their own views, some may question certain religious practices or cultural traditions. The UNCRC supports children's right to examine their beliefs, but it also states that their right to express their beliefs implies respect for the rights and freedoms of others. (UN 1989).

The children who took part in this study are co-researchers (Section 3.3.1), having been given the opportunity to articulate their own belief system, while respectfully engaging with their fellow classmates in exploring issues of religion in their environment.

A focus of the research is on ascertaining how children articulate their religious identity within a multi-faith; multi-belief classroom and what they say about religion and RE. The research examines the importance of religion to children, the prominence they allocate to it and the value they place on it as a curriculum area within their education.

1.1.1 Research Aim and Question

Education is the process through which we learn about ourselves, the world around us and the relationships that sustain us in the world. The purpose of education for Bruner (1961) is to enable children to think critically and to have the skills to solve problems in their everyday lives. They therefore become autonomous learners and not just people to whom an education system has imparted knowledge. A person's right to education is enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948). This has been affirmed in subsequent documents including the UNCRC (UN 1989). Pre-dating the UN 1948 document, the Irish Constitution (*Bunreacht na hÉireann*, Irish Government 1937) Article 42 sets out the State's resolution to provide for free primary education (Ireland 1937). The Irish Education Act (1998) (Objects of Act, 6(c), Ireland 1998) endorses "equality of access to and participation in education". The Irish Primary School Curriculum (PSC) (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) 1999) presents a strong vision of child-centred education that supports children as active agents in their own learning. Indeed some researchers have studied the experiences of children and teenagers

in schools in Ireland (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan 2010; McGorman and Sugrue 2007; Devine 2005). However, their research has tended to focus on specific groups within the larger cohort, for example migrant teenagers. Research has also been undertaken on the consideration of religion in school choice, it's shaping of pupil experiences in different types of primary schools and home school relationships (McGuckin et al. 2014; Darmody, Smyth and Mc Coy 2014, 2012) and on children's rights in relation to religion and education (ESRI 2010). Children's opinions regarding religion and spirituality have been recorded in the work of O'Farrell (2016) and in Appendix 3 to the report of *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector* (The Forum)(Coolahan et al. 2012). However, relatively little research has focused on the voice of children with regard to RE in Ireland (Faas, 2017; O'Farrell, 2016; Kitching and Shanneik 2015; ESRI, 2010; Kennedy, 1999). It appears therefore that minimal importance has been accorded to the opinions of primary school children in Ireland with regard to their own religious lives and experiences.

The right of the child to a voice in matters which concern him or her is the bedrock on which this research is built. Internationally, it is widely recognised that children not only have their own views (Mc Kenna, Ipgrave, and Jackson 2008; O'Grady 2006; Ipgrave 2004; Schweitzer 2004) but that their voices must be heard and respected (UN 1989). Young people should not be seen merely as objects of education but as active participants therein. Thus, education is moving away from a traditional adult-concerned approach to one more focused on the life of the young person (Miller-McLemore 2006). It is therefore important to explore the voice of the child and to place that voice within the wider context of the milieu within which they engage, namely families, school and civic society. In the United Kingdom (UK), the model of accessing all aspects of a person's life is seen as vital in creating community cohesion, social harmony, friendship and peace for people of various religious and cultural backgrounds (Ipgrave 2009). It is within this social context that people begin to explore their religious identity and come to an articulation of it.

The European Religious Education in Multicultural Society: Schools and Homes in Comparative Context (REMC) (ESRI 2010) suggests that for children religious identity can be quite fluid. Children can hold views similar to, or different from, their parents or other significant adults in their lives. They can also be influenced by the environment around them. Religious identity (Section 2.3.1) must be placed within a social context. Hemmings (2011) outlines four areas that are worth noting: affiliation and belonging; behaviours and practices; beliefs and values; and religious and spiritual life. He claims that exploration of

each of these offers a holistic and in-depth view of a person's religious identity. Ipgrave (2009) places importance on community and personal relationships in articulating religious identity. She emphasizes dialogue between children of all faiths and none pertaining to religion and sets out "Strands and Dimensions of Dialogue" (McKenna, Ipgrave, Jackson 2008), which move from life and social involvement to theological dialogue and dialogue of experience. These strands are further developed into a framework for dialogue in "Religious Education in a Plural Society" (Ipgrave 2016) It is in this movement she claims that people travel a path from "I" to "You" to "We" to "God". The key learning for Ipgrave was derived from observing the way in which the children engaged with each other, depending on the methodology used. This revealed their ability to engage in the conversation and the learning around religious questions, their resourcefulness and their use of appropriate religious language in working through issues themselves.

The research corpus relating to the voice of children in RE was reviewed. Of significance for the current researcher was (1) the absence of children as independent agents in research pertaining to their views on religion and RE within the Irish context and (2) the lack of their voices in this research. The researcher therefore designed a project that would address these issues by using participatory methods in a classroom setting (one of the children's natural environments) and putting the children's voices at the centre of any reporting with regard to the research.

The terms "student voice", "pupil voice" and "child voice" are used throughout the literature that treats of research into young people's opinions with regard to their own experiences and perspectives. So it is in the current study, particularly when citing and referencing that literature. However, since this study focuses especially on the opinions of children in a primary school in Ireland and because the researcher prizes their position as co-researchers in this participatory-based exploration, the terms "child voice" or "children's voice" will be used specifically with reference to their unique contributions.

1.1.2 Research Question

The researcher was cognisant of Dillen's (2014) view that most of the research on children in religion is built upon adult concepts. The researcher therefore built the present study on the principle of the children being central to every aspect of the study and so becoming co-researchers in gathering and interpreting the data. The overarching question is, "What have children to say about religion and RE in a classroom in a Catholic primary school in

Ireland?" This is explored in the following chapters, through the following embedded questions:

- How do children articulate their religious identity and who and what are the major influences on that?

- What does this sample group have to say about RE?

- Do they see a value in RE?

- How do they engage with the variety of religious and belief systems in their class?

1.2 Setting the Context: Overview of Irish Primary Education

The Irish primary school system is, overall, a privately managed, state-funded system of education. Today, 96.4% of schools at primary level are denominational. Such schools are managed by, or under the patronage or trusteeship of, a faith community. 3.6% of primary schools in Ireland are multi-denominational, for example Educate Together, *An Foras Pátrúnachta* and Community National Schools.

Patron	Number of Schools	Percentage
Roman Catholic	2787	89.66
Church of Ireland	173	5.6
Muslim	2	0.06
Jewish	1	0.03
Quaker	1	0.03
Methodist	1	0.03
Presbyterian	15	0.48
Multi-Denominational	112	3.6
Inter-Denominational	16	0.51

Table 1.1: Patronage of Primary Schools in Ireland (mainstream) (Department of Education and Skills, 2016)

This situation is a product of the history of the Irish nation, particularly its people's belief systems and the country's political history (Renehan 2014; Coolahan et al. 2012). In 1831, a state-sponsored primary school system was established. The schools in the system became known as national schools. Edward Stanley was Chief Secretary for Ireland at the time. A letter written by him in 1831 became the blueprint for the proposed scheme and set out how the national school system would operate. It would be overseen by a multi-denominational board of commissioners. Schools were envisaged as multi-denominational institutions wherein children of disparate religious denominations would receive literary and moral

education together but would attend instruction particular to their own religious beliefs on separate occasions. The main church groupings in Ireland at the time () each saw education as their prerogative. They each considered that religious instruction should permeate all parts of a child's school life. This could not happen if it was separate from other parts of the school day. As a result of the churches' persistent demands for change, the national school system developed into a denominationally managed system. This system continued following the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922. In subsequent years, direct government influence was minimal with Article 44.2.5 of the Constitution of Ireland, enacted in 1937, stating merely that the State would provide "for" free primary education. This is the system that, essentially, still pertains in Ireland today. The Irish State pays the majority of primary schools' capital expenses. It gives schools capitation grants based on the numbers of children attending each school. It also pays teachers' salaries, supports a schools' inspection system and sets the curriculum for secular subject areas. Religious denominations, mainly the church groupings listed above, own the school properties (sites and buildings), oversee management of the schools, including the appointment of teachers, and set the curriculum for RE.

The training of national school teachers was envisaged in Stanley's letter. To this end, a system of model schools would be established throughout Ireland beginning in 1848. These schools were under the auspices of the board of commissioners and, from the beginning, were to be resolutely multi-denominational. They were amongst the first "public schools fully financed by the state in any country" (Coolahan 1981). Model schools subsequently came under the direct management of the Department of Education which was founded in Dublin in 1924. With the exception of these remaining model school, the State did not become directly involved in the provision of new primary schools under their direct management until 2008.

In 1978, a group of parents in Dublin set about establishing a school that was not managed by a church body (Catholic, Church of Ireland and Presbyterian). The Dalkey School Project was the first multi-denominational school in Ireland that was managed primarily by parents. This model of school management was developed elsewhere in the country. Known as Educate Together schools, they now represent 2.6% of primary schools in Ireland. *An Foras Pátrúnachta* was established in 1993. This group is committed to the provision of Irish-speaking schools, which are operated as denominational or multi-denominational schools, depending on the wishes of the parents in the locality. In 2007, the Minster for Education, Mary Hanafin TD, on behalf of the State, established Community National

Schools to begin providing diversity in educational provision at primary level. These schools are multi-denominational. In 2016, the minister transferred patronage of these schools to the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). These are agencies of the State.

While the system of primary schooling in Ireland has remained largely unchanged since the 1870s, the same cannot be said of the religious and belief affiliations of the Irish people. Some 78.31% of respondents to the religious adherence section of Census 2016 identified themselves as Roman Catholic. 9.8% indicated that they were of "no religion". Nevertheless, this was an increase of 73.6% on the figures reported for the same section in Census 2011. At that stage only 5.88% of respondents indicated that they were of "no religion". It is worth keeping in mind that the Census Form is completed by one adult in the household and their views may not be shared by all members in the home.
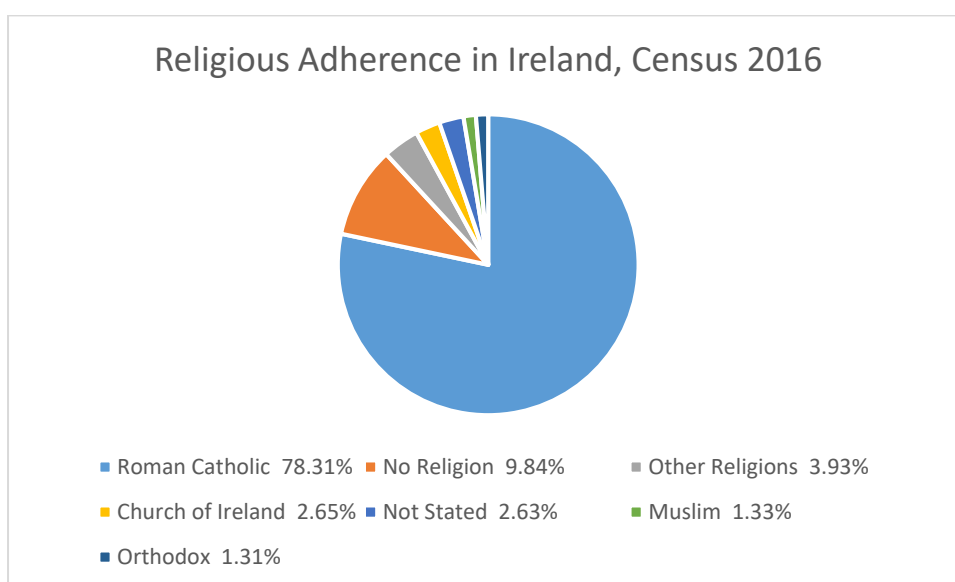
Figure 1.1: Religious Adherence in Ireland, Census 2016

Considering the percentages displayed in Table 1.1 and in Figure 1.1, some discrepancies are evident. The percentage of people identifying as Catholic is at odds with the percentage of schools under Catholic patronage. Multi-denominational schools under the auspices of Educate Together and/or ETBs might reasonably be expected to cater for children of no religious beliefs. However, though 9.84% of respondents indicated that they were of "no religion" only 3.6% of school are multi-denominational. These figures suggest that some restructuring of the management system of primary schools is required to meet the needs of contemporary Irish society. To this end, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn TD established the Forum, in 2011, to explore how such diversity might be created within the education system. The report of the Forum, published a year later, details how a minority of Irish people were unhappy with the school system and considered that their

human rights were being infringed by not having a school that reflected their family values pertaining to religion and beliefs (2012, p.38). The ESRI, in their study REMC found that most primary schools in Ireland have children from a variety of religious and belief backgrounds attending class together (ESRI 2010).

The report of the Forum recommended that the Catholic Church should divest some of its schools to other management bodies and identified 47 areas in which this might happen as part of Phase 1 (2012, p. 105). At the time of writing, only three schools were divested. It is an ongoing process with local ETBs being commissioned with surveying parents to ascertain their wishes in this respect (Donnelly 2018). As all schools have children of a variety of religious and belief traditions, the Forum recommended that the NCCA be tasked with developing a curriculum on Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics (ERBE), in line with the Toledo guiding principles on teaching about RE and beliefs in public schools (ODIHR/OSCE 2007). The NCCA conducted a consultation and received many submissions, the findings of which were published in a report entitled *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics: Views of Teachers, Parents and the General Public Regarding the Proposed Curriculum for Primary Schools* (Darmody and Smyth 2017). The authors conclude:

> while the stakeholders share a consensus in a number of areas relating to the curriculum, resolving broader issues such as convincing educators and parents of the need to implement the new curriculum remains a challenge. Considering stakeholders' diverse backgrounds, it is likely that some individuals or groups may actively oppose the introduction of the new curriculum. (2017 p.56)

To date, such a curriculum has not been introduced to schools. This means that the *status quo* remains. The State has not yet introduced its curriculum in this area at primary level. Meanwhile, the various patron bodies each produce a curriculum for RE that is acceptable to them (see Section 2.1.4).

Presently, the ownership and management of primary schools in Ireland is contested and in a state of flux. Patrons' responsibility for RE in primary schools is also being queried. It is against this uncertain background that the current study takes place.

1.3 Structure of Thesis

Chapter 2 presents a summary of the literature that informed this research. The literature examines and debates what is RE, the purpose of RE in Catholic schools, the primacy of the parent in that process, and how this primacy is enshrined in international, national and

institutional policy documents. The chapter also considers issues such as the withdrawal of children from RE classes, connections between home and school and interreligious education.

Chapter 3 outlines the research paradigm, methodology and approach used in this study. It also outlines the data collection and analysis procedures employed, as well as the methods of verification.

Chapter 4 brings together the findings and discussion of the results of the photovoice and scrapbooking sessions, as well as the focus group sessions conducted as part of this study. Data analysis yielded three major themes for consideration:

> Theme 1: Religious Identity
>
> Theme 2: Religious Education and the Curriculum
>
> Theme 3: Embracing Otherness.

Under each of these themes the findings are set out and followed by a discussion. They are compared with such literature and previous research as is pertinent to the theme.

Chapter 5 reflects upon the findings and considers some implications for RE in Catholic primary schools in Ireland. It explores ways in which the voice of children can be taken into consideration to allow educators to create a truly child-centred education that is directed by children's views.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the rationale and scope of the study, the aim of the research, the historical context, its impact on the current Irish primary school system and its influences on the study. The structure of the thesis has been presented. The next chapter considers the literature, national and international, pertaining to religion, RE and the child's voice. It thereby sets this study within the body of research already undertaken.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical mapping of the knowledge and the ideas that have inspired and informed the decision-making process relating to the focus of this study. Three concepts are central to the development of this research question: RE, child voice and identity. The place of religion is very much contested in today's world. While "religion has re-entered the public square and demands a response" (Davie 2010, p.1), some sectors of society have difficulty coming to terms with the issue as they are "rapidly losing the concepts, knowledge and vocabulary that are necessary to talk about religion" (ibid., p.2). In this context, the voice of children in religion and RE is of particular importance, as it is often overlooked in the research field. Davie's observations may be particularly relevant to the Irish context, with its growing numbers of "cultural Catholics" who only participate in religious services for major events in their lives and who are unable to articulate the religious convictions of the tradition (O'Connell, Ryan and Harmon 2018; Breen and Healy 2016; Francis et al. 2016; Ó Féich and O'Connell 2015; McGuckin et al. 2014). This lack of knowledge and vocabulary that is necessary to talk about religion is concerning in light of the fact the majority of people have engaged with RE throughout primary and post-primary education in Ireland. In the past two decades, Ireland has moved from a predominantly Catholic society to a more pluralist, multi-faith, secular one. Census figures 2011 and 2016 record "Catholics" as decreasing from 84.2% to 78.3%; and "No Religion" increasing from 269,800 to 468,400 (CSO 2017). Because of this growing religious and cultural diversity, the adoption of ever more inclusive practices is imperative (Faas 2010). The language of religion and the place of religion and RE are in a constant state of change. This is the focus of debate. It is against this backdrop that the present chapter explores the approaches to RE and child voice within the literature pertinent to this study.

2.1 Religious Education

RE in the broadest sense can be understood as an academic discipline whose foundation is religion and which is connected to, and dependant on, the discipline of education (Moran 1984). RE is a lifelong process and can happen in many situations and in many ways (IEC 2010, p.57). In Ireland, RE has followed a confessional model, which is based on the teachings of one religious tradition (Thompson 2004). It has an explicit evangelical/faith formation element, largely of the Catholic tradition. Grimmitt and Read (1975) introduced

the terms "learning about religion" and "learning from religion", offering other ways to engage in the study of RE. Currently, three strands are to be found within RE: educating about, educating from and educating into religion (Lane 2013; Teece 2010; ODIHR/OSCE 2007; Hull 2001; Jackson 1997). These are further described below:

- Educating *into* religion concerns a particular religious tradition. It occurs when a single religious tradition is taught by "insiders" with the aim of encouraging the learners to become, or remain, part of that tradition.
- Educating *about* religion focuses on descriptive and historical methods. The aim is neither to lead pupils into a religious belief nor to dissuade them from a religious belief.
- Educating *from* religion involves pupils learning from religious traditions, so as to enable them to develop their own standpoint on a religion or belief system.

In the Irish context, people currently engage with RE in either an interpretive (Community National Schools or Educate Together Schools) or confessional (schools under the trusteeship of religious patron bodies) way. It is important to remember that these models have grown out of particular historical contexts, legislative frameworks, and political and social ideologies (Hession 2015; Renehan 2015; Mc Grady 2014; Touhy 2013; Coolahan et al. 2012). What follows is an exploration of (1) interpretive and (2) confessional approaches.

2.1.1 Models of Religious Education

2.1.1.1 The Interpretive Approach

The interpretive approach was first developed for use in RE classes in publicly-funded schools in England and Wales. It aimed to allow children to develop a critical and reflective understanding of the subject area. Jackson (1997, 2004) details this approach to the study of diversity in RE in his book *Religious education: an interpretive approach*.

The interpretive approach is based upon didactical principles and strategies, taking account of the diversity that exists both within and between religions and religious cultures. The origins of the approach lie in the socio-anthropological tradition and the earlier ethnographical research of Clifford Geertz. *The interpretation of cultures* (1973), a seminal work by Geertz, places great emphasis on gathering a "thick description" from a group,

allowing the researcher to learn about the group in the finest of detail, in its own setting. Jackson considers this through a religious lens suggesting that:

> A close link has been seen between the activity of the ethnographic researcher, working on field research, and the activity of the learner in the classroom, attempting to understanding religions in the contemporary world. (Jackson 2011b, p.190)

The interpretive approach consists of three levels of operation: representation, interpretation and reflexivity, as follows:

- Representation: Jackson (1997) challenges conventional ways of representing religions. He argues that there is a Western, European way of interpreting religious traditions. "All Muslims do 'x'. All Hindus believe 'y'. All Catholics celebrate 'z'. Prejudices get reproduced and stereotypes abound". Jackson encourages the movement away from ideal types or universal essences in religious traditions to the messy complexity of the religious communities at a local/national level. He stresses the personal element of religion as part of lived human experience. (Jackson 1997, pp.122-6).

- Interpretation: Jackson (1997) considers the goal to be an understanding by an "outsider" of an "insider's" use of religious language. In this context an "outsider" is an individual who is not part of the particular religious tradition while the "insider" is a person within that tradition. The approach employs movement backwards and forwards between the "outsider's" and the "insider's" concepts and experiences.

- Reflexivity: the approach is not just about increasing knowledge but about increasing comprehension. Pupils need to reflect on their own experiences and those of the people whose ways they are trying to interpret. They need to consider the learning in the context of their prior values and understanding. In this, the pupils are encouraged to: (a) review their understanding of their own way of life; (b) make a constructive critique of the material (both spoken and physical) given at a distance; and (c) be involved in peer review.

Religious traditions should be presented not as homogenous and bounded systems but in ways that recognise diversity within religions and the uniqueness of each member, including the fact that each person is subject to various influences. The approach outlined above draws on sociocultural models and it is critical of stereotypes of religions. Thus religious traditions are considered in an unbounded space and relationships between them

are viewed as being more flexible. Gearon (2013), a critic of Jackson, claims that in doing this, religious traditions are no longer identifiable as integral wholes.

The interpretive approach is not constructed on a theological platform and so is not based on truth claims. However, the participants do not leave their presuppositions to one side but are required to bring them into the conversation, acknowledging differing and often competing truth claims. According to Jackson (2011a), this requires openness and genuine empathy, leading to an understanding of basic concepts, beliefs, attitudes and language of the other religions in the space.

The interpretive approach sets out to increase the knowledge base of the participants and encourages them to reflect on their new knowledge. The challenge is for the reflection to be critical in nature and so allow a strong sense of plurality to be developed and appreciated. The approach seeks to allow all to grow in self-awareness and respect of the other. Jackson (1997) contends that while teachers cannot guarantee this will happen, they can teach and facilitate the learning so that it may happen. The key concepts from the interpretive approach were used in classrooms as part of the "Religion in education: a contribution to dialogue or a factor of conflict in transforming societies of European countries" (REDCo) project (2006-2009). It explored young people's attitudes to religion and religious diversity in schools; how values in education can support or hamper mutual understanding; the promotion of dialogue; and the potential and limitations of religion in the field of education in several schools in European countries. The study focused on religion in the lives of 14-16-year-olds, with some attention to students in Initial Teacher Education and practitioners in the classroom.

Weisse (2010) highlights four mains findings of the project:

1. For those pupils who have no ties to organized religions, the school forms the main forum for learning about religion and the religious perceptions of other pupils.
2. For those pupils who belong to a religion, the school provides the main opportunity to come into contact with other religions.
3. Many pupils are prejudiced towards other religions but, at the same time, are prepared to enter into dialogue with others whom they consider interesting as persons. The school provides a unique forum for this.
4. Almost all pupils regard teaching an interreligious understanding at both the personal and the societal level as necessary and possible. (Weisse 2010, p.198)

Mc Kenna, Ipgrave and Jackson suggest that children need to be given more time to reflect upon the relationship between what they study and their own views (Mc Kenna, Ipgrave

and Jackson 2008, p.16). The interpretive approach is concerned with how children and educators interpret religions and beliefs, according to the real-life experiences and interests of children and the complexity of lived religious and belief traditions at local, national and international levels. Jackson's ethnographic-based approach reassesses how religions are represented and attempts to "bridge" the experience of the learner and that of children portrayed in curricular materials so as to help pupils to deepen their self-understanding through engaging with the religious and cultural lives of others.

Many have taken Jackson's (1997) interpretive approach and developed it as part of a theoretical grounding for empirical classroom-based research within their own context. Included, for example, are dialogue and conflict between teenage RE students (O'Grady 2005); teaching gifted and talented students (Amy Whittall 2005, 2009); issues concerned with assessment (Nigel Fancourt 2007) and applications of the interpretive approach to particular challenges, such as religious extremism (Miller 2013). Ipgrave (2004) developed the interpretive approach by fostering dialogue about religious diversity between children and young adults in classroom situations across many research sites. She encourages teachers and researchers to move away from ideal types or universal essences to the cluttered involvedness of religious communities at local and national level. The children do not just learn about religions and beliefs but rather learn from them. In this interpretive approach, teachers become co-learners with pupils who co-navigate the direction of learning. Children are encouraged to compare and contrast their beliefs with those of others (Jackson 2003, 2004). The work of Ipgrave is developed further in Section 2.2.4 of this thesis.

Jackson's interpretive and Ipgrave's dialogical approaches are adopted within the Irish context by Patricia Kieran (2018) in her project on "The enquiring classroom: values, identity, exploration". Kieran develops an interpretive and dialogical approach to the teaching of religions and beliefs whereby children listen to, and learn from, others who have religious and belief traditions that are different from their own.

Gearon (2012) is a critic of Jackson's interpretive approach. He claims that Jackson's conception of RE is a consequence of the framing of religion in such secular terms as tolerance and respect thereby ignoring the theological grounding. He claims that the REDCo project is:

> oriented towards civil religion and thus to political, secular, even (and though the empirical grounds of its effects are difficult to measure)

secularising goals, whether such ends were intended or not. (Gearon 2012, p.152)

He goes on to claim that this does not help the understanding of the wonder of religion in its own right. According to Gearon, Jackson's approach educates "out" of, rather than "into" being religious because the approach equates all perspectives in the search for ultimate truth. Jackson, in responding to Gearon, recognises that there is a political aspect to educational discussion, but in the case of "inclusive" RE, he contends that political liberalism, as put forward by John Rawls, can facilitate an understanding of religions and, furthermore, that his work is consistent with it (Lewin 2017). Jackson (2018) claims that Gearon's emphasis is on difference and rivals, rather than a model of collaboration, particularly between faith based and inclusive RE. He claims that Gearon's obsession with the framing of RE by those involved in its theory and practice neglects a variety of issues currently faced by RE, such as an over emphasis on numeracy and literacy to the detriment of RE and the Arts.

Gearon is not the only detractor of Jackson's approach, which favours the abandonment of discrete belief systems in favour of a much looser portrayal of religious traditions and groupings, is further criticised by Wright, who claims that "RE committed to the meticulous pursuit of truth is far more likely to promote a harmonious society" (2007 p.11). Wright does acknowledge the importance of contextual representations of religion within an RE class, but asserts that such representations do not offer a sufficient basis for RE.

2.1.1.2 Confessional Religious Education

Most RE in primary schools in Ireland can be defined as confessional or denominational. In these state-funded private schools, children are encouraged to journey in faith within one religious tradition (Hession 2015), with explicit evangelical/faith formation outcomes. This tradition, often viewed as the one true tradition, is usually Christianity, most often Catholic. Kieran and Hession (2005) emphasize the invitational nature of confessional RE in acquiring the knowledge, attitudes, values, skills and sensibilities involved in being religious. It allows people to develop religious modes of thinking which touch on the transcendent dimension of their lives from within the religious tradition and is orientated towards the fullness of humanity, thus educating a person religiously (Kieran and Hession 2005). The faith stories, beliefs, rituals, values and vision of the person are core to the process which takes place within the school/work, family and faith community, allowing people to be socialised into the tradition. Moran (1998) sees two motives within this form of RE: firstly, to teach people to practise a religious way of life and secondly to teach people

to understand religion. For those professing the Christian tradition, the focus is on the life of Jesus Christ and the reign of God. Groome (1998) claims that the reign of God is fully revealed during human history in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Groome's thought is developed in an approach for RE called Shared Christian Praxis, which has influenced RE at both primary and post-primary level in Ireland for the past two decades. At primary level, in schools operating under Catholic ethos this has formed the pedagogical basis for both the *Alive-O* RE programme (1996-2004) and the new *Grow in Love* RE programme (2015).

Confessional RE has been under criticism in Ireland for the past two decades (Faas 2017; Hyand and Bocking 2015; O'Kelly 2012; Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission 2011) and on the global stage since the 1960s. Jackson and O'Grady (2007) claim that it lacks an educational rationale. Meanwhile, others such as O'Connell (2017a), Hession (2015) and Lane (2013) disagree and maintain that it is educationally rigorous and enhances the educational system.

2.1.1.3 Shared Christian Praxis

Used in confessional RE, Shared Christian Praxis is an approach rather than a method. It can be argued that this approach has made a major contribution to RE in Ireland as it is currently being used in the *Alive-O* and *Grow in Love* RE programmes in Irish Catholic primary schools. This research study is centred on this approach based as it is within the Catholic tradition. Groome sees this approach as intentional and reflective. Significantly, the main influence on Groome's work was Freire. His view was that "education is to be an exercise in freedom and in agency" (Groome 1980). To this end, the children who were co-researchers in this study were afforded the opportunity to freely express their opinions on religion and beliefs in a safe space.

Groome describes praxis as "purposeful human activity that holds in dialectical unity both theory and practice, critical reflection and historical engagement" (1998, p.136). It is important for those who are engaged in Christian RE to become aware of their praxis, through reflecting on what their actions are and envisaging possible changes to their practice and methods, based upon the history and teaching of the Christian tradition. This approach is one that is built upon "mutual partnership, active partnership and dialogue with oneself, with others, with God and with the Story/Vision of Christian faith" (Groome 1998, p.142). It is therefore a shared process that is based on invitation, connecting everyday life experience with the Christian tradition.

Shared Christian Praxis is based upon the following five movements:

1. Naming the present action: students are invited to name or express in some form their own or other's life experience as it relates to the focusing theme or topic.
2. Reflecting critically: students are encouraged to reflect critically on what has already been expressed. Why do we do this? Why do others act the way they do? What options are there?
3. Accessing the Christian community story and vision: students are given access to the Church's faith and tradition relevant to the focusing theme or topic.
4. Integrating through dialogue: students reflect on their own understandings, experience, views and questions in the light of the Christian story and vision; by placing the two in relationship they deepen their understanding
5. Responding, decisions for future action: in response to this integration, students are challenged to identify appropriate ways of living the Christian life. (Buchanan 2011, p.28)

The movements of Shared Christian Praxis outlined above can be distilled further as "Life to Faith and Faith to Life". This is very much a dialectical approach, where the life experience of the person comes into conversation with the faith tradition (Christian tradition), which in turn influences how that person lives his or her life. O'Connell sees it as uniting "knowing" with "being in a way that engages the person in the whole community" (2008, p.199). It is a child-centred approach that holds Christ at its core, bringing life and faith together in an integrated way, which in turn allows for a holistic education. The approach is "as academically rigorous and challenging as any other approach" (Groome 1991, p.279) because it prioritises critical self-reflection by challenging the child to think along the lines of a praxis model, rather than just in abstractions of theory. It therefore moves away from the practice of telling children what they should think and how they should act. This holistic method brings the whole person into the process - head, heart and hands.

In his approach, Groome emphasizes the connection between education and faith formation (catechesis) and claims they should not be separated in an RE programme in a Catholic school. This is contested by Rossiter (1998). He claims that such separation is necessary due to the diverse enrolment found in Catholic schools where not all pupils wish to engage in the faith element of the programme. Cullen (2013), citing William Kay, argues that the nature of the approach makes it difficult, if not impossible, to apply outside a faith tradition. She goes on to highlight its lack of appreciation of contemporary society and the fact that not all will be engaging in the process of RE from the same starting point, that being a

belief in God, as represented by Groome. O'Connell (2008) argues that the approach is too heavily reliant on the "educator" to (1) prevent the participants from focusing only on the assumptions and predispositions of their lives and (2) to ensure that they are fully open to what the Christian story has to offer them in their engagement with the world.

2.1.2 Catholic Schools

The modern starting point for exploring the nature and purpose of a Catholic school is Vatican II's *Gravissimun educationis* (*GE*) (1965). This document positions Catholic schools within the mission of the Church, by continuing the work of Jesus in proclaiming the Gospel message of salvation for all. This is further developed by the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) in their document *The Catholic school* (1977) which states that a Catholic school is built on the:

> Christian concept of life centred on Jesus Christ; he is the One who ennobles people, gives meaning to human life, and is the model which the Catholic school offers to its pupils. (CCE 1977, par.33-37)

It goes on to say that a Catholic school is:

> a place of integral education of the human person through a clear educational project of which Christ is the foundation, directed at creating a synthesis between faith, culture and life. (ibid., par.37).

Thus, such a school is to bring about a Christian vision of the world through the interweaving of reason and faith. The Catholic tradition places importance on reason in coming to faith:

> The act of faith is always a free act and if it loses freedom, or if coercion is brought to bear, then it is no longer faith but some ideology. (Lane 2012, p.56)

It is incumbent on Catholic schools to ensure that each pupil achieves his or her full potential and contributes to the good of society (GE 1965). The curriculum of the school is grounded within this interplay, as set out above, where faith is not just taught in the curriculum area of RE but vivifies all that is happening in the school. While the school is grounded in the person of Jesus Christ, and a particular faith tradition, these schools are open to children of all faiths and none. Lane, describing Catholic schools, says they are not "something exclusive to Catholics but [are] inclusive and welcoming towards all to 'come and see'". Furthermore, they are "not sectarian but radically ecumenical and formally committed to inter-religious dialogue" (2016, p.35).

2.1.2.1 The Catholic School and Religious Education

In a Catholic school, the religious dimension of education is found in the RE curriculum. RE is the intersection between religion and education in the broadest sense of the discipline. Groome (2011) and Moran (1998) claim that it is the composition of two sharply contrasting processes. The first teaches people to be religious in a particular way while the second teaches them to understand religion in all of its complexities.

Central to our appreciation of a multi-faceted approach to RE is the distance Moran sees between the noun "religion" and the adjective "religious". The former concerns the academic discipline of teaching the facts of the religion while the latter captures the nature of the practice of a way of life (for example the practice of Catholicism which applies to the research site). As with the disciplines of maths or languages, the aim of this approach is to help people to understand. For some RE can be a combination of both the latter and the former while for others it may only be that which is offered by the understanding of the noun.

Alexander and McLaughlin (2003) refer to the "insider" and "outsider" in this context. The interplay between the use of the noun and adjective goes back centuries. At various times in history the concepts have been interchangeable. Catholic RE aspires to engage in both types of learning and incorporates what Deenihan (2002) and Astley (1994) call, respectively, a "critical dimension" and a "formation dimension". The Catholic tradition strives for an interdependent relationship between these two aspects of RE. Formation and critical education lead to religious understanding and understanding religion. This brings people to a service of the mission of Jesus Christ and of the society of which they are a part. The integration of these into one institution allows for the holistic development of the children in a Catholic school. This model of education allows the students, who will become active members of society, to have an integrated faith and to form within themselves a clear idea of the meaning of life (CSP 2007, p.4). The Catholic school is perceived to be in partnership with parents and the local parish community in bringing children to lives of faith. However, in many cases, the school is the only place where children encounter the faith tradition, exploring who Jesus is and celebrating the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church (McKinney 2011). The Church is aware of this and calls on the parish to be more effective and aware of its role in the faith formation of the children (IEC 2015; CCE 1988). The following section considers children and RE.

2.1.3 Children and Religious Education

An in-depth search through the literature on RE and children leads mainly to programmes of RE, rather than research about children's engagement in RE. However, refining the search to include the spiritual development of children brings to light a considerable body of relevant literature. It is evident from database searches that much attention has been given to the study of spirituality and spiritual development within religious and secular spheres. However, it is only in recent decades that a consistent focus has been given globally to the area of children's spiritual development. This has now become pivotal to an education that strives to be child-centred and holistic in nature. It is encapsulated in the vision for primary education in Ireland, as articulated in the introduction to the PSC (1999):

> The Primary School Curriculum celebrates the uniqueness of the child, as it is expressed in each child's personality, intelligence and potential for development. It is designed to nurture the child in all dimensions of his or her life—spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical. (1999, p.6)

Researchers suggest that it is preferable to explore the spiritual development of children before moving on to their religious development (Tracey 2005; Hay and Nye 1998). To be able to fully appreciate the voice of the child within this research study, it is appropriate to begin with his/her innate spirituality and then move to his/her religious development.

2.1.3.1 Spirituality and Religion

The concept of spirituality is widely contested in literature and, as a result, so too is its connection or relationship to religion. Spirituality is a word that is readily used in society to describe "something" that is beyond the self; or, as described by Wright (2000) and others, as an "ultimate concern" in life (Lipscomb et al. 2012; Rossiter 2012; Rossiter 2010; Ryan 2007b; Wright 2000; Tracey 2005; Rolheiser 1998).The literature argues that spirituality is innate in all and that it slumbers in the unconscious, awaiting expression (Tracey 2000; Hay and Nye 1998). When one analyses what key writers in this area are saying, it is evident that there is some common ground. Nevertheless, this does not allow for a clear, shared definition of spirituality (Eaude 2009; Hart 2003; Hay and Nye 1998, 2006). Some of this commonality lies in the idea of wonder and awe in the beauty of creation; belonging to a community; intellectual stimulation; search for meaning; and, for some, a connection with the transcendent.

Many scholars link spirituality to religion while others have a broader understanding of spirituality as not having a religious component. Meehan describes secular spirituality as

"seeking to find meaning and purpose in universal human experience rather than religious experience *per se*" (Meehan 2002, p.292). This form of spirituality is regarded also by Hay and Nye (2006) as being concerned with relationship with the other, nature and the world, but not with God. For the religious person, spirituality has aspects that are non-negotiable and is consequently unique. Rolheiser (1998) considers these aspects to include: (1) private prayer and private morality; (2) social justice; (3) mellowness of heart and spirit and (4) community as a constitutive element of true worship. A religious spirituality allows people of a religious belief system to engage with the world through a particular lens (Ryan 2006; Trousdale 2005). Others claim that spirituality can only be developed within a faith tradition and that this allows for it to be focused on developing a relationship with a God (Fisher 2010; Eaude 2009).

The concept of spirituality that is linked to religious tradition is widely supported. However, a secular spirituality is equally valuable for those who do not profess a faith background and both are valid within an educational system. When writing of spiritual education, Alexander and McLaughlin (2003) refer to education "from the inside", meaning working from within a religious tradition and "from outside", meaning from outside any faith tradition.

John Bradford draws distinctions between two kinds of spirituality: human (secular) and devotional (religious). In his book *The spiritual needs and potential of young people: a rationale for discussion* (1999), offers a third way of considering spirituality, which he calls "practical spirituality". The three spiritualties are as follows:

1.   Human spirituality: aspects which relate to the meeting of our human needs - love, security, reflection, praise and responsibility;
2.   Devotional spirituality: our propensity for religious response and involvement;
3.   Practical spirituality: a combination of human and devotional spirituality which represents the engagement of our combined spirituality with day-to-day living and being, including our contribution to the society in which we live. (Bradford 1999, p.3)

Taking the UNCRC (UN 1989) as his starting point, Bradford links spiritual rights to his first stage "human spirituality" which further leads on to "devotional spirituality", as set out in the table below:

	HUMAN SPIRITUALITY		DEVOTIONAL SPIRITUALITY
1	being loved	becomes	identity as a member
2	feeling secure	becomes	nurtured in tradition
3	responding in wonder	becomes	framework for worship
4	being affirmed	becomes	empowerment for service
5	symbolic sharing	becomes	experience of community

(Bradford 1999, p.6)

Bradford sees the relationship between the two as "religion transforming, giving order to an endorsing human spirituality" (1999, p.6). All that is part of "human spirituality" is key to a "devotional spirituality". He claims that it is within a religious context that people are provided with a culture and a tradition that enables them to find a language that allows them to share, and reflect on, their ultimate concerns in life. For Bradford, spiritual development is:

> the process by which our human spirituality is (i) established, (ii) grows in relationship with, and concern for, others, (iii) is extended into devotional spirituality, (iv) responds to questions and is supported by membership of a faith community, and (v) becomes integrated within a human-spirituality/devotional spirituality profile of a practical spirituality – or day-by-day inter-personal engagement – in a world for which one is both thankful and committed to contribute towards the struggle for good.(Bradford 1999, p.15)

Bradford's work is significant in allowing us insight into how the nurturing of young children's spirituality and their religious development (the first two steps above) is foundational for development within a faith community. This tallies with Trousdale (2005) who claims that spiritual development can occur separately from religion but that religion can offer a way for some to develop a sense of spirituality. This will be revisited in Section 2.1.3.2 – nurturing spirituality and religious development.

The literature suggests that spirituality is innate in humans. Its source is to be found deep within the person and it is developed in many ways (Dillen 2014; Hay and Hay 2006; Wright 2000; Bradford 1999; Rolhesier 1998). A clear understanding of the differences and similarities between secular and religious spirituality is key to the development of research in the areas of religious development or education of children. Ryan (2006) claims that, while spirituality is part of all people, religious spirituality is defined by membership of a particular faith community that is defined by a certain language and customs.

Children's spirituality is a relatively new area of study and has developed from two spheres, namely adult spirituality and the child in ancient thought. Ratcliff and Nye (2006) chart the

change in emphasis from adults reflecting on what it was like to be children and recollecting their childhood spirituality, which was more concerned with their RE or religious experience than with spirituality, to the present day, in which the focus is on the children and their experiences. Alister Hardy, of the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College, Oxford (1969) claims that religious experience was central to people's lives, with many participants stating that their childhood religious experiences were the most significant. He finds that these childhood experiences are brought to people's consciousness by situations in their current environment, such as nature, the arts or places of worship. Hardy's work is further developed by Edward Robinson (1977) who focuses on the nature of these religious experiences and describes them as having a sense of "something more" (1977, p.114). He considers that these religious experiences are not rare or unusual in people's lives but are common occurrences. Rolhesier (1998) agrees with Robinson in this and further states that these religious experiences are completely natural in people's lives. Placing these ideas within children's spirituality, Eaude (2009) states "inherently mysterious…it is not just about extra ordinary;…spirituality is often and most obviously for young children manifested and enhanced, within everyday experiences" (2009, p.191).

Research conducted in the area of religious development of children tends to reflect the work of Piaget and his emphasis on cognitive development. Goldman (1964) and Fowler (1981) both place restrictions on what children can be taught, with the former claiming that children cannot think abstractly and so are unable to appreciate certain religious concepts and metaphors. Because of this, he places limitations on what they are exposed to and so limits their exposure to the Bible. "Religious readiness" is the phrase put forward by Goldman (1965) and he argues that the focus for children in the area of RE should be more on real life experiences than on abstract religious concepts. He concludes that readiness for religious compares with readiness to read and can only take place when the child is at the right stage of development.

Francis (1996) considered that Goldman lacked appreciation of the affective and existential aspects of religious thinking. Priestly's (1981) critique, meanwhile, focused on Goldman's over emphasis on the cognitive. Priestly argues that the place of story and imagination is crucial to religious insight. "The basic ideas of religion are first communicated through its story and those ideas are interpreted not by the cognitive mind but by imagination" (1981, p.18). McGrady (1983) criticises Goldman's work for not using age-appropriate methodologies with children. McGrady endorses, for example, play, storytelling and other

interactive methodologies that are not reliant on linguistic ability alone but yet allow children to express themselves.

Fowler's (1981) study on children's faith or religious development worked within the framework of a developmental psychology perspective and was influenced by the writings of Piaget and Kohlberg. Fowler claims that all people have faith, by which he means trust or loyalty to a cause or an event. He views the term "faith" as encompassing more than "religious faith" alone. He believes that faith develops in stages. Fowler's Stages 2 and 3 are of particular importance to the present research:

> Stage 2: mythic-literal faith-ordering faith: the story becomes the major way of giving value and unity to thought for children at this juncture (Fowler 1981, p.149). Children are quite literal during this phase. They then move slowly to the abstract and can take the perspective of the other in confronting the contradiction they may face in the story. Children exhibit a commitment to reciprocal fairness - everyone deserves an equal share.

> Stage 3: synthetic-conversational faith-conforming faith: this is very much the "conformist" phase, which, according to Fowler, helps to "focus ourselves and assemble our commitments to values" (ibid., p.154). At this point "authority is located externally to the self. It resides in the interpersonally available "they" or in the certified incumbents of leadership roles in institution" (ibid., p.157). Children exhibit a commitment to identifying with the views and opinions of others.

Commenting on the work of Goldman and Fowler, Gottlieb (2006) reviews their three-stage development model, the third of which is particularly relevant to current research project:

1. Children pass through an intuitive stage in which they see religious identity as being bestowed by God or parents; prayers are conceptualised as recipes for gratifying personal desires and interpretations of the Bible are unsystematic, fragmentary and often inconsistent.
2. At around the age of seven, religious thinking enters a concrete stage; children associate religious identity with particular forms of behaviour, kinship or dress and prayer with specific concrete activities. They also interpret Bible stories concretely depicting God as a man or a power threatening specific action, often in response to specific transgression.
3. Between the ages of 10 and 14, children's religious thinking enters the abstract stage. At this stage, children distinguish religious groups by differences in their beliefs rather than by physical differences in

the people holding those beliefs; children understand prayer as a private conversation with God that need not be tied to any particular ritualized form of expression and they are no longer distracted by concrete elements in Bible stories, but interpret them abstractly and systematically, as communicating important moral lessons and sentiments. (Gottlieb 2006, p.244)

Eaude (2009), a critic of approaches based on the work of Piaget, argues that there needs to be greater emphasis given to an understanding of spiritual development. He claims that these approaches ignore the qualities that the child holds, which are often lost as they move closer to adulthood (Bunge 2001). Rather than being seen as something that is less than an adult spirituality, the spirituality of the child must be recognised as being good in its own right. Keating (2017) suggests that Fowler rates the spiritual aspect of the child behind intellectual and moral reasoning and identification with a particular belief tradition. He claims in Fowler's stages of development that belief rather than experience is prioritised in nourishing spirituality. Despite the criticisms of Goldman and Fowler's work, their research has provided important insights into the religious development of children.

Research on children has focused on their spirituality, in contrast to the religious development or education of children. One of the main researchers in this area is Robert Coles (1990), the aim of whose research was to learn from children as they went about their lives in their homes, schools and parishes. Coles' work is described as ethnographic, focusing on the children's own perspective on what they say about God and the meaning of religion, while they go about their daily lives. It is this, the child's own voice in the world, that is seminal to an understanding of the present research study. Coles, unlike other researchers, believed in giving direction to what he was trying to learn. This research took place over several years and included children from a variety of religious traditions and cultures. Cole was interested in the children's drawings and in what they had to say. However, he did not interpret the work as he felt that that would be unnecessary. Coles' work is grounded in the principle of respect for the voice of the children and the validity of what they have to say, based on their lived experience. His research led him to characterise children as young pilgrims, well aware that life is a journey and that they are as anxious as others to make sense of it. He concluded that children are interested in the meaning of life, in ultimate questions of life and in their own journey. The work of Coles resonates with that of Robinson (1977), referred to earlier in this section, and points to the often-profound ways in which children ask questions of ultimate concern and meaning of life. Whereas Coles is more focused on the now, Robinson's work is limited to the memories of its participants.

Nye (1998, 2009), Hay and Nye (1998, 2006) and Nye and Hay (1996) have built upon the work of Coles and Robinson. They based their work on interviews with children and concluded that, as they are innately spiritual, they do not require any religious denomination. These studies were founded on sensory awareness rather than that of cognitive awareness. Hay and Nye (1998) considered that children's spirituality is made up of three categories: awareness of sensing, mystery of sensing, and value sensing. They developed these categories through the observation of children as they went about their daily tasks. When children are totally absorbed in what they are doing and attending to the task in hand, they have an awareness of sensing. At times, children are caught up in the wonder and awe of the world they are in and as they try to make sense of, and respond to the situation, their imagination is alive with possibility. This is the mystery of sensing. Myers (1997) combines this concept of imagination within spirituality, which he sees as key, with play for children. He claims that it is through play that children develop their ability to imagine and this imagining is core to a child's spirituality. When children listen to stories, view art or experience a situation they tend to respond in certain ways (being positive or negative, delighted or sorrowful). Hay and Nye refer to this as "value sensing" on the part of the child.

Nye (1998) developed in her work the concept of "relational consciousness" whereby children speak about their awareness of a variety of things, always in relation to someone or something. As she explains:

> "I-Others", "I-Self", "I-World" and "I-God"...the child's awareness of being in relationship with something or someone was demonstrated by what they said and, crucially, this was a special sense that added value to their ordinary or everyday experience...In this "relational consciousness" seems to lie the rudimentary core of children's spirituality, out of which can arise meaningful aesthetic experience, religious experience, personal and traditional responses to mystery and being, and mystical and moral insight.
> (Nye 1998, p.114)

In their research, which is primarily focused on observing children in the natural environment, Hay and Nye place significant importance on relationships within the spiritual development of children. Hart (2003) concurs with Hay and Nye, by identifying four ways for children to be in the world for children: wonder, wondering, relational spirituality and wisdom. These can be observed in children in different ways and they do not all have to be present, as children are individual and engage in the world on their own terms. Hart's idea of wondering is about children asking the big questions in life. He connects this with their spiritual quest whereby they are engaging with the mystery of the world or, as Fowler

(1981) would have said, "striving for the sacred". Hart claims that this concept of wondering is core and has been ignored for too long. This wondering is a cornerstone of the methodology Godly Play developed by Berryman (1991, 2009) which is further explored in Section 2.1.3.2.

Research done into children's spiritual and religious development tends to support the importance of relationship and belonging or connectedness (Lipscomb et al. 2012; Hay and Nye 1998, 2006; Hart 2003, 2006; Nye 1998; Coles 1990). For children, the idea of relationship is bound up in the importance of relationship with self, others, the world around them and, for some, God.

2.1.3.2 Nurturing Spirituality and Religious Development

Having considered the nature of children's spiritually and religious development, and their connectedness, we move to explore how these are nurtured in the lived experience of the child. Spiritual development is seen by many as the starting point in a Christian educational setting but not in a formal RE programme (Hyde 2007; Hay and Nye 1996). They argue this on two points: the multi-cultural and multi-faith society that is now the reality in which children live and the number of children who come from no expressed or lived faith background. Arising from these, children do not have a faith language or appreciation of religious concepts. As in all curricular areas, the starting point needs to be with the lived experience of children and not an abstraction. For RE therefore the starting point should be based on children's spirituality.

Many of the approaches developed through the observation of children presume a commitment to a certain religious tradition. Moving from nurturing spiritual development to religious development involves, in most cases, moving into a catechetical framework that is developing a religious identity within one tradition.

Bradford's concept of human spirituality which, if developed, can lead to a religious/devotional spirituality has already been considered. He claims that the human spiritual aspect is essential to the development of the child and that it must include:

> the experience of a profound quality of love; a sense of ultimate security; play, exploration, humour, hope and wonder; affirmation of others; and encouragement to participate in and contribute to the spiritual and social well-being of their family, friends and community. (Bradford 1999, pp.3-4)

Bradford articulation of these five as core to the development of a religious identity of any kind concurs with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). In other words, if the primary

human spiritual needs are not met, it will be impossible for a religious spirituality/religious identity to be cultivated. For this to happen, within a pluralist world, the religious backgrounds of all the children must be respected as the starting point. Bradford also emphasizes the importance of community practice in developing religious spirituality and gives guidelines as to what should be on offer in a healthy community of faith (1999, p.8). Bradford's idea of community practice concurs with Rolheiser's (1998) concept of "non-negotiable" participation in community as part of Christian spirituality. Hay and Nye (2006) consider that the nurturing of the child's spirituality is the responsibility of the teacher. They hold that the teacher must keep the mind of the child open to all. (S)he must also encourage personal awareness and the development of a social spirituality. Hay and Nye do not situate this nurturing within a particular community and, in many ways, see it as the reverse of the importance of community participation, as suggested by Rolheiser and Bradford.

Ryan (2007a) and Hyde (2006) agree that, given the child's ordinary and natural openness to spirituality and religion, it is best to offer an integrated approach that allows the curriculum to develop the multi-faceted nature of children's spirituality. Children experience spirituality in many ways: some just describe an experience (Hart 2003) while others experience it through questioning (Hyde 2008), through wonder and awe and these are so profound within their development that they are carried into adulthood. Literature focuses on the importance of children being free to express their thoughts and ideas and so come to a safe place where their sense of the spiritual can be expressed and appreciated in a confident way. Hence, the environment and methodologies employed must be open enough for the child to feel this security. For this to happen, Hyde (2007) asserts that the adult/teacher must be comfortable in his/her own spirituality and must be a reflective practitioner.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952), herself a Christian, wrote influentially about children's religious development. She believed that children were born with potential waiting to be revealed and not as a "blank slate". She considered that the environment/community had a profound influence on the development of the child. Central to Montessori's thinking was the idea of sensory education and the fact that children learned through engaging with the environment, rather than passively receiving information, while the teacher fostered a sense of lifelong learning in the child. Cavalletti, a student of Montessori, developed her ideas into an approach for catechesis called The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. The focus of Cavalletti's approach was "the existence of a mysterious bond between God and child"

(Cavalletti 2002, p.22). According to this method, children were invited to engage with three-dimensional materials to process Biblical stories and religious tradition and so develop their inner religious language. This evokes the work of Bradford (1999) who placed importance on children's ability to express their spiritual identity.

The importance of learning through language is also a feature of the work of Berryman (1991) in Godly Play and he was influenced by the work of Montessori and Cavalletti. His work incorporates the three-dimensional materials and the development of religious language and he places emphasis on the concept of wonder and wondering within a playful environment, in a discovery-based approach (Berryman 2009; Hyde 2010). This allows the children to move from the physical to the abstract in their engagement and reflection. This aspect of his work is further developed in the work of Hart (2003), as previously discussed. O'Farrell's research (2016) with children who engaged with Godly Play over several sessions shows that they have "a great capacity for engaging at a deeper level and a great desire to go to that deeper level" (2016, p.140) because of the engagement.

The literature shows common areas in the nurturing of the spiritual and religious development of children. These include the development of the imagination and language of children through an appreciation of the world around them and the ability to be awakened to the wonder and awe in the world, together with a sense of connectedness to the people around them (Braford 1999; Hyde 2008; Berryman 2009; O'Farrell 2016). Coles gave children an opportunity to exercise their right to express their religious and spiritual selves (1990). He described the children as pilgrims who understood that life was a journey and were anxious to make sense of it. He claimed that they were interested in the meaning of life and questions of ultimate concerns. Bradford (1995) argues that meeting the religious needs of children can be explored under three categories:

1. Helping them to be aware of their religious identity and to value what is positive within it.

2. To provide opportunities for them to link with people of other traditions and to share knowledge and opportunities for shared worship.

3. To integrate their faith, experience, attitudes and lifestyle gradually so as to allow them to fully express their identity.

Bradford promotes a holistic integration of learning, faith and life for children that will lead one day to a holistic engagement with a faith community and allow for an authentic

expression of their religious identity. Highlighted also in the literature is the importance of a safe and secure environment for the children to express spirituality, as well as an appreciation of spirituality that is integrated across the curriculum (Ipgrave 2017; Hyde 2007; Hay 1998; Nye 1998).

This section has explored the relationship between spiritualty and religion. It highlights that everybody has a spirituality and that it is developed through many factors in the daily lives of both adults and children, some moving from a secular spirituality to a religious spirituality. This understanding of the interplay between spirituality from a secular perspective and a religious or faith worldview is key to this study, as the participants come from both religious and secular spiritual backgrounds and are very much influenced by the environment in which they live and attend school.

2.1.4 Religious Education Curriculum in Catholic Primary School in Ireland

Much of the literature tends to agree regarding the nurturing of the spiritual and religious development of children. One of the ways this happens is through the RE curriculum in a school setting. In Ireland, the PSC 1999 requires each school to teach RE for 2.5 hours per week and it lays out the rationale for this clearly in its introduction (NCCA 1999, p.57). However, the patron body of each school must decide what content is to be taught (Faas et al. 2015; Hyland 1989). Since the 1970s, the Catholic Church, the patron body of 89.66% of primary schools in Ireland (DES 2017), has provided a programme called the *Children of God* series. In 2015, Catholic bishops published a curriculum for use in schools under their patronage entitled *Catholic preschool and primary religious education curriculum for Ireland*. The curriculum takes its starting point from *Share the Good News*, the 2010 National Catechetical document of the Irish Episcopal Conference, which states that education in a Catholic school "seeks to launch children on their lifelong journey with an education that honours them personally and helps them to develop and use their affective, active and cognitive learning capacities" (IEC 2010, p.140). This document also states that the RE programme should foster and deepens children's Catholic faith and be based upon the six fundamental tasks of catechesis, as identified in the General Directory of Catechesis (IEC 2010, p.141). The *Catholic preschool and primary religious education curriculum for Ireland* sets forth these responsibilities in detail and offers support and encouragement to children from the Catholic tradition in their own faith development. One of the aims of RE is to build community among the children and help them to have a sense of belonging to the Church and also to participate in its life and mission (IEC 2015, p.13; Bradford 1999). The Catholic school works in partnership with the home and family to create an

environment where the children come to know God and celebrate Him in their wonder and awe of their own lives and the world around them (IEC 2010, p.141).

The RE curriculum divides its outcomes into two: firstly, general aims and outcomes and secondly faith formation goals. The general learning outcomes refer to the intellectual dimension of learning. Here the pupils "learn skills of spiritual, moral and religious literacy which informs their minds and enhances their understanding of Christian faith" (IEC 2015, p.14), allowing children to understand the teachings and values of the Catholic Church. These outcomes are what Jackson (2007), Hull (2001) and Grimmitt and Read (1975) refer to as "learning about" and "learning from".

The faith formation goals seek to:

> form children's characters in the virtues and values of Jesus; support their faith development and help them to experience what it means to be a member of the Church community called to witness to Jesus in service of others (IEC, 2015 p.14).

These faith formation goals move beyond the acquisition of knowledge into what is referred to as "learning into" (Lane, 2013; Teece 2010; Jackson 2007; Hull 2001), where the children come to know who God is in a personal dimension and grow in the faith tradition. The anticipated outcome is that they will become active members of the Catholic community.

As previously noted, Ireland is a multi-faith, pluralist society and this is recognised in the curriculum. Catholic schools are, by their very nature, welcoming of children, irrespective of faith, and are socially inclusive (CSP 2015; Darmody et al 2012). The curriculum offers a limited number of interfaith lessons each year from first class onwards. In these lessons, the first steps of interfaith dialogue can take place in the classrooms.

2.1.4.1 Guidelines for Religious Education from the Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland

This curriculum contains fourteen guidelines for the teaching of RE. These are designed to help the teacher engage with the curriculum. Those pertinent to this study include:

1. Right of withdrawal for children, by their parents, from RE, under the *Rules for national schools under the Department of Education* (1965), Rule 69; *Constitution of Ireland*, Article 44.2.4; *Education Act 1988*; PSC (1999, p.58). This is explored more fully in Section 2.1.4.2 below.

2. "Catholic primary RE is theocentric, the mystery of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is the Centre of the curriculum" (IEC 2015, p.25). This sets forth an understanding of a Trinitarian God in relationship that is to underpin any RE curriculum and any future programme.

3. The "mystery of God through both Scripture and Church tradition" (ibid., p.25). The curriculum states that Christians believe that this God, who is Trinity, has been revealed through our holy books and history and that those delivering the curriculum should "remain faithful to God's Revelation and [that] Church teaching must be presented in its fullness, not fragmented or impoverished" (ibid., p.25).

4. "The person of Jesus has priority at each and every stage of the curriculum" (ibid., p.25). All the teaching is Christo-centric within the Catholic tradition. The children are introduced to key moments in the life of Jesus, as found in the scriptures, and so Jesus becomes a personal friend to them.

5. Liturgy is core to the curriculum. It is in the liturgy that children come to know Christ in a deeper way, through prayer and the interconnection between scripture and the liturgical life of the Church. Liturgy is therefore an "essential element of Catholic RE" (ibid., p.26).

6. Ecumenical and interreligious awareness and respect is about developing "awareness, attitudes, relationships and values" (ibid., p.28) where the children can begin to engage in interreligious dialogue with the variety of belief traditions that are present in their classrooms.

7. Assessment and evaluation are important facets of the educational system, as outlined in the Irish PSC (NCCA 1999, p.17). The RE curriculum "enables the teacher to build on the principles of Assessment for Learning" (IEC 2015, p.29).

This sampling of the guidelines illustrates the framework that is provided for the teaching of RE in a Catholic school in Ireland. God, who is Trinity, is at the heart of the curriculum. Scripture and tradition are the doorway through which the children come to know God, and in particular the person of Jesus, who is at the centre of all that is a Catholic school – one that is open to the other in respectful dialogue. These introduce children to both the educational and faith formation dimensions of RE (IEC 2010, p.57-58, 140-141). The children in this study do not follow an RE programme based on the *Catholic preschool and primary religious education curriculum for Ireland*. This is due to the fact that *Grow in*

Love the programme being designed out of the curriculum has not been developed to sixth class at the time of the research.

2.1.4.2 Contested Space: Religious Education in a Catholic School in Ireland

RE has a long history in Irish primary schools. The Stanley letter of 1831, which established primary (national) schools in Ireland, sought to establish a multi-denominational (mixed) educational system for all, irrespective of religious conviction. It was initially envisaged that children of all denominations would attend the schools for literary and moral instruction, with religious instruction taking place for the different denominations "on separate occasions". By the middle of the nineteenth century, schools had become increasingly denominational, though in theory, the system remained mixed (Coolahan 1981, p. 14). This primary school system evolved over the years and is documented by Coolahan et al. (2012) in the report of the Forum. In Ireland presently, some 96.4% of the mainstream schools are denominational or inter-denominational in nature, of which 89.66% are under the trusteeship of the Catholic Church (DES 2017). Faas, Darmody and Sokolowska (2015) consider that this preponderance of denominational schools and the lack of multi-denominational or nondenominational schools for minority faith and non-faith groups has "resulted in a situation whereby many children attend primary schools which do not reflect their own beliefs and, in fact, have a strong emphasis on socialisation into the majority faith" (2015, p.7).

At the time of writing, the place of RE in Irish primary schools remains contested. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's *Education at a glance indicators* (OECD 2013) show that pupils in schools in Ireland and Israel spend considerably more time than other OECD countries on religious instruction. In addition, while 90% of teachers work in denominational schools, overall only 49% of those surveyed report teaching religion "willingly" (Rougier and Honohan 2015). Heinz, Davison and Keane (2018) found that 88.9% of those wishing to enter Initial Teacher Education (ITE) at primary level in Ireland identified as Catholic and 90.4% of those who eventually received a place on the programme. O'Connell's et al (2018) research with current students in ITE at primary level in Ireland found 84% of respondents believed in God and that half of the students attend religious services at least once a month (58.83%), with over a third of those going at least once a week. However Heinze, et al. (2018) found that a significantly high proportion of respondents appreciated the importance of passing on "Catholic values" within the Catholic primary school. Ruairí Quinn, Minster for Education and Skills, 2011 – 2014, repeatedly suggested reducing the time given to RE in schools (O'Brien 2014;

Holden 2013; RTÉ 2011). Meanwhile, the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA) has indicated that the organisation would have considerable difficulties if sacramental preparation were to be entirely removed from schools (Rougier and Honohan 2015). In 2016, a consultation document was launched by the NCCA, entitled *Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum: for consultation.* In this document a change in the placing of RE is proposed whereby the curriculum area of RE would be replaced with the title "Patron's programme" and placed in a category named "Flexible time" (40%), separate from the other six curricular areas. Some consider that the removal of the nomenclature RE and its separation from the other curricular areas undermines its academic value and is at odds with the introduction of the PSC (CPSMA 2017; Lane 2017; O'Connell 2017b). Others, like Equate (2017), welcome the content of this proposal.

Another issue that faces RE in Irish Catholic schools is the management of the "opt out" provision for those parents who do not wish their children to participate in RE in the classroom. This right is documented in numerous locations, as cited in Section 2.1.4.1 above. The "opt out" is an area of contention. In some locations it is managed well, as noted in *Catholic primary schools in a changing Ireland* (CSP 2015, pp.26-27). However, it must also be recognised that it is not always well managed and the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) has cautioned that:

> unless Religion classes are moved outside of the school day, human rights standards suggest that it is necessary to put in place mechanisms to ensure supervision of children who wish to be exempted. (IHRC 2011, p.100)

Symth and Darmody (2011) note that in fact some children and families do not "opt out" for fear of being seen as different from the others in their school community. Mawhinney et al. (2010) state that some children of minority religions or beliefs in Northern Ireland consider that, because of the "opt out", their religion or belief is not respected or acknowledged in their schools. Consequently, the children feel excluded.

Faas, Darmody and Sokolowska (2015) stress the "integrated" nature of the Irish PSC, in which religion is one of seven curricular areas. They claim therefore that it is not possible for minorities in denominational schools to have their religious freedom safeguarded. Evans (2008) holds the view that the practice in some countries of removing children from their classrooms for the purpose of receiving RE is, in fact, separation along religious grounds and may result in "othering". This is to overlook current practice in many schools whereby

children move freely between classrooms and groups, accessing appropriate academic, emotional, behavioural or social supports.

2.1.4.3 Freedom of Religion

Both ODIHR and OSCE stress the importance of RE that contributes to a society that is built on respect, where diversity and religious freedom of thought and action is appreciated. It has been argued that one of the core aims of RE is to develop religious literacy within society. Conroy and Lundie (2015) claim that RE has not achieved this in the UK, for example. Religious literacy is most important in a pluralist society, where people should have the opportunity to wonder about their own beliefs and those of their friends in their shared learning environment. McGrady (2014) stresses that the concept of "freedom of" comprises "freedom for" and "freedom from" religion and that all must be accommodated within every form of RE. This point is echoed by the Council of Europe (2014 p.28).

2.2 Voice

Children must be active participants in, not merely objects of, their education. This moves from schooling determined traditionally by adult concerns to education focused more on the life of the child (Fleming, 2015; Dillen, 2014; Miller-McLemore 2006). Qvortup (1994) states that children should be seen as "beings" rather than "becomings" and should be regarded as active participants in the own lives. This is also true when it comes to conducting research with children. Accepting that children must be active participants influences how the research views the children and childhood influences and how the children engage in the research process (Kellett et al. 2004). It prompts a move from a view of children as objects of research to a group with views and perspectives that are valid and are worth hearing, and as rights holders in society, entitled to have their views regarding their own lives heard (Clarke and Moss 2001; Christensen and James 2017). Fielding and Mc Gregor (2015) highlight the importance of the voice being both dialogue and action, with discussion on issues that are relevant to the parties involved. In this study, that means the children and their views on religion and RE.

2.2.1 Student Voice

Recent Irish policy and legislation supports the rights of children: the passing of the *Education Act 1998* and the *Children's Act 2001*; the establishment of the National Children's Office in 2001; the appointment of a Children's Minister in 2008; and the *Thirty-First Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Act 2012,* a constitutional imperative to strengthen the rights of the child in Ireland. Children are taking their place as valued

members of society, with rights that must be heard, cared for and respected. The journey to this place where children's voices are heard has been a long one and is well documented by Ruddock and Flutter (2000). Dewey's *Democracy and education* (1916) states that education should have both an individual and societal purpose thus applying the principle of democratic society to education. Dewey seeks to transform child-voice, hitherto virtually silent, and so the role of the child as a co-constructor of knowledge becomes central to the progressive educational practice advocated by him (Dewey 1916). The twentieth century has been identified as the century of the child with child-centred ideologies underpinning and informing legal, welfare, medical and educational policy (James and Prout 1997).

The first formal Declaration on the Rights of the Child was in 1924. This, along with other significant movements, lead to the UNCRC in 1989 (UN 1989). The UNCRC is made up of forty-one articles in total. These seek to improve the life experiences of children throughout the world, including their living conditions and education. The UNCRC states in Article 12 that children have the right to have their opinions considered and their views respected in decision-making that affects them (UN 1989). However, while inclusion of the voice of the child is articulated as a key principle in international education policy and practice contexts today, ensuring that the child's voice is meaningfully included and, moreover, responded to continues to challenge educational systems (Deegan 2015). Deegan questions whether educators are truly convinced of the value in their practice of the child's voice. A democratic educational system acknowledges the importance of the child's voice and recognises that prioritising "participation" enhances children's self-esteem and confidence, promotes their overall development and develops their sense of autonomy, independence, social competence and resilience (Martin and Forde et al. 2015; Whitebread and O'Sullivan, 2012; Rinaldi 2012; Landsdown, 2005). Deegan's concern is addressed by Ring et al. (2016). Their study entitled *An examination of concepts of school readiness among parents and educators in Ireland* found that:

> young children can provide valuable insights into how they perceive their early years' education experiences and underline the importance of embedding a pedagogy of voice and a pedagogy of listening for children from the beginning. (Ring and O'Sullivan 2018, p.6)

The principles of democracy and child voice are key focuses of the pedagogy of listening articulated and embraced the view of the children. This study is particularly interested in the child's opinions (UN 1989, Article 12) and his/her freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion (UN 1989, Articles 13 and 14). Morrison (2007) notes that some

schools use pupil or student voice, as it suits, to the advantage of their own agenda, and at other times, ignore the voice. This is mirrored in Fielding and Rudduck's concern. They state that the:

> key issue is whose voice can be heard in the acoustic of the school, and by whom. Moreover, how what is said gets heard depends not only on who says it, but also on style and language. (Fielding and Rudduck 2002, p.2)

Echoing Fielding and Rudduck, one of the criticisms of the UNCRC is the fact that children themselves were not involved in drafting it (Hill and Tisdall 1997). Notwithstanding this, the UNCRC endeavours to ensure that children are heard on issues that are relevant to them.

2.2.2 Environment for Accessing Student Voice

A model to access this voice is offered by is Laura Lundy at the School of Education, Queen's University, Belfast. Lundy has developed a rights-based model of child participation that is beneficial to all education settings. It is consequently germane to this study. Lundy's model focuses on ensuring all children's views are valued and respected (Lundy 2007).

Figure 2.1: The Lundy Model of Participation (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2015, p.21)

The Lundy Model of Participation (Figure 2.1) highlights four components that are necessary to ensure that Article 12 of the UNCRC is achieved. The components are: space,

voice, audience and influence. Lundy (2007) suggests that children should be given space through the provision of safe and familiar location, in which the children are:

(1) encouraged to express their views and are given opportunities to both form and express their views on what matters to them;

(2) allocated a voice through being facilitated in expressing their views freely (this is not dependant only on their ability to form their position, whether it be mature or not);

(3) assured of their voices being heard by an audience and given due weight, as they have a right to be heard by those who have power to make decisions;

(4) assured of having their views responded to in order that they understand that their views have influence in their environment. (Lundy 2007)

2.2.3 Children's Voice in Irish Research

Ireland is a signatory to the UNCRC (UN 1989). With a focus on the importance of the child in national policy through the establishment of the various governmental initiatives referred to in Section 2.2.1, many agencies and intuitions in the past decade have engaged in accessing the voice of the child in education through a rights-based approach to research. This can be seen from the following examples of research projects and initiatives of relevant government departments and agencies: *An examination of concepts of school readiness among parents and educators in Ireland* (Ring et al. 2016); *Better outcomes, brighter futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020* (DCYA 2014); *National strategy on children and young people's participation in decision-making 2015-2020* (DCYA 2015) and the *Whole School Evaluation* (2006) inspection process which now includes a section where the views of the children in the school are gathered.

Growing Up in Ireland (ESRI 2008) is a significant, longitudinal study being conducted currently in Ireland. It researches children's opinions and accesses their voice. The project started in 2006 and is at present in phase 2 (2015-2019). This seven-year project, which is following the progress of 8,500 9-year-olds and 11,000 9-month-olds, describes itself in the following terms:

> *Growing Up in Ireland* is designed to describe and analyse what it means to be a child in Ireland today and to understand the factors associated with children's well-being, including those affecting their physical health and development, their social, emotional and behavioural well-being, and their educational achievements and intellectual capacities. (ESRI 2013, p.8)

This study, demonstrating the value Irish society currently places on young people, claims it will address "all aspects of children and their development" (ibid., p.8). Nevertheless, the spiritual and religious lives of children are not included.

Indeed, little research has focused on the voice of children in Irish RE at primary level (O'Farrell 2016; Kitching and Shanneik 2015; ESRI 2010; Kennedy 1999). Kitching and Shanneik's work (2015), *Children's beliefs and belonging: a schools and families report* was a subsection of a larger project, *Making communion: disappearing and emerging forms of childhood in Ireland's schools, homes and communities*. It focused on children aged between 4 and 8 and found that moral principles, formal religious knowledge, traditional obligations and sacred practices were very much guided by the adults in their environment (Kitching and Shanneik 2015, p.11). This concurs with a similar study by Beste (2011) in the USA. O'Farrell (2016) conducted research with children aged 10-11, using Jerome Berryman's (1991) Godly Play, and looked at their experiences of a process providing opportunities for spiritual expression and development. O'Farrell found that the children valued the opportunity to engage with Godly Play and hence to develop their spirituality. She also highlighted the value that the children placed on having the space to engage in this at a deep level, noting that they:

> exhibited a sense of agency in matters of the spirit and claimed the importance of God in their lives regardless of whether those at home held God in the same regard. (O'Farrell 2016, p.140)

Both of these Irish studies suggest that children can provide valuable insights into how they perceive the world in relation to religious and spiritual matters, thus concurring with the findings of Ring and O'Sullivan (2016) in relation to early years' education in Ireland. The next section explores Julia Ipgrave's work on a dialogical rights-based approach to accessing student voice within RE.

2.2.4 Ipgrave: An Approach to Accessing Children Voice in Research
In many countries around the world, the educational system plays a key role in the transmission of religious and secular values and beliefs, and this feeds into the civic society in which the students engage. This is done in a variety of ways: through formal instruction in a religious tradition; celebrations of various rituals and traditions and sociocultural questions. Internationally, it is widely recognised that children not only have their own views (Ipgrave et al. 2009; O'Grady 2006; Ipgrave 2004; Schweitzer 2004) but that their voice must be heard and respected (Lundy 2007). It is also important to place children's voices within the wider context of the world they engage in, namely in families, civic and

social participation, in both a national and international context. In the UK, this model of accessing all aspects of the person's life to build community is part of community cohesion and social harmony, attempting to bring people of various religious and cultural backgrounds together to promote friendship and peace (Ipgrave 2009). It is within this social context that people begin to explore their religious identity and come to an articulation of it.

2.2.4.1 Student Voice and Religion in the Work of Julia Ipgrave

Ipgrave is an emerging theorist in student voice and is influenced by the work of Jackson and his interpretive approach, as out lined in Section 2.1.1.1. She claims that all RE should lead to religious understanding that is in context, in terms of what the people understand about religion and about God. She claims too that RE should be a place where people engage in active meaning-making for their lives (Ipgrave et al. 2009).

2.2.4.2 Ipgrave and Dialogue

Arising from her experience as a class teacher in Leicester, Ipgrave became interested in the interaction of children of different backgrounds. She began to research the religio-cultural and theological influences that they had on each other within the class setting. She was particularly interested in whether this led to the formation of new ideas through the engagement (Ipgrave 2002). It was because of this work that she began her pedagogical work on dialogue.

 In the modern RE class, dialogue is a key methodology that allows the pupils to explore their values and belief systems. Ipgrave (2013) argues that it is vital for teachers to be aware of the "meaning-making" that is taking place through such dialogue. She also contends that it is important to be more in tune with the way that the pupils are assimilating their religious knowledge. For Ipgrave, children become the "prompter, chair, interviewer and questioner as well as providing information when required" (McKenna, Ipgrave, Jackson 2008, p.19) and they are active collaborators in the community of learning. She is especially influenced by the work of Bakhtin (1981) and his concept of the "living word". This concept is built upon the awareness that:

> at any given time in any given place there will be a set of conditions…that will ensure that a word uttered in that place at any time will have a meaning different than it would have in any other condition. (Bakhtin 1981, p.426)

Because of this, Ipgrave became more focused on what the children have to say – language – rather than on the representation of their lives through the material they create. Bakhtin

emphasizes the importance of the social setting of people, and how this influences their words, and the meaning that those words then hold: "one's own discourse is gradually and slowly wrought out of others' words that have been acknowledged and assimilated" (Bakhtin 1981, p.428). Ipgrave acknowledges that, as her work takes place in a school setting, she cannot know the exact social setting in which the children first encountered the words. However, she can focus her analysis on where the words are used in the context of the activity that is taking place. Bakhtin's idea of place and context highlights diversity and change in social settings. This is key in the work of Ipgrave. The value of Bakhtin's work to Ipgrave rests in the identification of the many understandings that can be given to a word, depending on where it is spoken:

> no word stands alone but relates in a chain of meaning to a whole history of the already spoken, as well as to the response it anticipates, for example God, only one God; lots of Gods; other people's Gods; God as real; God as not real; Allah; Jesus and so on. (Ipgrave 2002, p.206)

Ipgrave contends that a conflict of value is evident in the word "God", depending on the situation, history and person using the word.

2.2.4.2.1 The Religious Understanding of Minority Non-Muslim Children in a Predominantly Muslim Inner-city Area

Ipgrave (2002) carried out her work on the inter-influence of children from Muslim, Hindu and Christian backgrounds in her multi-cultural primary school in the city of Leicester. From this developed an approach to RE based on the process of conducting the research and on her ultimate findings. Her pedagogy is built on children's ability to engage with religious questions and to use religious language to which they are exposed through their interactions with other children in school. She suggests that the teacher often acts in the role of facilitator, prompting and clarifying questions. Considerable agency is allowed to pupils who are regarded as co-constructors of knowledge in teaching and learning. Ipgrave contends that her approach raises children's self-esteem, provides opportunities to develop critical skills, allows children who struggle academically to express themselves and generates a climate of moral seriousness through the discussion of basic human questions (Ipgrave 2001; 2004).

A threefold approach to dialogue has been developed by Ipgrave, through her research project, and has been incorporated into her pedagogical work:

- Primary dialogue is the acceptance of diversity, difference and change.

- Secondary dialogue involves being open to, and positive about, difference – being willing to engage with difference and to learn from others.
- Tertiary dialogue is the actual verbal interchange between children. (Ipgrave 2002, p.212)

Discussion and debate are the basic activities involved. Throughout, the approach encourages personal engagement with ideas and concepts from different religious traditions and children are encouraged to justify their own opinions and to be reflective about their contributions. When they arrive at their conclusions, they are challenged to see how they came to them and also to appreciate the possibility of alternative opinions and to being open to the position of others. Ipgrave extends this approach using email communication between children from different backgrounds in schools in Leicester and East Sussex (McKenna et al. 2008).

2.2.4.3 Faith of Participants in Dialogue

Ipgrave's work focuses on dialogue and children's understanding of religious difference in their communities. However, as her work develops, she begins to emphasize the faith element of the participants within these encounters. She points out that, while religious diversity is an interesting topic for an RE class, one must be mindful of those who are engaging in it. She stipulates that during dialogue sessions participants must "distinguish between personal criticism and criticism of ideas" (Ipgrave, 2002). However, this does not cover cases in which those ideas are constitutive of identity, bound to a personal faith or to a sense of relationship with a personal God, to family, to community, to tradition. Beliefs should not be treated as ideas in isolation from these identities and relational factors. It is for this reason that she looks outside the normal practices of school dialogue to the traditions of interfaith dialogue in the wider society. Interfaith dialogue means adhering to one's beliefs while simultaneously trying to understand another's faith (Ipgrave 2012). With this in mind, she suggests four players in the interfaith dialogue: I, We, You and God.

2.2.4.3.1 The "I" Statements

The "I" suggests a place of stability, a cognitive understanding for all pupils of their own tradition, their own identity, their own belief system. It is their starting place and they must be respected for it and adhere to it during the dialogue. This contrasts with Mercer's formula for classroom dialogue. This influenced Ipgrave in her earlier work. Mercer (2000) advocates that, instead of "holding on" and protecting their own identities and interests, pupils are encouraged to "let go" and move on to "new and better ways". This idea of stability in the "I" does not mean that people cannot change their perspectives, even,

ultimately, to conversion. However, this should not be the primary aim or outcome of the conversation. Ipgrave (2013) draws attention to the importance of guarding against a form of neo-confessional secularism that has been adopted by some schools in the UK in recent years as a partner of the critical approach to RE. She quotes educator Michael Hand who has argued that pupils should be actively encouraged "to question the religious beliefs they bring with them to the classroom" so that "they are genuinely free to adopt whatever position on religious matters they judge to be best supported by the evidence" (Hand 2004, p.162). Ipgrave says that some teachers she has interviewed have spoken of "liberating pupils from the religious certainties they bring from home" (Ipgrave, 2016). Ipgrave suggests that challenging pupils' religious identities and beliefs in this way is beyond the remit of the school system. She goes as far as to say that doing this shows ignorance of the contexts of tradition, of community and of prayer in which faith is developed. She further contends that personal religious faith is misunderstood or even trivialised if it is treated as something that can be decided by classroom debate (Ipgrave 2016).

Focusing on what the pupils know, experience and believe from their own perspectives, rather than arguing about the truth or otherwise of a religious proposition, is a way to value their identity and respect their integrity (Ipgrave 2016). This does not mean that critical thinking is misplaced in religious dialogue. In selecting the words, illustrations, stories, symbols and metaphors to articulate their ideas, in analysing them to uncover deeper meaning, in exploring links between their beliefs, practices, experiences, feelings and values, pupils can exercise and articulate, to a high level, a critical thinking that builds on, rather than disregards, personal faith. In this way, the pupils not only "hold on" to their identity but deepen their understanding of that to which they are "holding on" and improve their capacity to articulate that understanding. For Ipgrave, the "I", as a place of stability, is an important starting point for the pupils.

2.2.4.3.2 The "We" Statements

Ipgrave stresses the importance of using "I" language rather than "we" language. The placing of the "I" above the "we" recognises the status of all young people as individuals with their own thoughts, opinions and beliefs. It also acknowledges the internal diversity of any religious tradition, which means that what young people say about their religious position and practice cannot be taken as representative of the whole tradition, as they may have limited knowledge of that tradition. Ipgrave (2016) argues that the "I" is powerful and should be given due recognition. She also claims that the "we", too, has an important place in interreligious dialogue. She notes that pupils asked to talk in "I" terms about their

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religious practices and beliefs will naturally slip into "we" language. This example of a boy describing to his email dialogue partner his celebration of Eid is a case in point:

> I have a festival it is called Eid. We wear new clothes. We respect our god by praying salaat, furthermore we get exesize (*sic*) from doing it. The boys pray inside a building named the mosque and the girls pray inside the house. We love our festival a lot. (McKenna et al. 2008, p.86)

Insisting on "I" is to neglect the communal experience, so important to the religious lives of many. Interfaith dialogue is not just interpersonal but is also intercommunal. It is not just a dialogue between individuals but between communities. All participants in interfaith dialogue bring to it their own internal dialogue with the tradition to which they belong.

2.2.4.3.3 The "You" Statements

The "you" statements provide another window into the conversation that takes place between the pupils. Ipgrave (2016) claims that the "you" is in fact respecting the "otherness of other". In claiming this, she is developing what is found in the guidelines for interfaith dialogue in the UK, which state:

> dialogue and co-operation can only prosper if they are rooted in respectful relationships which do not blur or undermine the distinctiveness of different religious traditions. (Inter Faith Network 2014)

Jackson, in his approach, tends to move towards unbounded systems of faith. Ipgrave proposes the importance of maintaining distinctiveness and otherness. For Ipgrave, this becomes evident during her field research in a dialogue session with a mixed group of Hindu and Christian primary-aged children (Ipgrave 2009). During the dialogue, it appeared that the logic of friendship was required for the commonalty of belief for the children. The Christians wanted their friends to move towards a more monotheistic position: "But one day will your…temple stick to one god one day, any day?" (Ipgrave 2009) They also wanted to know which Hindu god's name could be applied to the one god they knew. The persistence of the Christian children in their attempts to make one god of all the Hindu gods, though kindly meant, had a rather domineering character. They exhibited a desire to fit their partners' religion into their own framework and an inability to accept their dialogue partners as "you".

The challenge is for children to be respectful and to learn to be comfortable with difference and not to find it threatening, either to their own religion or to that of their dialogue partners. Young children can be prepared for this by being encouraged to identify and discuss differences between faiths, which can easily become obscured by an overemphasis on

similarities. Ipgrave (2016) sees this as a contribution to the restoration of the religious literacy that Davie (2010) claims is lost.

2.2.4.3.4 The "God" Statements

Ipgrave introduces her final dialogue partner in the conversations that take place in an interfaith context, and this is "God", which is also cited by Watson and Thompson (2007) as a telling metaphor used in RE. In introducing this notion of a "God", she acknowledges that the term is very much contested within religious traditions and that it does not hold a transcendent understanding in all religions, as it does in her own Christian faith tradition. However, she does acknowledge that this idea of God needs to be explored further in her future work (Ipgrave 2016). With the introduction of "God", Ipgrave recognises that all the other players in the dialogue ("I", "you" and "we") do not cause much controversy for people, but "God" does, as many would dispute the existence of God. She calls for tolerance and openness about the place of "God", and notes that for some "God" is a vital part of their conversation and allows people to learn about and from the other in promoting a respectful society.

She suggests that at times, when one comes across hesitation among pupils about engaging with the ideas of other religions, it is not a reluctance to engage with the other but a fear or uncertainty on behalf of the pupil about whether such activity is pleasing to God. Ipgrave (2012; 2013; 2016). In earlier research projects with primary school children, Ipgrave notes their willingness to introduce God into the conversation and to talk about God in a way that reflects their relationship with Him: "I love Jesus", "I know my God's good", "My God made me". Some of the conversations within these projects move beyond the facts about God to wondering more about the nature and purpose of God within the religious traditions. Ipgrave claims that these conversations are theological and can be classed as "God-Talk", described by John Mac Quarrie as being "when religious faith becomes reflective" (Mac Quarrie 1967, p.19).

Ipgrave might indeed take cognisance of the work of Watson and Thompson (2013) concerning the literal interpretation of the word "God". According to them, the concept of God as "father" has either positive or negative connotations for some people. They remind readers that it is questionable theology to describe God as either male or female. It must be remembered, however, that the phrase "God as a loving father" is not meant to be interpreted literally but is intended to convey the positivity of the relationship that many share with their fathers.

2.2.4.3.5 Four Dialogue Categories

At this point in her work, Ipgrave claims that these four dialogue categories can help to bring about a greater religious literacy among children, as they develop into active members of society:

The "I" is learning to articulate one's own experiences and ideas about religion; "we" is making connections between one's own experiences and ideas and the wider tradition; "you" is listening to the language of others, comparing and contrasting; and "God" is learning to talk about God and about transcendence (Ipgrave 2016).

For Ipgrave, respect and tolerance for another's point of view is not a theoretical or abstract concept. She claims it relates directly to the quality of interaction between the dialogue participants. Dialogical approaches emphasize critical thinking and reasoning but should not be categorized exclusively as a cognitive method. While much of Ipgrave's work is defined by words such as "dialogue" and "interreligious dialogue", Cullen (2006) questions the use of this term in RE and argues that the term "conversation" is being more appropriate to the type of interaction that is taking place during these sessions with children. Conversations break down barriers as they are about swapping the small details and sharing the small intimacies of everyday living, allowing glimpses into the life of another person. (Cullen 2006, p.994)

Interreligious dialogue requires a deep knowledge and ability to articulate one's own tradition (Donnelly 2003). Because of the ages and development of the children in this current study (Fowler's Stage 2), interreligious dialogue cannot be undertaken. Cullen's (2017) concept of conversation is more apt, while still maintaining Ipgrave's key world analysis of dialogue, as set out above.

2.3 Identity

How people think about themselves, others and the environment they live in reflects their identity. Erickson's (1968) definition of identity includes both individual and social-contextual dimensions and emphasizes identity as "a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity" (p.19) directed towards a personally chosen future. In this way, identity acts as an organising principle of self-categorisation, which focuses on coherence across values and roles and represents the relationship between what is cognitively understood and social relationships. The present study is focused on the religious aspect of identity.

2.3.1 Religious Identity

David Voas (2009) has described identity for a growing number of Europeans as one that is "neither religious nor completely unreligious". He considers that such people are of "fuzzy fidelity" (p.161). David Quinn, writing in *The Sunday Times*, sums up the Irish position: "We're too secular to be especially religious, and we're too religious to be especially secular" (Quinn 2017, p.15). Religious identity is, by its very nature, complex. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Identity*, it is defined as follows:

> Religious identity describes how a person or group understands, experiences, shapes, and is shaped by the psychological, social, political, and devotional facets of religious belonging or affiliation. There has not yet emerged a unifying theory of religious identity, but the plurality contained within the category has occasioned psychological, sociological, and political, as well as philosophical, theological, and tradition-centred, accounts of religious identity. (*Encyclopaedia of identity* 2010, p.631)

For the purposes of this study, the researcher takes religious identity to be the affiliation of a person to a religious or belief tradition that has shaped his/her world view and has been shaped by the environment and people around him/her. The European REMC suggests that for children it can be quite fluid (ESRI 2010). Children can hold views similar to, or different from, those of their parents or other significant adults in their lives and can also be influenced by the environment around them. Religious identity must be placed within a social context. Hemmings (2011) outlines four areas that are worth noting: affiliation and belonging; behaviours and practices; beliefs and values and religious and spiritual life. He claims that exploring each of these offers a holistic and in-depth view of a person's religious identity. This concurs with Bradford (1999) who views engagement with community-sharing worship, in addition to sharing the story of others and their faith tradition, as key to the development of religious identity. Ipgrave (2009) identifies community and personal relationships as key to articulating religious identity through social cohesion. All emphasize knowledge of one's own faith as the starting point. This is then developed through engagement with faith communities, while concurrently availing of opportunities to engage with other religious traditions, where possible. It is within this social context that people begin to explore their religious identity and thus come to articulate it (Jackson 2007). For this study, the focus is on social identities and environment.

2.3.2 Religious Identity and the Voice of Children

In the past two decades, Ireland has become ethnically and religiously diverse, with people from around the world making their homes in both urban and rural communities (Kitching et al. 2015). With this comes the issue of religious identity and the part it plays in Ireland

(CSO 2017, Figure 1.1). The current body of research highlights the connection between social identities and religious identity. Quantitative studies have shown that boys tend to demonstrate a lower level of religious observance than girls (Smith et al. 2003; Francis 2001; Kay and Francis 1996). This is replicated in qualitative studies, and in areas such as religious understanding, experience and attitudes (ESRI 2010; Levitt 2003). Studies tend not to offer definitive results on the part that age plays within religious identity. Francis (2001) suggests that younger people become less religious as they get older, while Smith et al. (2003) argue that age does not really play a major part. However, the current research submits that age and gender are indeed linked to the religious identity of children.

Some qualitative studies have been carried out on minority and ethnic communities in Ireland (Gilligan et al. 2010; Lodge 2004). Nevertheless, quantitative research has not been done in the area of religion and beliefs with children of this age. Some research has been done with older children, focusing particularly on children in post-primary schools. For example, research undertaken in 2014 by McGuckin et al. considers the religious socialisation of young people in Ireland. This research explores several data sources compiled between 2010 and 2011 that give insight into the lives of young people and religion. Finding that 75% of parents have an influence on their children's religious socialisation, which in turn gives the children certainty, they conclude that parents are a major influence in fostering the religious identity of their children (McGuckin et al. 2014, p.242). The most recent large-scale study suggests a change in the intervening years, specifically regarding the prominence of parents in the development of religious identity. This study, conducted by Francis et al. (2016) considers groups of "Catholic females, aged between 13 and 15 years, in the Republic of Ireland and in Scotland: the intersectionality of religious identity, religious saliency and nationality". This research delineates how differently members of the groups react to issues of belief, identity and family influences. Overall, Catholic females in Ireland, though not attending church on a regular basis, have a positive attitude towards prayer and evince a belief in God and an afterlife but are less likely to talk about religion in their lives. Some 90% of those who cite their religious identity as being important to them recognise that religion is also important to their grandparents who are seen as vital in the passing on of faith (Francis et al. 2016, p.81). This study suggests also that female members of a family are seen as more influential in fostering religious identity than males. In all 75% of respondents recorded the importance of female relatives in this respect, whereas just 57% noted the impact of males (ibid., p.81).

Looking beyond Ireland, some work has been completed in ethnicity and religion, with the focus on the using of labels (Smith 2005; Buamann 1996). On exploring further, the connection between national, cultural and religious identity begins to emerge (Valentine et al. 2009). While there is some research in the areas of social identity and religious identity, it is worth noting that little has been done in these areas with regard to social class, sexuality and people with special educational needs. Social class impacts on how people interact with the world around them and this too plays a part in religious identity. Francis (2000), Kay and Francis (1996), and Wallace et al. (2003) have explored ideas of social class, religious observance and church attendance. One such project carried out by Leslie Francis (2000), using "The Teenage Religion and Values Inventory" developed by Francis and Kay (1996) to assess Bible reading, was completed by 33,134 pupils between the ages of 13 and 15, in 185 schools. The schools were a cross-section of all school types on offer in England and Wales. Using the social class classifications of parental occupation, as defined by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, Francis found that the Bible was more likely to be read by those from professional or semi-professional backgrounds.

The school environment and curriculum are key in developing identity, especially considering Article 29 (d) of UNCRC (UN 1989). This convention advocates:

> the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin. (UN 1989)

Several quantitative studies have shown that the environment influences identity and that the religious climate and denomination of the school plays a part in this (Barrett et al. 2007; Kay and Francis 1996). The school curriculum, both formal and informal, plays a key role in how religious difference within community is dealt with, particularly among those of minority faith traditions, when there is a gap between prescribed values and reality (Ipgrave 2009; Ipgrave et al. 2008).

Quantitative studies have found that friends and peers impact on how children develop their religious identity and their religious practices (Smith and Denton 2005) and on how they conform to religious norms in their communities. Many of these interactions influence their understanding of the world and can form reasons for religious and non-religious practices (Day 2009). Ipgrave in McKenna et al. (2008) place friends and peers at the core of religious identity and social cohesion in that the latter can provide information about other traditions and realities.

In the Irish context, Ó Féich and O'Connell (2015) published an article entitled "Changes in Roman Catholic beliefs and practices in Ireland between 1981 and 2008 and the emergence of the liberal Catholic". This article outlined the quantitative study undertaken by them which investigated the changes that occurred in religious beliefs over a period of 27 years. The study focused on those who identified themselves as Catholic (N=3810). Using data derived from twenty-three religious indicators and social contexts from the European values study (EVS), the researchers found that these religious indicators were in decline in Ireland during this period. The study also found that personal religiosity during this period remained the same or rose slightly while at the same time there was a decline in the importance Catholics placed on both religion and God in their lives. When this is compared with a subsection of the data set, "Catholic Attitudes towards Social Issues", one finds a move to a more liberal stance over this period. It appears, therefore, that data regarding personal religiosity and social identity are somewhat contradictory. This research is of interest to the present study, as it reflects the views and practices of the people with whom the children in this study interact during their lives. It also gives a snapshot of the homes of these children. It seems reasonable to suggest that, because schools are microcosms of society that reflect both global and local identities (Levin 2004; Haupt, 2010), it is likely that the profile of students coming into schools will therefore be less religious and more secular.

2.4 Conclusion

This literature review has focused on the three areas that are pertinent to this study: RE, voice and identity. The voice of the child is an important one that needs to be heard in the world of RE in Ireland. The literature has shown that this must be framed with an appreciation of the spiritual and religious development, along with the social and religious context of the child. Children's sense of belonging in the world, and their identities, are linked to, and shaped by, those around them, the religious beliefs they encounter and the way in which that is nurtured. For some, this leads into a faith community but for others it does not. Irrespective of faith, in a pluralist society, children must be given the opportunity to learn about and from the religious and belief traditions of others in their communities, particularly their school settings. This is placed within a rights-based agenda under the UNCRC (UN 1989). While some Irish studies have focused on children's views on religion and RE, to date no study has been carried out in one site with children of varied religions and beliefs. The present study addresses this gap, drawing an interreligious, interbelief

group together in conversation in an Irish classroom. The next chapter outlines how this was co-ordinated and the methodology employed for the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

Thomas Kuhn's contends that:

> Inquirers always work within a paradigm – a framework that determines the concept that are used and that also contains exemplars, or model inquiries, which direct attention toward some problems as being key and away from other problems regarded (from that perspective) as somewhat trivial. (Kuhn, 1996 p.67)

This chapter outlines the underlying understandings that guided the choice of methodology, the data gathering, analysis, methods of validation employed and the researcher's collaboration with his co-researchers during this study.

3.1 Assumptions and Rationale for Research Design

The research design underpinning this study is as follows: interpretivist paradigm, qualitative methodology and case study approach.

All research is interpretive. It is guided by the researcher's own beliefs and feelings about the world and about how it should be understood and studied (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p.22). As an educator, this researcher holds a very strong belief in the agency of each person, in particular that of the child, in his/her education. He has been particularly convinced of the agency of children, of their ability and right to shape their own environment, and of their potential, capacity and entitlement to be active agents in the learning that takes place within that environment. These rights, articulated in UNCRC (Article 12, 13, 14, UN 1989), are at the core of this study.

3.1.1 Conceptual Foundations of the Research

This study explores the voice of children in a Catholic primary school classroom in Ireland regarding religion and RE. It is qualitative in nature. This type of research comes from a post-positivist, constructive, inductive and interpretive position (Creswell 2014, 2012, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Bryman 2001). Qualitative research is, by its very nature, interactional and is based upon concepts, ideas and words. Its ontological position is subjective in nature: the views of the individual are seen as unique and therefore not generalizable (Cohen et al. 2007). The relationship between the researcher and the participants, and in this case co-researchers (Section 3.3.1), is interactional in nature and can extend over a period, allowing relationships to be formed. This is particularly relevant

with regard to educational settings. In this study, it has been key to build relationships that allow data, particularly of the unspoken word, to be generated. According to Denzin and Lincoln, "Action research is based on the premise that professional knowledge is important and can be valuable, but local knowledge is a necessary ingredient in any research" (2005, p.150). Local knowledge of the attitude and worldview of the participants, and of its contextualisation, is central to analysing what they are saying. It is anticipated that the material generated by the researcher and his co-researchers (the children) will lead to a comprehension of "multiple realities" (Creswell 2007, p.16) and will serve to inform policymakers and educators in Ireland.

This study falls within the parameters of interpretivism, which is described as follows:

> Interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them. (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991, p.11)

In this approach, it is argued that there are no correct or incorrect theories, but rather, theories should be judged according to how interesting they are to the researcher and to the society of which they are a part (Walsham 1995). The constructs come from an in-depth examination of the field of interest, the phenomenon of study, in this case the voice of children on religion and RE within an Irish classroom. Gephart (1999) argues that people who hold this perspective assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation and that there is no objective knowledge that is independent of thinking or human reasoning. One of the keystones of this approach is that reality can only be accessed through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meaning (Myers 2009). It is underpinned by interpretation and observation. However, to observe is just to collect information, whereas to interpret is to make meaning and to draw inferences from the material (Aikenhead 1997). The interpretive paradigm stresses the need to put analysis in context and is concerned with understanding the world as it is from the perspective of the subjective reality of the individual.

> The interpretivist rejects generalization as a goal and never aims to draw randomly selected samples of human experience. For the interpretivist every instance of social interaction, if thickly described (Geertz 1973), represents a slice from the life world that is the proper subject matter for interpretive inquiry…every topic...must be seen as carrying its own logic, sense of order, structure and meaning. (Denzin 1983, pp.133-4)

The interest of interpretivists is not in the generation of a new theory but in judging or evaluating and refining interpretive theories. Walsham (1995) presents three different uses of theory in interpretive case studies: theory guiding the design and collection of data; theory as an iterative process of data collection and analysis and theory as an outcome of a case study. The use of theory as an iterative process between data collection and analysis has been applied in this research study. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), interpretivism is not a single paradigm; it is in fact a large family of diverse paradigms. The philosophical base of interpretive research is hermeneutics and phenomenology (Boland 1985). Emerging in the late nineteenth century, hermeneutics has become a major branch of interpretive philosophy, with Gadamer and Ricoeur arguably being its best-known exponents (Klein and Myers 1999). A dialogical approach to hermeneutics based on the work of Bakhtin (1981), Jackson (1997, 2004) and Ipgrave (1998, 2001, 2003, 2008) is used in this study.

3.2 Approach: Case Study

"Case studies are the preferred strategy when how or why questions are being posed and the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin 2009, p.27). A case study was consciously chosen as a research method to respond to the research question about understanding children's voices on religion and RE in a classroom in a Catholic primary school in modern Ireland. Qualitative in nature, the open-ended, reflexive and responsive approach facilitates the exploration of the children's perspectives, including their opinions regarding curricular changes proposed for RE in primary schools in Ireland.

Stake (1995) observes that a case study can capture the complexity of an individual case, appreciating the interaction of multiple variable, relationships and the pivotal role played by the context and situatedness of behaviour. Reflecting the "unique, complex, dynamic and unfolding interaction of events, human relations and other factors" (Cohen et al. 2000, p.289), the holistic design of a case study can illustrate a more detailed understanding of the perspective of the child, in this case his/her perceptions of RE. To fully capture the complex reality of the issue, multiple sources of data are generated and collected. Creswell (2007) points to the bounded nature of the phenomenon being studied. While the structure of the school community imposes a natural boundary, a case is also defined by the time available for data generation and the sampling procedures applied. This case is bounded by the participants, the children, and their voice which is the focus of the work. While the participating school offers a natural boundary to the study, it is not the subject of the case being explored.

The researcher was particularly interested in both the uniqueness and commonality that was to be found within the group. Adelman, Kemmis and Jenkins (1980) argue that case studies exist as a significant and legitimate research method. Each participant in the study is situated in a unique context. The use of case study methodologies allows probing in these situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis. The case study reports and investigates the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance. Geertz (1973) explains that case studies strive to portray what it is like to be in a particular situation; to catch the close-up reality and dense description of participants' lived experience of, thoughts about, and feelings for a situation. The case study "seeks to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors and consequently may be described as interpretive and subjective" (Cohen et al. 2011, p.181). Cohen et al. explain that a case study "provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories and principles" (ibid., p.181).

It is incorrect to define case studies as unsystematic or merely illustrative. Case study data are gathered systematically and rigorously. Nisbett and Watt (1984) caution case study researchers against using journalism, selective reporting, anecdotal style, pomposity and blandness. They suggest that case study researchers often pick out the more striking features of a case, thereby distorting the full account, to emphasize the more sensational aspects. Similarly, case study researchers, by selecting evidence that supports a particular conclusion, misrepresent the whole case. The data presented in Chapter 4 gives a vivid account of the participants in a non-selective manner. The description places the experiences of participants in a wider context than that of the school and provides the reader with a verbal portrait of the participants. Yin (2009) claims that case studies can offer "analytic" rather than "statistical" generalisations, by contributing to the expansion and generalisation of broader theory and thereby informing and guiding future research. This is achieved by comparing findings arising from the conceptual categories with the theoretical findings proposed in the literature review. It must be noted, however, that the purposeful sampling employed in the selection of the study school, in addition to the "idiographic" nature of case studies (Yin 2009, p.15), places limitations on the generalisability of the findings in the discussion of Chapter 4.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

In undertaking a case study, one of the fundamental aspects of the research is that no single method is sufficient to capture the essence of the phenomena. Data collection in case study

research is therefore carried out by means of multiple methods. Yin (1984) emphasizes the need for data to converge in a triangulating manner and suggests the utilisation of several sources including interviews, archival records, participant observation, direct observation, documentation and artefacts. The data for the case study were gathered using a variety of age appropriate methods, in oral form, along with several collages created by the co-researchers. At the beginning of each research session (Section 3.5), the researcher checked for accuracy of content from the previous session. Patton (1990, p.10) explains that qualitative data consists of "direct quotations from people about their experience, opinions, feelings and knowledge". Developing opportunities for conversations with young people in education has increased as a result in the interest in the study of young people's social practices and the impact of their engagement with their culture on their relationships with themselves and the world. In this study, it was decided to use two participatory methods to encourage conversations in the research setting and to develop these within semi- structured group interviews. The co-researchers were recorded on audiotape for analysis. These activities were designed to capture the richness of the conversations on RE. This discussion is a key method of data collection.

3.3.1 Co-researcher and Participatory Methods in Research

This study is built upon the rights of the child as delineated in the UNCRC (UN 1989), with a particular emphasis on Article 12 which states children have the right to express their views freely and to have due weight given to them in accordance with their maturity. As Freeman observes, this is significant "not only for what it says, but because it recognises the child as a full human being with integrity and personality and the ability to participate freely in society" (1996, p.3). Article 12 is seen as key in moving towards the active participation of children in research, rather than having them as the objects of research to be observed (Ring and O'Sullivan 2018; Clark 2010; Clark and Moss 2001). It also encapsulates the idea of choice for children, rather than obligation (Dillen, 2014; Lundy, McEvoy and Byrne 2011). However, many view the idea of co-researchers as just giving the children the tools to be data collectors, instead of having them engage in the substantive issue that underpins the research. The first session (explained in Section 3.5.1) focused on explaining the research project to the children and building on their capacity to engage with the project. In inviting the children to be co-researchers, and in accepting that not all would have similar aptitudes and abilities, various data gathering tools were chosen to support the individual in question. Thus verbal and non-verbal means of communication and visual and kinaesthetic approaches were adopted, as outlined in the following sections.

A study that invites co-researchers (children) to participate must ensure that they are part of the data interpretation so that the findings are grounded in the perspectives and experiences of the children, as opposed to an adult interpretation of the data (Dockett et al. 2013; Dillen and Pollefeyt, 2010; Dillen 2007). Having the co-researchers involved in the interpretation adds to the credibility of the findings within the study.

This study understands co-researchers not simply as data gatherers but as vital in shaping the study, in particular the analysis and interpretation of the data which gave rise to the specific findings of the project. This was achieved through constant feedback and conversation with the researcher at the end and beginning of each session. This allowed the co-researchers to analyse the outcomes of each session in a rigorous way and challenge any interpretation the researcher may have inadvertently imposed on the data. Working with the children as co-researchers allows the researcher to gain an insight into their world. It also enables their peers to appreciate aspects of their lives that may be otherwise ignored. This alone is a fulfilment of children's rights under the UNCRC.

3.3.2 Photovoice

The taking of photographs by children as a data gathering exercise has been recommended by many (Rasmussen 2014; Enright and O'Sullivan 2010a; Clark and Moss 2001). Photovoice has been described as "a powerful participatory action research method where individuals are given the opportunity to take photographs, discuss them collectively, and use them to create opportunities for personal and/or community change" (Enright and O'Sullivan 2010b; Einsarsdóttir 2007; Harrison 2002). "Voice", in the context of photovoice, clearly has political connotations and refers to both "the expression of feeling or opinion" and "having the right or opportunity to express an opinion" (Young and Barratt 2001; Wang and Burris 1997). Wang and Burris (1997) outline three goals of photovoice: to enable people to record and reflect on their community; to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues; and to bring about change. The taking of pictures was therefore used as a data gathering exercise in this study. Participants were invited to participate in a workshop which focused on the ethics of photographing other people. Basic photography skills with digital cameras were also explained. Participants were then invited to take photographs in response to a focus question, as set out in Section 3.5.1.

The children kept one copy of their photographs and the researcher retained a second. The photographs were used to support the discussion within the groups (Einarsdóttir 2007; Burke 2005). These conversations were audio recorded and later transcribed.

3.3.3 Scrapbooking

The second participatory method used was scrapbooking. Media educators and researchers have begun to use scrapbooks, sometimes called media diaries, as pedagogical and methodological tools to engage young people in generating and extending their knowledge of culture. More recently, physical educators and researchers have harnessed the potential of scrapbooking as a pedagogical and methodological tool to help researchers and teachers to better understand, extend and challenge students' existing knowledge of, and critical engagement with, popular physical culture. The purpose of scrapbooking is to enable the children to connect the dots between informal and formal sites of learning relating to physical activity, physical education, health and the body (Enright and O'Sullivan 2010b). During Session 3, the children were asked to design a poster that they would use to teach a topic in RE. This allowed them to highlight what was important to them and give the researcher an insight into their world and priorities in religion. Photographs taken by the children, school documentation, text from books, magazines and newspapers, screen prints from internet sites, drawings, stickers, and children's writing were all included in their scrapbooks. The scrapbooks constituted a data source for this study, as did audio recordings of the participants' focus group discussions around their own and other children's interpretations of the various scrapbook entries. Recordings were transcribed, and all data was inductively analysed and reviewed repeatedly, with the researcher looking for patterns, themes and regularities while identifying irregularities, paradoxes, nuances in meaning and constraints. Initial themes were constructed from the data and relayed back to the children to ensure that the researcher had accurately recorded their views.

3.3.4 Group Interview

Flick (2009) advocates group interviews, as they better reflect the way opinions are expressed and shared in a natural environment. They also provide opportunities for respondents to challenge or correct statements that are not socially shared or considered to be extreme. While Flick (2009) recommends that such groups should comprise strangers rather than friends, this did not apply to the present study, as the children were in class with each other each day and their relationship with each other was an essential part of the research. While the groups should ideally consist of four to eight people, those in this study comprised three, five and seven participants. Each of the groups had a mix of religious perspectives and levels of engagement with RE within the school and the wider community. This mix allowed for conversational depth. As with semi-structured interviews, a menu of questions was constructed. These, however, were intended as a guide rather than a rule.

Flick (2009) remarks that the volume of qualitative data generated from such a group, when carefully interpreted and utilised correctly, is highly valuable in any research study.

3.3.5 Interview Schedule

Interview schedules consisted of open-ended questions to encourage the participants' views and to allow for the development of thought and probing of responses. Robson (2002, p.41) explains that an interview schedule is "a shopping list" of questions and stresses the importance of including thought-provoking questions in semi-structured interviews. At all times, participants were put at ease. They were asked for their permission to record the interview and were reminded that they had the right to withdraw at any time.

3.4 Access and Sampling

3.4.1 Sampling

For this study, convenience sampling was used because the researcher had worked as a Diocesan Advisor for RE in the area in which the school is located. Though there were some initial issues with gaining access to a site for the research, the Catholic school where the study eventually took place proved apposite. The selected school was chosen on the basis of it's being representative of numerous large schools in urban centres whose pupil intake includes a mix of nationalities, religious and belief traditions and other worldviews.

3.4.2 Gaining Access

The researcher sent letters of invitation to principals of large schools in a county in the West of Ireland. He followed up with telephone calls to each school. Formal access was granted by one school through the Board of Management in consultation with the Principal and class teacher. Having completed the required letters of consent for the Board of Management (Appendix B), the Principal (Appendix C) and the class teacher (Appendix D), and after all the material was ready to send to the parents/guardians (Appendix E), the researcher was informed that Garda Vetting from his home institution was not valid for the site of research. A new vetting application had, therefore, to be made through the school. This delayed the research for several weeks. Once the new Garda Vetting had been returned, parents of forty-two children were contacted by letter through the school. Of these, consent was received for thirty-five children to participate in the study. These children were then invited to complete the necessary assent form, which explained the nature and purpose of the research (Appendix F).

3.4.3 Site, Setting and Participants

The study school is situated in an urban area. Some 480 pupils attend this co-educational primary school which is under the trusteeship of the Catholic Church. It is one of five such schools in the area, along with one Educate Together multi-denominational school. The area does not have a school under the trusteeship of any other faith tradition. While the research is based within a denominational school, the school has children of sixteen different nationalities and eight different religions. In addition, twenty-one children are identified as having unspecified belief systems, with a further ten having "no faith". The research was conducted, in two separate classrooms, with children from sixth-class, the most senior pupils in the school. The thirty-five children who were to participate in the research comprised a variety of belief traditions. In all, seven of these children belonged to the group who do not access the school's RE programme. Of the forty-two parents originally contacted through the school, seven withheld consent for their children to take part in the research. Of these seven children, one belonged to the Islamic faith while six were Catholic.
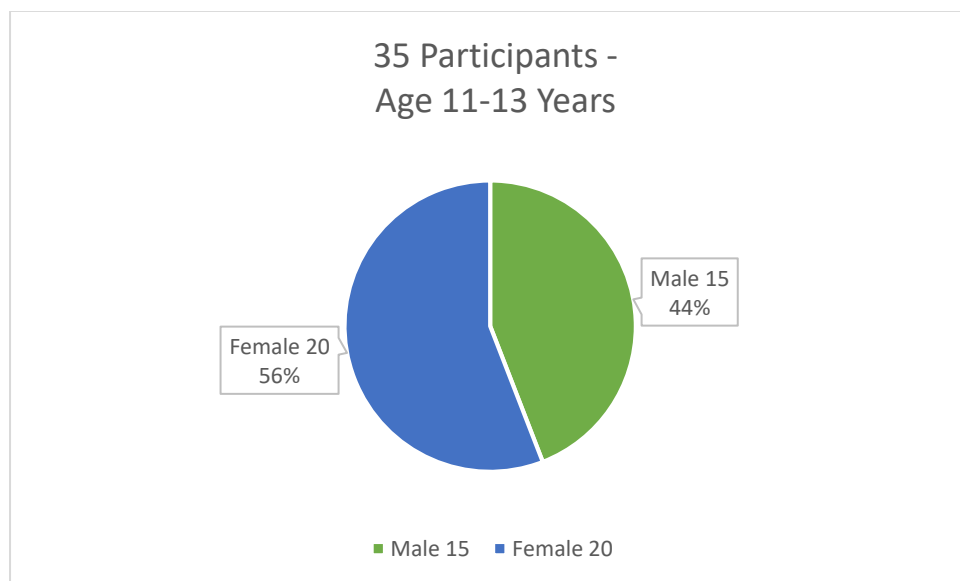
Figure 3.1: Participants in the Study

Vygotsky (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) believe that child-centred research should take place in a setting familiar to the child, rather than in a clinical laboratory setting. Similarly, Lundy (2007) identifies the importance of a safe space for the child to articulate their views. This research, therefore, was conducted in the children's classrooms.

3.4.4 Ethics

Conducting research with children can be challenging, as outlined by Dockett, Einarsdottir and Perry (2012) and Fargas-Malet et al. (2010). Ethical issues and their impact on children

were the two issues most pertinent to this study. Ethical approval for this project was granted by the Research Ethics Committee, Dublin City University (DCU) on 20 September 2016 (Appendix A). This was to ensure that the project adhered to high ethical standards in light of the involvement of what is classed as a vulnerable population.

Children are very willing to share information, at times without reflection. This was a concern for this project when something as personal as belief systems was being discussed. Broström (2005, cited in Dockett, Einarsdottir and Perry 2012, p.293) enquires if it is in the best interests of children to be in a situation where they can uncover parts of their private lives which they may not be comfortable about, after the fact. He also highlights the issue of a research agenda directed by adults invading the right of the child to privacy. These were concerns for the researcher. He reflected upon them and opted to use methodologies that were self-directed rather than adult directed. The children, therefore, could choose what they wanted to share, with the conversation being based largely upon material they brought to the conversation. When the recorded conversations had been transcribed, the researcher consulted the children. This allowed them children an opportunity to review what they had said, to decide whether it had been fairly represented and/or to clarify or withdraw any statements. The researcher spent a considerable amount of time with the children during each visit and so built a relationship with them. This was important as it led to trust between the researcher and his co-researchers. As observed by Green and Hill (2005, p.17): "time and trust go hand in hand".

3.4.5 Privacy and Confidentiality

Every effort was made to ensure the privacy of the school and of the participants, while the research was being conducted. The group activities took place in the base classroom and the group interviews look place in a quiet area of the school, during school hours. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, all names were removed from data generated. Recording of group discussions and interviews was carried out using a digital recorder. Immediately after the recording, the files were transferred to a computer hard drive and then transcribed. All files and transcriptions have been stored as encrypted files on a password-protected computer. Files on the digital recorder have been deleted. Photographs, once printed, were deleted from the cameras. Those retained by the researcher, are stored in a locked filing cabinet to which only the researcher has access.

3.5 Research Procedure

Data gathering consisted of five visits, each of approximately one and a half hours. In line with respect for anonymity and privacy, participants (including the researcher) were referred to, at all times, by their first names alone. The use of the children's first names in the research report would place each child at the centre of the research, as indeed the children were. It would further add vibrancy and immediacy to the report. However, all of this must be weighed against the children's rights. Because anonymity and privacy are imperative, the researcher has changed all first names used in this thesis. Every effort was made to match these names with the cultural and religious backgrounds of the children.

3.5.1 Session 1: Introduction

During the introductory session, the children were shown a video clip of the UNCRC (UN 1989) and a discussion took place around people's rights and it eventually led to reflection upon rights to thought, religion and conscience (Article 14) and freedom of expression (Article 12). The children were then introduced to the first data gathering tool, photovoice. This was framed within the ethics of taking photographs and what was appropriate and was not appropriate. The children were then given digital cameras and basic photography skills were explored. The children were invited to borrow the cameras for one week, to take pictures based on the following focus question:

> Embracing your right under Article 14 of the UNCRC, take pictures that express your religious views or beliefs, as well as celebrating the religion and beliefs of others in your world.

They returned the cameras to the class teacher a week later and the researcher then picked up and developed all of the photographs for Session 2.

3.5.2 Session 2: Photovoice

The children were divided into groups by their teacher, as per their usual classroom working groups, and each child was given the photographs they had taken. They were asked to create a poster that best expressed the religious view or beliefs of their group in the world. At the end, they presented the poster to the whole class. All conversations were audio recorded and later transcribed. The photographs were used as aids in their discussion. The children helped each other and the researcher to understand the meanings associated with their chosen images. At the close of the session, children were asked to collect material (photographs, pictures and newspaper and magazine cuttings) ahead of the following session.

3.5.3 Session 3: Scrapbooking

At the start of the session, the researcher gave feedback on his understanding of the conversation from the previous session, to check for accuracy. The children offered some clarification and amendments to what the researcher had noted. Once this was completed, they joined the same groups as for the previous session. During this session, they were invited to use materials that they had collected along with others provided by the researcher to create a poster on a topic they would like to teach their fellow pupils as part of an RE class. The objective of this was to see what were the children's priority issues regarding religion and beliefs. At the end of this session, they presented their work to the whole class.

3.5.4 Session 4: Group Interviews

When the researcher returned for the fourth time, he once again gave feedback on what he had understood from the conversation during the previous session, again checking for accuracy. After this, the children who had self-selected to be part of the group interviews were invited to go to a room that was identified by the class teacher for the process. Due to the number of children who volunteered, three groups were created ranging in size from three to seven. The interviews all began with a set number of questions, after which the conversation moved in whatever direction the group chose. In the room where the group interviews were held, all materials from the previous session were present on the table. At the beginning of the session two questions were asked by the researcher:

1. Can each of you pick five positive words to describe yourself? I will ask you to share them with the group in a few minutes if you are happy to.
2. What part of the work we have done together so far have you enjoyed and why?

3.5.5 Session 5: Review

On his final visit, the researcher relayed to the children what he had understood from their conversations across all the sessions. Once again, the children offered amendments and clarifications and these were taken on board by the researcher. During all the sessions, the conversations were audio recorded to be transcribed afterwards.

The sessions and data collection took place over a period of twelve weeks, due to the busy school schedule.

3.6 Data Analysis

This section discusses the analytical procedures applied to the data collected. Yin (2009, p.127) explains that: "the analysis of case study is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies". It is important, when engaging in a case study, that the researcher is aware, from the outset, of how the data is to be analysed. Geertz (1973) claims that while using an interpretive approach to research, "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to".

Multiple methods (photovoice, scrapbooking and group interviews) were employed to generate qualitative data during this case study. This study aims to explore the voice of children on religion and RE in an Irish Catholic primary school classroom. For this to happen, an appropriate qualitative data analysis method had to be chosen. Given the researcher's experience in RE, he chose thematic analysis. The researcher envisaged searching for rich patterns and themes across all the evidence gathered. Therefore Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was selected.

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis: Braun and Clarke

Straus and Corbin (1990) consider coding to represent the way data is deconstructed, conceptualised and restructured in a new way, leading to the development of theories to explain phenomena. To achieve this in this study, the researcher chose Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and he opted to use the software package *NVivo 11*. Thematic analysis' six phases of coding are outlined below in Figure 3.2, below.

Phase 1	•<u>**Familiarising yourself with the data**</u> •Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, jotting down initial ideas.
Phase 2	•<u>**Generating initial codes**</u> •Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
Phase 3	•<u>**Searching for themes**</u> •Collating codes into the potential themes, gathering the data relevant to each potential theme.
Phase 4	•<u>**Reviewing themes**</u> •Checking the themes application to realtion, the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map of the analysis.
Phase 5	•<u>**Defining and naming themes**</u> •Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall narrative by the analysis; generating clear definitions and names of each theme.
Phase 6	•<u>**Producing the report**</u> •The final opportunity for analysis. Selecting vivid, complling extracts, final analysis of selected extracts, relating them back to the analysis to the reserach question and literature, producing a scholarly report on the analysis.

(Braun and Clarke 2006, p.35)

Figure 3.2: Braun and Clarke Thematic Analysis

Phase 1 requires the researcher to read and reread, view and review the images, so as to become familiar with, and closer to, the data. During this process initial notes are taken. Once all the sources had been uploaded to *NVivo 11*, Phase Two, open coding began. Some 1,255 codes were created across ninety-seven categories, which were judged to be pertinent to the research question (Appendix H). As part of this process, both interviews and images

were coded. The images were coded using shadow coding, that is when a portion of the image is coded and the relevant vocal interpretation of the image is also indirectly coded, Figure 3.3.
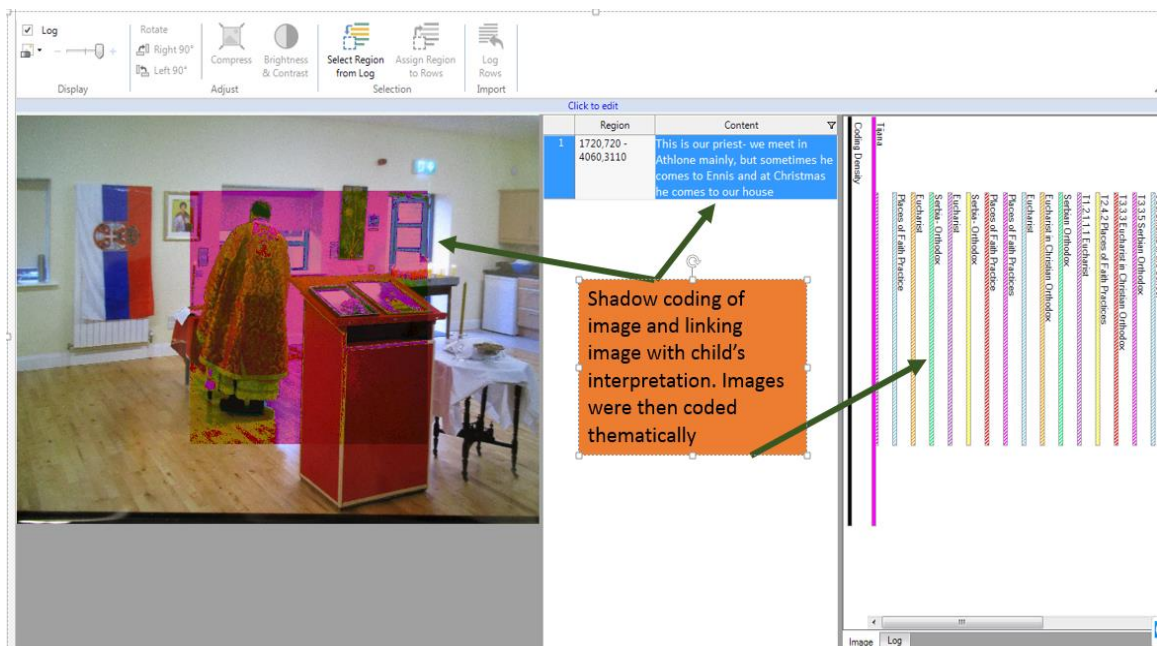
Figure 3.3: Shadow Coding in Phase 2

During the third phase of coding, codes that were similar were identified and brought together so that they could be coherently grouped to form a theme. At this stage, twenty-four categories were identified. Some of these were subsequently disregarded, as they did not include sufficient data to warrant further investigation. Additional coding was undertaken to ensure that no significant information in the data gathered was overlooked.

Phase 3 - Searching for Themes 94 open codes mapped to 24 categories	Interviews & Images Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
Belief - religious	13	44
Environment	11	14
Faith practice	8	41
Future of RE in children's lives	1	5
Important thoughts	2	6
Interesting facts about the others' faith	2	10
International Women's Day	1	1
Miracles	2	15
Non-verbal RE	6	7
People who influence faith-belief system	5	11
Prayer	10	27
Religious diversity	13	64
RE	3	40
Religious freedom	1	2
Sacramentals	5	7
Sacraments	4	11
Sacred texts	5	11
Saints and people of interest	5	10
School ethos	12	61
Social justice	2	2
What is RE	4	18
What would children teach in an RE class?	7	28
Being withdrawn from RE	2	9
Work for children withdrawn from RE	2	7

Table 3.1: Braun and Clarke's (2006) Phase 3 Searching for Themes

On completion of the third phase of coding which saw the creation of themes, a process of refining began in phase four. This involved two levels of reviewing and refining of the themes already created. Some themes were removed at this time, while others where integrated with more dominant themes. The fifth phase involved defining and naming themes. The following three were finally agreed: Religious Identity, Embracing Otherness and Religious Education and the Curriculum. These were chosen because of their relevance to the research question and because they reflected the story of research findings (Appendix G). The sixth and final phase involved choosing examples of transcripts and pictures that reflected the core of each theme and linking them to the literature that had been uploaded as a source to *NVivo 11*.
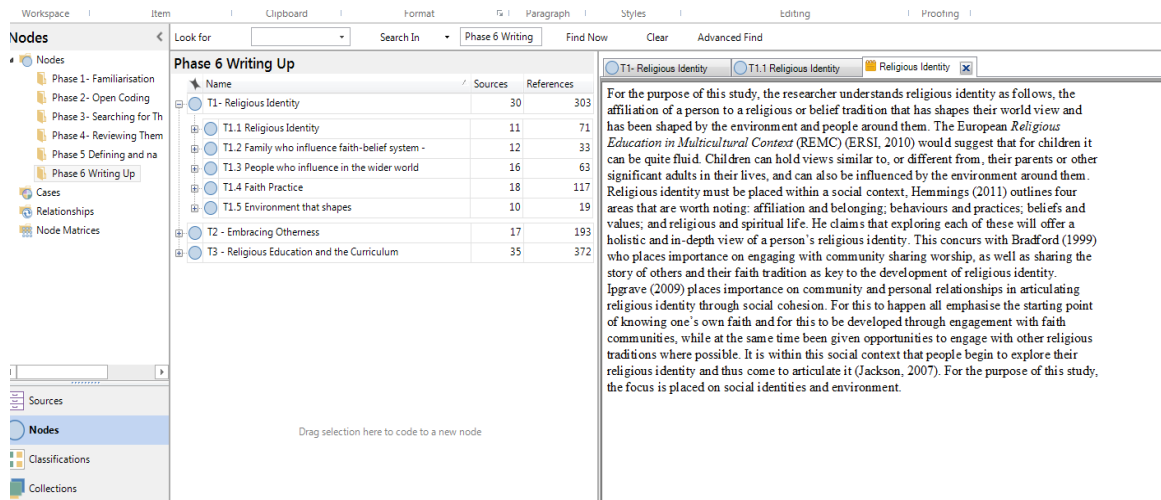
Figure 3.4: Screenshot of Braun and Clarke's (2006) Phase 6 "Writing Up"

Having completed all six phases of coding, as prescribed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, a case study report was compiled, outlining the findings and comparing and contrasting them with other relevant research in the field, as presented in Chapter 4.

3.6.2 Verification of Data
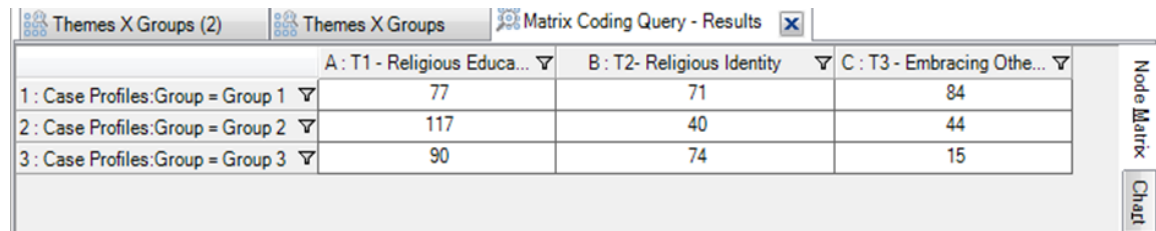
Four criteria are used to assess how qualitative studies can be considered trustworthy: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). While the authors outline several ways to establish trustworthiness, for this study, the following levels of verification took place. First, after every data gathering session the researcher returned to the class and gave feedback on what he had recorded during the previous session. He then checked for accessary of understanding and noted any amendments or corrections. In a final session, he also presented main observations from the preliminary analysis to the co-researchers (Lundy et al. 2011).

Second, the researcher chose peer debriefing which, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is:

> a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session…for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind. (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p.308)

The advantage of such a debriefing is that it gives the researcher an opportunity to have his or her bias probed, meanings explored and the basis for interpretations clarified. The researcher chose a colleague as the person with whom the debriefing sessions would be conducted. The "devil's advocate" role of this individual was particularly important for the researcher in considering the implications of the data for further research (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p.309).

Third, having completed phase 5 of the coding, as prescribed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, all codes were intersected in a matrix to show, the prevalence of the themes consistently across all three interview groups and illustrated their validity as key areas of reflection for the children. Consequently, they were adopted as the key themes for this research.

	A : T1 - Religious Educa...	B : T2- Religious Identity	C : T3 - Embracing Othe...
1 : Case Profiles:Group = Group 1	77	71	84
2 : Case Profiles:Group = Group 2	117	40	44
3 : Case Profiles:Group = Group 3	90	74	15

Table 3.2: Screenshot of Matrix Coding Query

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described the research paradigm, methodology and approach, along with the data collection and analysis procedures used in this study. It has also detailed the methods of verification that were employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. The following chapter presents the findings and locates them within relevant literature.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.0 Introduction

Bazeley contends that researchers all face the challenge of ensuring that they do not present their findings in descriptive form alone but rather with depth and reflection (Bazeley 2009). Others, however, maintain that the description is in fact an act of interpretation of the data (King 2012). This chapter presents the findings of the research in a balanced and reflective way. It also situates the findings within current literature and other research in the field.

The findings in this case study report are presented narratively according to three main themes that emerged during data analysis, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis (Section 3.6.1) and *NVivo 11*. These themes are as follows:

> Theme 1: Religious Identity
>
> Theme 2: Embracing Otherness
>
> Theme 3: Religious Education and the Curriculum

4.1 Theme 1: Religious Identity

Religious identity is, by its nature, complex. REMC suggests that children's religious identity can be quite fluid, since they can hold views similar or different to those of their parents or other significant adults in their lives, and can also be influenced by the environment around them (ESRI 2010). Findings from the current research concur with this. It has emerged that the religious identity of the young co-researchers of this study has been developed through the people they engage with and the places in their environment that they know and frequent.

4.1.1 Religious Identity not a Priority

At the beginning of the semi-structured group interviews each child was asked to use five words to describe him/her self. No child referred to his/her religious identity or religious or belief tradition in his/her description. This was noted by the researcher and relayed to the children. Anne responded by saying, "Like it wouldn't be the first thing that we would think of if we were describing ourselves". Most of the participants agreed with this statement. Each child was then invited to identify his/her religious or belief system (Figure 4.1). All the children involved in this study professed to be part of a religious tradition. Interestingly, 2.8% of the school's entire population describe themselves as not following any religious

belief system. The majority of respondents identified as Catholic. At 71%, this percentage is slightly higher than the 68% of the whole school population who identify themselves as Catholic.
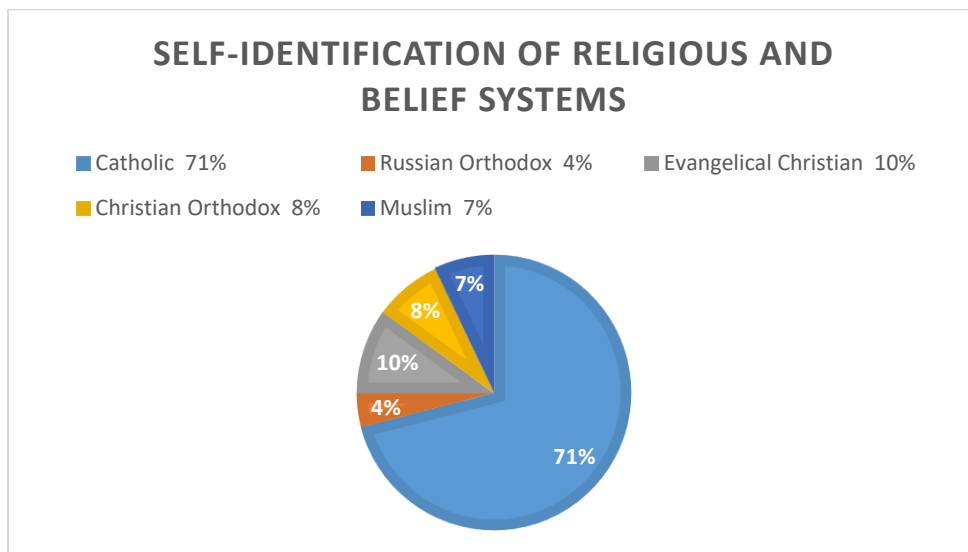
Figure 4.1: Self-identification of Religious and Belief Systems

While all the children were aware of their traditions, some stated that they were uncomfortable talking about this aspect of their lives. Anne said she saw it as a personal matter and not something she would talk about publicly: "You can be judged if you say you're some religion and some people don't like you. A lot of people kind of shy away from it". In contrast, Tijana informed the group that she was comfortable talking about her faith within the Christian Orthodox tradition. During the conversation on whether religion is, or should be, a public or private aspect of a person's life, Doyle pointed out that in the past people in Ireland could not always talk about their religious identity. Looking through the photographs from Session 2, he showed the group the photo of the inscription on the statue of Daniel O'Connell in the town, reminding them that people in the past could not always practise their religion freely nor even speak openly of their religious identity.

Figure 4.2: Daniel O'Connell Monument

Doyle stated that the statue is there to remind people of how O'Connell fought and won Catholic Emancipation in 1829. This gave Catholics the freedom to speak about their faith. He went on to emphasize that people should always feel free to talk about their religion and that people should respect the religious tradition of others. The children concurred with Doyle, highlighting the importance of respect for diversity.

4.1.1.1 Children Live in Blended Faith or Blended Belief Family

When the self-identification was further explored, the children began to move from one tradition to multiple traditions to describe themselves. Doyle described himself as a Catholic atheist and Hannah described herself as a Catholic Buddhist. When these new classifications were investigated, the children said that while they were Catholic, they wanted to respect the religious tradition of one or both of their parents. For example, as Hannah's mother is a Buddhist, she tries to mix both faiths to describe herself, "I am a Catholic Buddhist". It is not just parents in a family who can have differing beliefs systems. The children try to navigate their own sense of religious identity:

> Ronald: My parents...well, my dad's atheist, my sister is Christian, my mother is Catholic, 'cause they're Armenian, so they're really religious. Um, my brother I think he's atheist as well. There's a few atheists in my family but a lot of them are Russian Orthodox and Christian. I am Catholic, I think!

Anne lamented the fact that her mother was an atheist, with no religious beliefs, and that she was judged on that by some people.

> Anne: Like my mother, she don't [*sic*] believe in anything. Her mother was Christian, and her sister is Christian, but she just doesn't believe in anything. Just sometimes people are kind of like and she is shunned by some people, like judged for not believing in anything.

This statement by Anne gives meaning to her comment in Section 4.1.1 above, that religion is private, and people are judged when they share their belief system. She is in fact speaking from the experiences of her own family.

Noah was the only child who explicitly identified his male parent as religious. He spoke of how he liked to read and study religious materials with his father. The children who identified with religious traditions outside of Catholicism did not report other belief traditions within their families.

The majority of the children taking part in this research project (60%) live in blended faith families.

4.1.1.2 Influence of Grandparents on Catholic Religious Identity

It was revealed that grandparents were the most important group shaping and influencing the religious identity of most of the Catholic children involved with this study. Over 68% of the Catholic children cited their grandparents' influence in the religious lives. Rose: "I go to Mass with my gran, she is very religious, she is the sacristan in the church"; Mia: "My nana has lots of lovely holy pictures and statues and we pray together; we do not pray at home, so I like that about my nana". For those within the Orthodox tradition who are separated from their grandparents due to living in different countries, do reflect on their influence. Tijana: "When I go to [Serbia] sometimes I go and visit my granny and I help out in the Church there with the others and pray with her";
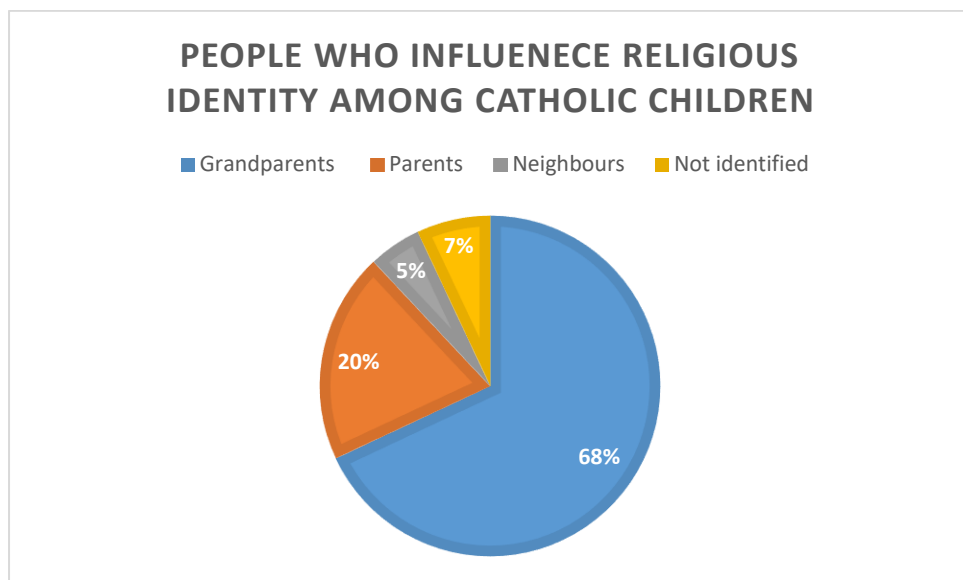
Figure 4.3: People who Influence Religious Identity Among Catholic Children

4.1.2 Faith Practice and Family

Bradford (1995) states the importance of allowing children to have an opportunity to link in to and experience their faith communities. The findings of the current research suggest that not all children who took part in the study, especially those of the Catholic tradition, are afforded the chance to be in regular contact with their faith communities.

4.1.2.1 Catholic Children's Minimal Connection with the Wider Faith Community

It was shown that most of the children taking part in the study from within the Catholic tradition (84%) have minimal contact with their faith community. They attest to attending only for major religious events.

Ronald: We do especially go like the festival days of the religion like on Christmas, Easter, etc.

Mia: We sometimes go to the Cathedral on Sunday for Mass – not all the time.

Interestingly, the Catholic children did not return any photographs of community gatherings as part of the photovoice session. Children from the Catholic tradition who did speak of attending events at their faith community appear to attend mainly with their grandparents. Anne: "I go to Mass all the time with my granny; she is very religious".

4.1.2.2 Importance of Community Worship for Orthodox and Evangelical Christian Children

The research revealed that the Christian Orthodox children who took part in the study do not have a local community with which to attend worship. Some recorded travelling up to 100km to join with others of their tradition.

Tjiana: We just, like, book a spot in Ireland, because there's like none of our churches here, and when we're in Serbia, we go to our churches that we have.

Figure 4.4: Orthodox Priest Celebrating Mass

The Christian Orthodox children spoke of the joy of the community and the amount of preparation that is done before they attend. The children highlighted the making of the bread to be used for Eucharist in the community gathering as something very special in the home. These children contributed a variety of images from their faith community gatherings to the photovoice session.

The member of the Evangelical Christian community who took part in this research spoke and pictured his faith community gatherings as part of the photovoice session. He talked about the importance of sharing his faith with the others when they gathered and of praising Jesus in song. The community he described, and in which he takes a very active part, is, according to him, vibrant and interactive.

> Noah: Our community sings a lot and we praise Jesus, people sit around and are very happy, after about a half hour we move to Bible reading and people share their views and then more community worship.

In both cases, community gatherings are central to the lives of the children and give them a definite sense of religious identity.

4.1.2.3 Religious Imagery in Granny's House

Children from the Catholic faith tradition who took part in this study recorded few religious images in their homes. During the photovoice session, these children contributed many pictures of religious objects and practices within what appeared to be their home environment. Some were quick to point out, however, that the images were mainly from their grandparents' homes and it was in this environment, rather than in their own homes, that they most often engaged in prayer. Indeed, the presence of this imagery in their grandparents' homes appears to lead to shared moments of prayer with them.

Figure 4.5: Picture of Mary and Jesus

> Anna: This is a picture at my granny's house, it is of Mary and Jesus

> Rose: Well when I'm at my gran's, I would [pray], and there's like pictures everywhere of Jesus and stuff so you kind of are just like there like. Um, she has like a magnet with a prayer on it and it's just on the fridge so like you know just eating your dinner or something, you'd casually be reading the prayer. I sometime say the Rosary with her in the evening.

Figure 4.6: Statue of St Anthony

> Rose: This is the statue of St Anthony at my nana's house – she prays to him
> and I join her at times.

This once again demonstrates the influence some grandparents have on the faith development of children within the Catholic tradition, taking account of points in Section 4.1.1.2 above.

In contrast, the children from the Orthodox tradition who took part in this research brought images of the altars that are in their own homes and they spoke about prayer as part of their home lives. They attested to the traditional religious iconography in their homes and the prayer moments they experience there.

Figure 4.7: Christian Orthodox Altar in the Home

> Amy: This is our altar at home. We are Christian Orthodox. We pray at home
> and sometimes study about our religion.

4.1.2.4 Saints and Public Figures Influence Religious and Belief Identity

The research showed that children are influenced in the development of their religious identity by a variety of people inside and outside their homes, sometimes from the political

and/or religious world. The young people who took part in this research, in common with most others of their age, engage mainly with two environments - home and school. In these milieus, they encounter a variety of people and influences. Indeed, analysis of data from all group sessions regarding impact on the children from outside their families numbers as many as sixteen different sources of influence. One of these is the media. Five children in different groups, and across two of the three sessions, showed a particular interest in Donald Trump, the 45th President of the USA. They were very unhappy with his treatment of Muslim and Mexican people, as reported by the media. They considered that he lacked respect for people, an appreciation of diversity and an affinity with the dignity of each human being:

> Anne: He [President Trump] doesn't […] He thinks that if one person is bad in that religion, then all of them are bad. That's like saying, "One Christian is bad and that means all of them are bad". It's not. It's just...His views on some things are just not right. We must respect people's religions.

> Rose: Trump does not respect religion and he does not respect Muslims.

Highlighting this further in their scrapbook work, they used cuttings from material they had gathered to illustrate how his words can be disrespectful.
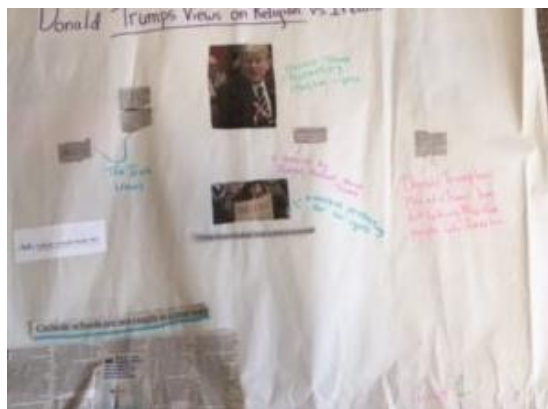
Figure 4.8: Scrapbook Poster on President Trump

Across two of the three sessions, and with most groups, President Trump was highlighted as someone disrespectful of difference and of diversity of religion.

The groups countered this image of President Trump with people whom they identified as good role models in developing their religious selves. As might be expected, they focused mainly on Jesus, Mother Teresa, Pope Francis, St Patrick and St Brigid. They also included their local priest. He visits their classroom on a regular basis and, in their eyes, embodies positivity, kindness and compassion. They made no mention of their class teacher in whose company they spend most of the school day and who is the person who shares the formal

RE programme with them. This is noteworthy in the light of Hay and Nye's work (2006) which claims that the nurturing of the religious identity of children is the responsibility of their teacher.

4.1.3 Discussion on Religious Identity

The children highlighted the complexity of religious or belief identity for them in their lives. Some children demonstrated a very fluid understanding of their religious identity, which chimes in with REMC (ESRI 2010). Many identified their religious identity as being different from that of their parents and other members within their family. This further illustrates that in Ireland and within families religious identity is no longer homogeneous (ESRI 2010, p.40). By comparison to children in Flanders (Kuusisto et al. 2017; ESRI 2010) who struggled to describe the religious identity of their parents, all the children who took part in the present study were able to identify their parents' religious identity or worldview. However, some of them were unable to explain what that identity or worldview really meant. Those who did not identify as Catholic were more definite about their religious tradition. This was most evident among the children of the Orthodox Christian and Evangelical Christian belief systems, which concurs with Mawhinney et al. (2010).

It is worth noting the diversity of faith present in the 71% of the group who initially identified themselves as Catholic. Their responses and contributions suggest a fluid belief system, influenced in part by the heterogeneity of religious affiliation within their family units. While younger children are usually guided by adults and parents on the matters of religious identity (Kitching and Shanneik 2015), those of the age group involved in this research typically move between Stages 2 and 3 of Fowler's (1981) phases of faith development (Section 2.1.4.1).

Documents prepared by the Catholic Church, for example *Share the Good News* (2010), *Handing on the faith in the home* (1980) and *Gravissimun Educationis* (1965), and researchers such as Darmody, Smyth and McCoy (2014, 2012) and Kennedy (1999) have placed the parents and the home as the primary influences on children in developing their religious identity. This situation is changing, as can be observed from the experience of this group of children, who, in many cases, come from multi-faith, multi-belief homes, and whose grandparents appear to be the main influence in their religious lives. This concurs with Copen and Silverstein's (2007) American study, which highlights the importance of grandparents (especially grandmothers) in the transmission of religious beliefs. While Francis et al. (2016) do not cite grandparents as the primary influence, they find that 90%

of Irish Catholic girls recognise the importance of religion for their grandparents. In the Irish context, it appears that the place of parents is being replaced by that of grandparents in the development of children's Catholic religious identity. While formerly they were simply regarded as "religious", it appears that grandparents are now becoming the primary influence on Catholic religious identity.

The development of the community aspect of the tradition, where people gather to celebrate their faith, appears to be on the decline for Catholics in Ireland (Cragun 2017; Quinn 2017; Breen and Healy 2016; McGuckin et al. 2014). The present study concurs with this. Bradford emphasizes the importance of community practice as a way of developing religious identity and outlines what should be on offer in a healthy community of faith (1999, p.8). His idea of community practice concurs with Rolheiser's (1998) "non-negotiable" contention that community participation must be part of Christian spirituality. Interestingly, Hay and Nye (2006) consider that the nurturing of a child's religious identity is the responsibility of the teacher. They posit that it is his/her task to keep the mind of the child open to all possibilities and to encourage personal awareness and the development of a social spirituality, rather than placing it within a particular community. In many ways, Hay and Nye contest the importance of community participation as outlined by Rolheiser and Bradford. Others, like Ryan (2007b) and Hyde (2006), however, do not attribute the same level of importance to the community. They claim that children, given their ordinary and natural openness to religion, experience spirituality in many ways. Some simply describe an experience (Hart 2003), others express it through questioning (Hyde 2008), through wonder and awe, and these experiences are so profound within their development that they are carried into adulthood.

Literature emphasizes the importance of children being free to express their thoughts and ideas and so to come to a safe place where their sense of the religious identity can be articulated and appreciated in a confident way. The idea of children finding their own way within a safe environment is something that is happening for some of the Catholic children involved with this study. Though they might not attend faith community gatherings they do find time to visit places of worship on their own and in private.

> Doyle: Um, I rarely go to the church, but I do pray at home, but I do sometimes do it at the church. But the last day when we had like this optional half day, me and a few friends, we weren't busy, but we came back to school to see what's going on, and I was like: "Do you want to go to church to see what's going on?" We went in and it got serious all of a sudden, and then we all went to different parts of church lighting candles, thinking about

people that we know and all that. And then like praying, kneeling down on the...the chairs and all that.

This study concurs with others (Darmody et al. 2012; ESRI 2010, p.40) in affirming that children's sense of religious identity is fluid and that those who are living in blended faith families have views that can be in conflict with what is being presented in school (ESRI 2010, p.43). It also affirms that community practice of faith is absent for much of the time among Catholic children (Kitching et al. 2015). This research accepts that there are those so-called "cultural Catholics" who only attend the local Catholic Church for major feasts and events in their lives by comparison with those of other faith traditions who gather as communities to pray and celebrate. Notwithstanding this, children, along with adults, enjoy certain parts of the faith practice and highlight private prayer with their grandparents and private non-directive prayer in a church setting. The children in this study attest to a clear sense of "being" religious or having a belief system that is valued.

4.1.4 Religious Identity: Key Findings

1. The self-description of their religious or worldview identity is fluid for many Catholic children. This does not appear to be the case for children of other religious traditions, often considered minority groups in the Irish context.
2. Religious identity is no longer homogenous within the homes of many children.
3. Community practice of faith is very much absent for much of the time among Catholic children. This seems not to be the case for children of other faith traditions.
4. Children pray with their grandparents and will visit a church to pray privately at times.

4.2 Theme 2: Embracing Otherness

The school in which the research took place has a diverse community of religious and belief systems. This theme examines that diversity, how the children engage with that diversity, and the desire of the children to learn about and from other faiths.
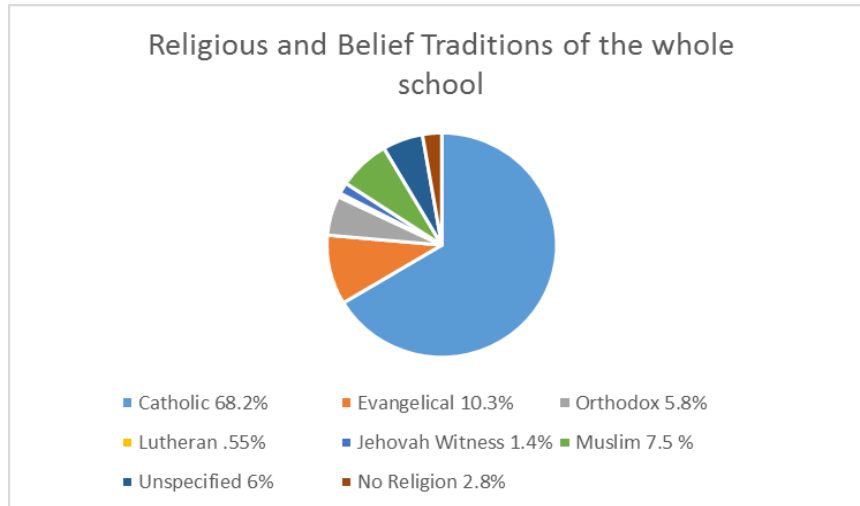
Figure 4.9: Religious and Belief Traditions of the Whole School

4.2.1 Welcoming All

A Catholic school, by its very nature, is meant to be a place of welcome and inclusion for all, irrespective of pupils' or parents' backgrounds (CSP 2015). Such is very much the case in the school in which the research took place. This can be deduced from the displays on view within the school and from the very fact that the school building is physically accessible to all. The children who took part in the research were very aware of the principle of a welcome for all and it was recorded by all groups during the photovoice session. Figure 4.10 shows photographs that were taken in the entrance hall of the school and on the main staircase. For the children, these were statements of welcome to all, showing respect for multiplicity of cultural identity and diversity of country of origin. Interestingly, the school does not presently have a comparable display celebrating religious diversity in the school.

Figure 4.10: Displays Celebrating Diversity in the School

4.2.2 Learning about and from other Religions

The challenge for any religious education programme must be to prepare those who engage with it to live communally in a respectful way with people of a variety of faith traditions (CSP 2015). The RE programme that the children who were co-researchers in this project are currently completing offers little, if any, education about traditions outside Christianity. Furthermore, the majority of the curriculum relates only to Catholicism. The children show an awareness of different religions in their classroom and school. However, they appear to know very little about them. Through the sessions conducted as part of this research, the children began to explore the religious traditions present within their classroom. Having identified the theme "Embracing Otherness" and having reviewed the coding, the researcher carried out a focused analysis of the interfaith dialogue nature of the conversations. This was influenced by the work of Ipgrave (Section 2.2.4.2) who asserts that interfaith dialogue means holding onto one's faith or beliefs while simultaneously trying to understand the others (2012). Ipgrave (2016) identifies four key players in this dialogue "I", "you", "we" and "God". The following sections illustrate how these four key players were present and not present in the conversations across all sessions held with the children.

4.2.2.1 Children Articulate their Own Traditions – "I" of the Conversation

Within each child's tradition and identity, the "I" is a place of stability. This space must be first respected by all and each child must be given the opportunity to share his/her story. The children were very comfortable with each other, sharing their pictures and stories about their belief systems. The photographs show personal places of prayer and religious objects with which they identify. Photographs of buildings were used to identity places of worship that they attend from time to time. All children were comfortable and able to identity their own tradition, and all began by saying "I am a ..." thus firmly grounding themselves within a particular tradition. Some children used the phrases "I believe" and "I do" around their religious selves. The children of the Orthodox tradition identified their saints. Tijana said, "My saint is St. Fetiquentlia and I have an icon of her at home in my house". Rose quickly pointed out that her saint was St Anthony and provided the group with a picture of him taken in her grandmother's house.

When reflecting on dialogue, the tendency is to focus on the spoken word. This of course is not the only form of dialogue, as is evident from the following contribution of a child who suffers from selective mutism. As a group of children from Christian traditions was articulating their belief in Jesus, as found in the Bible, Arya, a Muslim girl, slowly pushed

a picture of the Qur'an into the middle of the table and bowed her head. The children all stopped talking and looked at the photograph and began to ask about it. In this one non-verbal articulation of her belief system, she made her personal "I" statement and grounded herself within her tradition. At no time did any child argue the truth or otherwise of any religious or belief system identified through the other children's "I" statements.

4.2.2.2 Minority Faith Traditions are Strong on Community Aspect: "We" of the Conversation

While Ipgrave (2016) argues that the "I" is powerful and should be given due recognition in the interreligious dialogue, as set out above (Section 4.2.2.1), she also claims that the "we", too, has an important place in interreligious dialogue. She notes that pupils asked to talk in "I" terms about their religious practices and beliefs will naturally slip into "we" language. The "we" highlights the community aspect of the belief system that the child is explaining.

The photovoice sessions allowed for the greatest level of conversation about "we" statements. Some children had brought photographs of their community celebrations and other aspects of their belief systems. These became the catalyst for discussion. Tijana shared a picture of the bread that is used in the Orthodox community during Eucharist. She noted the tradition whereby the bread is made at home and brought to the community celebration, and throughout the description used "we" statements:

> Tijana: I make special bread at home and we used the bread at our community gatherings. On the bread we make shapes and they represent the time of the year.

Amy, another child from the Orthodox tradition, talked about the icon of the family saint and again used "we" statements.

> Amy: I have a special saint called Saint Stylianos of Paphlagonia and I have an icon of the saint at home and we pray to the saint each day.

When using "we" statements, children of the Catholic tradition, in contrast, tended to refer more to content of faith, referring to belief in Jesus and Mary.

Noah, who is a member of an Evangelical Christian Church, brought this picture of Sunday worship from his community.

Figure 4.11: Evangelical Christian Worship

The other children began by asking him what concert he had attended, saying that he was not supposed to be taking photographs of a concert. He was quick to point out that it was not a concert but a worship group before the community moved into the main part of their faith gathering on the Sunday. He explained the worship as follows:

> Noah: We gather for about thirty minutes of worship before the service. We sit around and we sing and praise Jesus. It allows people to gather and to meet up. We have worship at home with my family at times. My dad leads worship.

As can be seen above, in most of these cases the children began with "I and moved to "we" statements during the conversations. This was particularly evident in the photovoice and scrapbooking sessions.

4.2.2.3 Children's Interest in other Faith Traditions: "You" of the Conversation

The "you" statements provide another window into the conversation that took place among the pupils. Ipgrave (2016) claims that the "you" is, in fact, respecting the "otherness of other", is listening to the language of others and comparing that with one's own tradition. In this way, the children try to find commonality in a respectful way between the different traditions experienced in their classroom.

Focus Group 1 comprised a mix of Christian faiths and after a short while the children identified their common ground. Rose: "We all believe in Jesus and we all get baptised". From this, they respectfully engaged in questioning and discussion about the different Christian traditions. They continued to expand on the commonalities:

Anne: What's like your main religious celebration?

Rose: Everyone has a different one, I think –

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Tijana: Uh, our main one will have to be Christmas.

Rose: Yeah, that is the same as ours. The sixth of January is important too.

Tijana: Yeah.

Anne: The sixth January, then, yeah?

Tijana: Sixth of December, yeah.

Rose: Do you do, um, the sixth of January – wait, the sixth of December, when you clean your shoe and you put it outside?

Tijana: No.

Rose: That's what they do in Germany.

Anne: What's that about?

Rose: It's, um, on the sixth of December, and it's St. Nicholas and it's in Germany and in...Well, I thought it was in main European countries, and um, you clean your shoe and you leave it outside your door, and if you've been good all year, you'll get like sweets and like games or something like that. But if you've been bad, you get coal. It's very like the actual Christmas and – Christian Christmas, but it's just an extra kind of thing.

Tijana: Yeah, we have like St. Nicholas on the sixth of December but it's just like say a prayer and then like just have a big, um, like dinner like thing. And on the 14 of January, we just celebrate our like own, um, New Year's. So, we make like a big celebration…and like all people from Ireland are – well, all people from Serbia that live in Ireland can come no matter where they are. They just come and then we all celebrate there.

Rose: I don't know that. I know that your main Saint is Fetiquentlia.

Tijana: Yeah, that's our main one. There's twenty-seven, but my one is Fetiquentlia.

Rose: We have lots of saints too, my favourite is St Anthony like my gran.

Anne: It seems we all have different saints in our religions.

This level of conversation continued but moved to a discussion on the Eucharist and the different ways the children celebrate according to their traditions. Tijana used the following picture to explain about her tradition to the others in the group.

Figure 4.12: Orthodox Priest at Community Celebration

Tijana: This is our priest and we stand. No sitting down.

Anne: Do you kneel?

Tijana: No, we just stand there, crossed hands.

Rose: When they're just about to give out the food we normally kneel, and we stand up –

Interviewer: The food?

Rose: Er, the bread and the wine.

Anne: Yeah.

Tijana: When we go up to get our bread, they [the priest] have a cross in their hand and we have to like kiss their hand and then kiss the cross and then we get our bread.

Anne: It's, um, body of Jesus.

Rose: Blessed Christ. Blessed wafer.

Anne: Yeah.

Rose: Like at the start: it's meant to be like a symbol of Jesus Christ –

Anne: That you're like letting into you, kind of.

Rose: It's a symbol of Jesus Christ?

Anne: It's like at the Last Supper, Jesus gave bread –

Rose: Bread.

Anne: ..and wine and he said, "Do this in memory of me" –

Rose: In memory of me...and we've done it ever since and during the Mass, the priest blesses it and then –

Anne: Yeah.

Rose: ...at the end, we're allowed to eat it because it's blessed.

Tijana: Yeah, in my religion it's kind of the same. It's just like normal bread and they have – Yeah, it's also like about Jesus as well. That's how they explain it to the kids, like you're getting parts of Jesus into you-

Rose: Yeah. It's the same with us.

Tijana: Well our bread is made at home, not like your bread. We put like decorations on it and all of the decorations stand for something. They cut it like across like in half then – quarters and they put like the wine or, yeah, in the middle and then you say some like prayers or something, I'm not sure. So, ours is a bit different.

The extract above highlights the children's desire to learn about the other. It also shows how the children were trying to come to an understanding of the other through their own lived experience. They have moved away from a more general conversation into the substance of a central part of their faith traditions, which Ipgrave (2016) calls "spiritual sharing". Ipgrave (2016) emphasizes the importance of the children being comfortable with each other and with the various faith traditions that they encounter. However, she does warn that encouraging respect for the different traditions takes precedence over focussing on similarities. The conversation above illustrates an overemphasis on the struggle for similarity. However, this can be justified as it was the first time that the children have engaged in an interreligious dialogue conversation. It is through this searching that they will come to appreciate the core values of the Orthodox tradition being presented to them. A conversation like this also helps to develop the religious literacy of all the children and goes some way to restoring that literacy which Davie (2010) claims is lost.

4.2.2.4 Word God is Absent from the Conversation: "God" of the Conversation

Ipgrave introduces "God" as the final word, acknowledging that the term is very much contested within religious traditions and that it does not hold a transcendent understanding in all religions. The researcher took all codes under the theme "Embracing Otherness", and carried out a simple word cloud. It is noteworthy that the word "God" had been absent from all the conversations.

Figure 4.13: Word cloud of God in Theme 2

Ipgrave (2016) acknowledges that the most contested space is the God space, as some reject the presence and existence of God. However, she calls for tolerance and openness that allow a space to be created for that part of the conversation. On initial analysis, it appears that there is an absence of God talk, which John MacQuarrie describes as "when religious faith becomes reflective" (1967, p.19). A deeper analysis of the conversations, however, finds that while the word "God" is not explicitly used, concepts of God are discussed and reflected by the children.

> Senan: It is important to be kind and to care for the poor, you know like Mother Teresa and Pope Francis. He is always looking out for the poor. That is how we should be. Our school always talks about respect and care for people.

4.2.3 Children's Desire to Learn about Religious Diversity

The children continued to talk around various religious and belief traditions but returned repeatedly to their desire to learn about other traditions. Some went as far as to say that this was something that they would need in their future lives, with some indicating that they hoped to study as much in second-level school. They indicated that the only time they got to talk about other religions and beliefs was during their school's annual Diversity Day. They explained that each of the school's cultural groupings had a stand containing information about their ethos and traditions. As part of this, some groups included religion. They saw this as very interesting. However, it generally represented only a small part of the display and usually got very little attention. When asked why they thought they were not learning more about other religions and beliefs, one child suggested:

> Anne: Like they [teachers] don't want to talk about it because they feel like the parents could come in and be giving out. Teachers don't really want the

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hassle of that, but they do feel like teaching children about things, but they're just scared to.

That the children had a very strong desire to learn about other religious beliefs was evident from the fact that they eagerly engaged with the opportunities afforded during the current research project to learn from the others in their midst. Furthermore, Nvivo analysis generated 195 references to the theme of being open to the other. An analysis of engagements carried out between the children of Catholic and Orthodox traditions revealed that the latter are more vocal. It was evident from the codes that they were attempting to teach their fellow classmates about their tradition, while the former were busy asking questions through the engagements. The school is often the only place in which children encounter those of other traditions and, even then, the space created for such conversations and learning is minimal (Lundy 2007). This concurs with findings of the REDCo project (2009) which reported that the school indeed provides the main opportunity for children to encounter other religions.
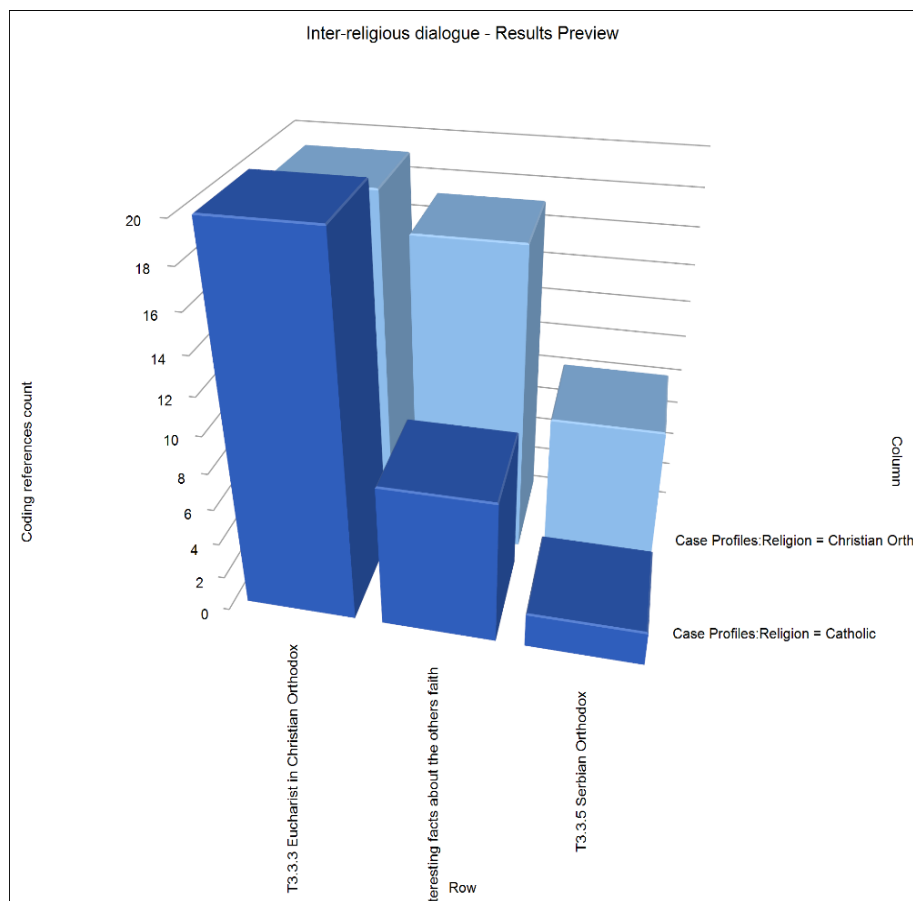

Figure 4.14: Vocal Engagement of Catholic and Christian Orthodox Children in Theme 2

4.2.4 Discussion on Embracing Otherness

Hand (2004) argues that children should be actively encouraged "to question the religious beliefs they bring with them to the classroom", so that "they are genuinely free to adopt whatever position on religious matters they judge to be best supported by the evidence" (p.162). Ipgrave (2016) challenges this, saying that such an approach ignores the contexts of tradition, of community and of prayer in which faith is developed. She further contends that personal religious faith is misunderstood or even trivialised if it is treated as something that can be decided by classroom debate and discussion. For her, the first step of the dialogue (Section 2.2.4.2) starts with respecting self, but also respecting and accepting difference, diversity and change in the classroom. Ipgrave, in her approach, respects the rights of the child as set forth in the UNCRC (UN 1989) Article 12 (1) which recognises that children have views and that they have a right to be able to express them freely. Hand (2004), Mercer (2000) and others appear to promote an environment that encourages children to "let go", rather than "hold on" to their beliefs. This is not only pedagogically questionable but a violation of children's rights, as laid down by UN. The children who took part in this study showed profound respect for the diversity of religions and beliefs of their peers. They engaged fully in primary dialogue (Section 2.2.4.2), highlighting acceptance of difference, diversity and change. For this to happen, Lundy's (2007) prerequisite of space, in which the children feel safe and are encouraged to express their views, is key to the process. If children are challenged, from the beginning, to let go of their beliefs(Mercer 2000), this researcher contents that the safe space is lost and that the further steps of interfaith dialogue will not take place. The present study concurs with Ipgrave's (2016) contention that the "I" is a critical starting point for the pupils, a place of stability or, as expressed by Lundy (2007), a "safe space" in which the voice is heard and respected.

Ipgrave (2016) makes the case that alongside the individualised "I" there is also the "I" that is embedded in the "we" of community and tradition. Ipgrave's connection between the "I" and the "we" is evident in the extracts of the conversations in Section 4.2.2.2. This is also part of the work of Nye (1998) and her concept of "relational consciousness", the "I - Others". Those in a relationship with something or someone other than self are in fact conscious of the relational aspect of their connectedness and this is revealed through "I" and "we" statements. While they may begin with the individual "I", they are in fact referring to the beliefs and traditions of the wider community of which they are part. This notion of connection with the wider community is important, as outlined by Bradford (1999) and Rolhesier (1998). It is evident that the children who were part of this research project were

aware of the larger communities of which they believed themselves to be a part. While the majority of Catholic children appear to not often encounter that community in a physical sense, children of other faith traditions do.

It is worth noting that the children's engagement with their faith communities, effectively the children's own experiences, allowed them to begin conversations around their faith traditions. While the Catholic children were very interested in learning about the religious and belief traditions of their classmates, the non-Catholic children had very few, if any, questions about Catholicism. This may be explained by the fact that they may be listening in while RE class is taking place, as outlined in Section 4.3.2.6 below.

Coles' (1990) research with children focused on their drawings and conversations. From this he concluded that they were interested in the meaning of life and questions of ultimate concern on their own journey through life. The children who were co-researchers in this study were also interested in the meaning of life and how people see the world, especially as could be explored through the faith and belief tradition of others in their classroom. They were very respectful of diversity and embracing difference in their environment, which of course is key as the primary step in interreligious dialogue (Ipgrave 2002). They were not only happy to respect difference, but once given the opportunity to learn about and from the other, they quickly embraced it (as is evident in Figure 4.14). This corresponds with Ipgrave's (2002) second step in interreligious dialogue. Ipgrave (2008) urges that children should be required to reflect upon their own position and to develop a language to be able to justify that position. As the present research was underway, it was not possible for the children to do this, as this was their first experience of interreligious dialogue in their classroom. However, this point is raised as one of the recommendations for further development of the study.

As also found in the REDCo project (2009), the school in the present study provides a unique opportunity, through its Diversity Day, for the children to encounter other traditions and cultures. Furthermore, the children are prepared to enter into dialogue with others whom they consider interesting as persons. However, praiseworthy as this event certainly is, it does not highlight or focus on areas of religious diversity and interreligious dialogue.

Extrapolating from this to the general Irish education landscape, and considering the request of the Forum regarding the introduction of a new curriculum on ERBE at primary level (Coolahan et al. 2012), it is clear that the children would welcome an opportunity to learn about the religious others in their classroom. However, given the *status quo*, this

researcher contends that when and how this opportunity is provided in primary schools in Ireland will be closely contested (Todd, 2017; Atheist Ireland, 2016; Lane 2016; Walshe 2016; Iona Institute 2015).

4.2.5 Embracing Otherness: Key Findings

1. The children were very aware of the principle of a welcome for all in their school and wider community.

2. Minority faith traditions are strong on the community aspect of their tradition.

3. While the children talk about "God", they in fact do not use the word "God" in their conversations.

4. Children have a strong desire to learn about religious diversity.

4.3 Theme 3: Religious Education and the Curriculum

Phase 5 ("defining and naming themes") codes for RE and the Curriculum were intersected in a matrix to show, that all three groups were heavily engaged in the conversation.

	A : Case Profiles:Group ...	B : Case Profiles:Group ...	C : Case Profiles:Group ...
1 : T1 - Religious Educat...	77	117	90

Table 4.1: Screenshot Religious Education and the Curriculum – Phase 5

This theme is broken down into the following subthemes, Figure 4.15:

Figure 4.15: Sub-themes within RE and the Curriculum

4.3.1 What is Religious Education?

While the children did not offer a clear definition of RE, as found in the literature (Council of Europe 2014; IEC 2010; Moran 1984; Jackson 1997), they highlighted, in all sessions, the things they liked about RE. These included listening to the stories, class discussions on the stories and, most of all, the visit of their local priest to the classroom. In other ways, they struggled with RE and this was articulated in a variety of ways across all data gathering sessions. One child vocalized the dilemma:

> Doyle: You don't know if you believe it or if it's all just lies or, 'cause a lot of it seems so surreal like, as if it could be impossible. Like, 'cause nowadays, nothing, like no miracles happen nowadays. Everything is just gone into nothing. Like everyone's dying, there's catastrophes everywhere and all that. So, it's like more thinking of, is this real, is that real, and all that kind of thing.

Generally the children displayed a positive disposition toward RE. This is consistent with other research (O'Farrell 2016; Kitching et al. 2015). The fact that the children could not offer a definition in the traditional sense is in keeping with these children's level of religious development, as outlined by Fowler's Stage 2, "Ordering Faith" (that is learning the stories of one's group and community) while at the same time moving towards the very early part of Stage 3, "Conforming Faith" (that is identifying with the views and opinions of others). What this shows is that the children are at the phase of religious development that is appropriate to them (Fowler 1981). This is key to how we read and frame the analysis of the findings in this study. It concurs with the earlier finding regarding the fluid nature of their religious identity (Section 4.1).

4.3.2 Religious Education within the Classroom

This section presents the findings regarding the children's view of RE in their classroom and in their school. For some children, the school and RE are vehicles for them to explore and develop their own understanding of religion and that of others.

4.3.2.1. Sacramental Similarities and Differences: Girls More Vocal

While the RE programme covers all seven sacraments during the child's eight years in primary school, the children focused their discussions on Baptism, the Eucharist and Confirmation only. Of the three, the most in-depth deliberation took place on the Eucharist.

When the children began to discuss their faith or belief traditions, they immediately tried to find a link common to all the people in the group. They recognised their Baptism and their shared belief in Jesus. Rose: "We all believe in Jesus and we all get baptised".

Once they had agreed on this commonality between their belief systems, they quickly saw differences within their sacramental celebrations. This was most evident between the children of the Catholic and Christian Orthodox communities in the classroom. They realised that they had all been baptised not just as infants but at different times in their lives. The children from the Christian Orthodox tradition were already confirmed, but those of the Catholic tradition had not yet received the sacrament of Confirmation. Most of the children in the study were in the process of preparing for Confirmation but they spent less than ten minutes discussing the sacrament during the data collection process. This was even though all the teaching in RE during data collection was focused on this aspect of the Catholic tradition.

> Senan: This is our sacred space at school – it has the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. We are getting ready for Confirmation in the next few weeks.

In all the discussion groups, the children became quite animated when they talked about the picking of their Confirmation names, in each case linking them to a religious figure or to significant people in their lives. Though they were eager to choose a name, usually the children were unable to articulate the religious reason behind that.

A substantial conversation took place between three participants on the sacrament of the Eucharist. Two of the children were of the Catholic tradition while one was of Christian Orthodox belief (Section 4.2.2.3). The conversation began with a picture of the Eucharist from the Christian Orthodox tradition.

Figure 4.16: Eucharistic Bread in Christian Orthodox Tradition

Tijana: This is the bread we use at Mass.

Rose: Ours is like a wafer.

Anne: What does the bread taste like?

Rose: Yeah, is it like proper bread?

Tijana: No, it's not like a wafer, it's just regular bread.

The conversation concluded with an agreed statement that the bread was just a symbol of Jesus. When asked what that meant, they said it represented Jesus. The interviewer asked them if they believed it was Jesus (real presence: "he is present…most *especially in the Eucharistic species*" (CCC 1373)). They again emphasized the symbolism. Here can be observed that one of the central tenants of the Catholic Church was not believed or understood by the participants, even allowing for their age:

> that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood.

This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation. (CCC 1376)

This lack of belief or misunderstanding regarding transubstantiation was not confined to the three children, as outlined above, but could be detected in the responses of all discussion groups when the Eucharist was explored. When a matrix was created, it was clear that girls were more vocal and questioning around the Eucharist than boys (97.25% to 2.68%). It is also worth noting that the Christian Orthodox participants were more articulate in explaining the Eucharistic celebration in their tradition, and that the children of the Catholic tradition had a lot of questions for them. This point is further explored in Section 4.2.2.3.

4.3.2.2. Children like Bible Stories but do not know the Sacred Books of other Traditions

When the children considered the question "What is RE?", they referred to their love of the stories. The children knew that in the Christian tradition these stories come from the Bible.

> Mary: We do all the stories in the Bible. I just think they're really nice and they give us ideas for everyday lives and [it] just take a few minutes to read some of those stories.

Furthermore, they were able to identify some of the parts of the Bible. For example, Rose stated "There's an Old Testament and a New Testament", while others highlighted the importance of the Gospel in telling of the life of Jesus. Outside of the Christian tradition there was modest conversation around sacred texts. Arya, the child who is selectively mute, presented a photograph from her tradition of a group of Muslim children reading their sacred text the Qur'an.

Figure 4.17: Children Studying the Qur'an and the Qur'an
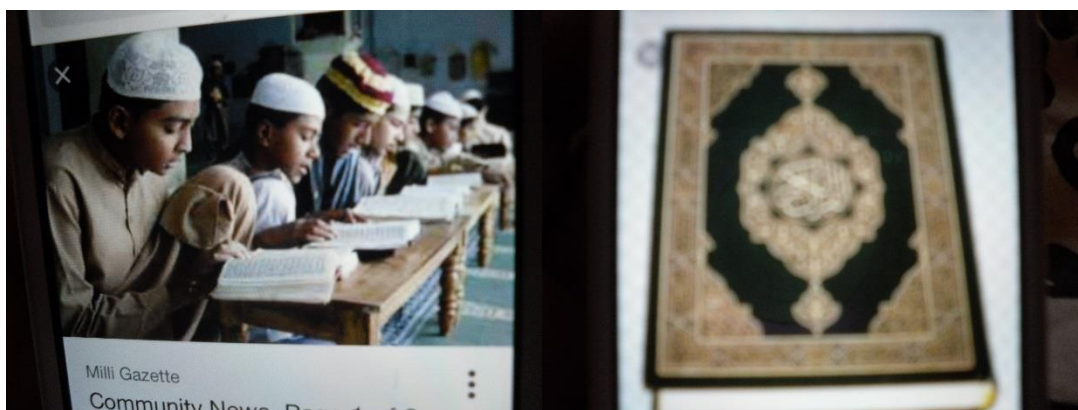
The children sat in silence and looked at the picture and then began to try and understand it. The girl then presented a second picture: a Qur'an, which the children began to recognise as the sacred text of her tradition. The children did not have the name of the book but knew it was the special book for the Muslim people. The girl did not articulate any information

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to the group. However, through the pictures she shared her tradition with her fellow pupils and ignited in them a sense of curiosity about her belief tradition. This reflects Lundy's (2007) references to the importance of a safe space wherein children are confident in articulating their views.

When the children were asked to pick a topic to teach for RE, no one picked a story from the sacred texts. While the children were familiar with the sacred text of their own belief traditions, few opted to use them in exploring their chosen theme. Though they selected messages contained in the texts, for example care of creation and respect for other people, they did not actually wish to teach or teach about the text. One group talked about the Rosary and how it is based on the life of Jesus in the Bible. It is noteworthy that, in general, the children had little knowledge of the sacred texts of faith traditions other than their own.

4.3.2.3. Prayer Inconsistent in School

The children highlight the importance of school assemblies and how these reflect what is happening in religion and major feasts and seasons.

> Ronald: We have assembly and during it we talk about what is happening in religion, like today it was all about Easter.

One group of children referred to the fact that they had prayer at the end of the day before going home. They all said that they had prayer at times as part of their RE class.

Figure 4.18: Prayer Space in School

Several children took pictures of various religious statues around the school and said that these were places for prayer in the school. They commented on how they liked prayer time, especially when this involved meditation: Senan: "Meditation gives you time to think and just sit and listen, it is good".

4.3.2.4. Religious Education not Relevant to Lives outside School

During the three semi-structured group interviews, the researcher asked how the children connected what they learned in RE with the rest of their lives. This question and the ensuing discussion explored one of the main components of Shared Christian Praxis, that of bringing the faith thought to life. Shared Christian Praxis, as already stated (Section 2.1.1.2), is the model on which the *Alive-O* programme is constructed- *Alive-O* is the programme used in the study classroom.

The children struggled at first to see any connection. Eventually they referred to two of the scrapbook posters – one on creation and the other on Mother Teresa – and made some connections. They saw the poster on creation being linked to the importance of caring for the environment and the need to protect it for the next generation. They began to draw from the book of Genesis and the story of creation to support what they were saying. Mother Teresa was seen as a good person and her philosophy of care was something that was important in their everyday lives.

Figure 4.19: Scrapbook Poster of Mother Teresa

> Amy: She helped the poor in the world – we need to help poor people in our everyday lives.

Looking at the photographs that they had taken, the children begin to connect what they had learned with their lives outside of school. They reflected on the connection with parish and the celebration of the Mass. They explored how they prayed at home and in particular the environment that they experienced in their grandparents' homes. Initially, they saw no connection between religion and what they learned at school and their lives outside of school, but with the pictures and the discussion that followed, they began to see tangible

links. This researcher contends that this highlights the need for a greater connection between school and the wider community in children's experiences of, and learning in, RE.

4.3.2.5. "We Teach Who We Are" - Respect for People and the Environment

The second workshop consisted of the children designing a poster that would show the theme of what they would teach during an RE class. This gave insight into what they saw as important in their tradition. As Palmer (1998) claims, "we teach who we are". To create the poster, the children used a variety of papers, books, magazines and other material that they had collected. When all eight groups had competed the task, the following topics were collated:
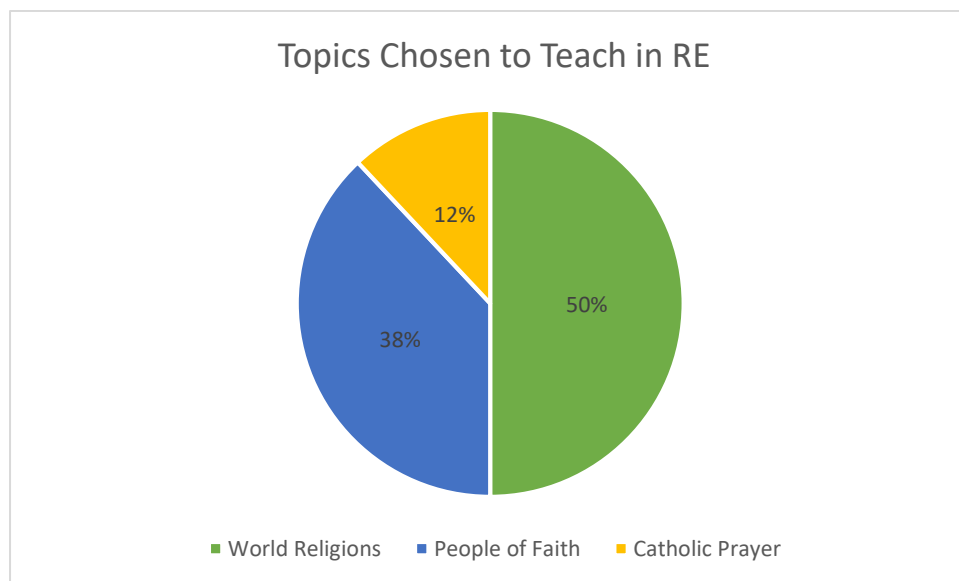
Figure 4.20: Topics Chosen to Teach in RE

In all, 50% of the groups chose to teach a class on world religions. They did not pick any one religion to teach, but kept it general, not focusing on any of the religious traditions from the class. The conversations focused on respect for the other and celebrating diversity in the world. The children showed minimal knowledge of the content of any of the traditions they mentioned.

The other 50% chose topics that could be identified as core Catholic teaching, namely People of Faith (38%) and Catholic Prayer (12%) (Figure 4.19). Three groups chose to teach a class on People of Faith: Jesus, Pope Francis, and Mother Teresa. The group that chose Jesus focused on his acts of kindness and forgiveness; they mentioned some of the Bible stories that would illustrate their message. With Pope Francis and Mother Teresa, they chose elements of their lives – the environment and respect and kindness towards others, respectively.

Some 88% of the children indicated that they would wish to teach the themes "World Religions" and "People of Faith". Within these themes they would focus on respect for people and the environment. This again highlights their commitment to embracing diversity and respecting it within the world in which they live.

4.3.2.6. Withdrawal from Religious Education (Instruction): a Matter of Choice

Under the *Constitution of Ireland*, Article 44.2.4 (Irish Government 1937) parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE (religious instruction) lessons in schools. Consequently, conversations around RE within a Catholic primary school in Ireland will often turn to this and to concerns surrounding children being withdrawn from the subject.
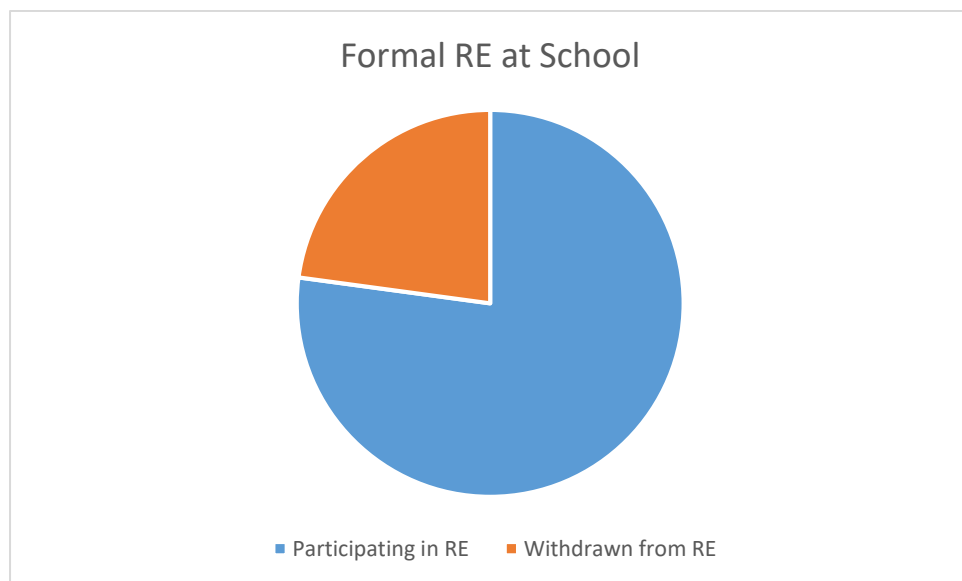
Figure 4.21: Formal RE at School

At the start of the semi-structured interview sessions, the children were asked to identify their belief system and to indicate if they participated in RE at school. All thirty-five participants identified with some faith tradition. Some eight participants stated that they did not take part in RE classes in school. The children withdrawn from RE said that they listened at times during RE, especially to the stories, and found them interesting. Occasionally, their teacher gave them projects to do during RE. At the time of the research, they were doing some work on world religions which they were due to present to the rest of the class at the end of the month. At other times, they read library or other books or carried out tasks as directed by their class teacher. No child spoke of feeling excluded and many saw it as a choice that had been made.

> Daniel: I feel like it's just...like it's totally my decision. I don't feel like if I don't do it I'm like separated or that. I am happy with it, it's a choice.

During all the conversations around withdrawal from RE, the children referred to respecting people's choices and respecting diversity in their school and the world.

4.3.2.7 No Formal Assessment for Religious Education

Assessment is seen as a key component of educational endeavour, including RE. The children viewed it very differently. They did not see the reason for assessment in RE. They identified it as a subject that was different from the others and claimed it would be inappropriate to engage in assessment or "tests". They also felt it would lead to people being judged.

> Anne: I don't feel like it would be right
>
> Amy: You shouldn't be judged if you don't know everything about your religion.

4.3.2.8 Acceptable School Ethos

At the time of the research, the school was in the process of trying to achieve a "Yellow Flag" for diversity. (The "Yellow Flag" is an award given to those who complete the eight practical steps of the programme that highlights issues of inter culturalism, equality and diversity in the school.) The children involved in the research, across all groups and during all sessions, focused on the philosophy of respect for diversity and welcome for all in their school. They connected their ethos to the three words engraved on the floor in the entrance hall of their school: "Justice, Respect and Self-worth". They saw these as foundational to the philosophy of the school and were very committed to respecting diversity and making people feel welcome. They acknowledged that the school was founded by "Sisters" who lived across the road from the school. Most were not be able to talk about the Sisters but they could trace the history of the school, listing its previous locations in the town. However, the children did not link the school's philosophy in any way to the Sisters' Catholic tradition but considered "Justice, Respect and Self-worth" as values for good living in society.

When asked if they wanted to alter the ethos of the school, 100% of respondents stated that they did not want any change. They were unable to say why but they were happy with their school as it was. However, they did say that there might have to be a change to the name of the school in the future, if it were no longer under Catholic patronage. They also considered that, in that case, religious songs should not be sung during school assembly.

4.3.2.9 Children propose Three Models for Religious Education into the Future

The children spoke about the importance of RE as a subject and the need to include the teaching of other religions and beliefs in their classes. They proposed three models of how all could be included in RE, suggesting that

1. Children should move into their religious or belief groups, just as they do for maths each morning (children work in ability-appropriate groups for maths).
2. All children do a general programme for four days and consider their own religion or belief on the fifth day.
3. Everyone follow a general programme.

The majority were in favour of Option 2. Option 1 was the next most popular. They associated the model of moving between classes, depending on their religion or belief system, with that of their movement for maths. They also felt it was important to get some time to discuss their own religion with people of a similar religion or belief system to themselves.

The discussion involved always trying to be respectful of the difference in the school and recognising that, with regard to RE, people have different needs.

4.3.3 Visit of the Local Priest Appreciated

As part of their preparation for Confirmation, the children had to attend formation classes ("Faith Friends") one evening a week in the parish. These classes were facilitated by pupils from the local second-level school and supported the children in exploring their faith. These formation classes were only mentioned by the children in passing. The children apparently did not consider that they merited an elongated discussion. Other than this formal arrangement, the children had little contact with the parish with regard to practising their faith. However, they did have a strong connection with the priest who visited their classroom and they looked forward to his visits. Mary showed a picture:

> Mary: "This is Fr Joe. He is the priest in our parish - St Michael's - and he comes to visit us. We really enjoy his visits and he is very interesting to talk with.

4.3.4 Discussion on Religious Education and the Curriculum

Share the Good News (IEC 2010) states that RE is a process that contributes to the faith development of some people who engage in it. RE can happen in a variety of locations - home, school or work, and church. This study considered all sites of RE for children but focussed especially on RE in the school context which is, of course, an important vehicle

in the development of the children's understanding of religion. In the school, RE is one of the seven curricular areas within the Irish PSC (NCCA 1999), though, at the time of writing this thesis, it is becoming a contested area (NCCA 2017). The rationale set out in the introduction to the curriculum states: "RE specifically enables the child to develop spiritual and moral values and to come to know a God". It goes on to say: "It is equally important that the beliefs and sensibilities of every child are respected" (p.58). The curriculum allows for two and a half hours of RE during the school week. Typically, RE is delivered during a thirty-minute session each a day. According to the class teachers, the children who took part in this research receive an average of one to one and a half hours per week. The teachers explained that this was due to what they perceive as the demands of an overcrowded curriculum. The time devoted to RE is less than the allocated curriculum time. It is against this backdrop that we explore the experiences and attitudes of the children around their engagement with RE in their classroom.

The school wherein the research took place adopts a confessional approach to the teaching of RE (Section 2.1.1.2). Consequently, it follows the Groome/Shared Christian Praxis approach (1988) in an effort to bring life to faith and faith to life. The children in the study struggled to apply the content of the subject to their lives outside of the school. This concurs with the narrative that religion is becoming more private and that society is losing the religious literacy which traditionally allowed people to articulate a religious view point within their communities (Davis 2010). This inability to connect the school learning with the wider faith community is in fact another facet of the phenomenon of "cultural Catholics". People struggle to articulate the religious convictions of their faith tradition and to see their relevance to society as a whole and only connect with the community at key personal moments in their lives (O'Connell et al. 2018, Francis et al. 2016, Breen et al. 2016, Ó Féich et al. 2015 and McGuckin et al. 2014).

When exploring the concept of religion with children, many writers do so within the starting point of spirituality (Hart 2003; Hay and Nye 1998, 2006; McCreery 1994). The children pass through various stages of religious development (Fowler 1981), and as this occurs, different people and situations influence them. Children, like adults, have things that give their lives meaning and purpose. Rolheiser (1998) refers to these as ultimate concerns, and Coles (1989) talks of the meaning of life and ultimate questions of life. Echoing Dewey's (1916) ideas of democracy in education and the UNCRC (UN 1989), the co-researchers of the present study were asked to pick topics to teach in RE. This revealed some of their "ultimate concerns" or "meaning of life" topics. The children focused predominantly on

world religions and on trying to learn about the religious others in the room. This suggests some noteworthy possibilities. One might assume that the children simply wished to know about what other people believe, as an academic exercise. It is also possible that, in line with Fowler's stages of development (1981), the children were moving between Stages 2 and 3 and trying to make meaning of life and learn about the other's story. Alternatively, as with Gottlieb's Stage 3 (2006), perhaps the children were entering the abstract phase of attempting to distinguish religious groups.

World religions emerged not only as possible topics for RE but across all activities during the data gathering sessions. The children moved through the first two steps of Igrave's interreligious dialogue (2002) in respecting diversity and engaging in questioning each other, but at no time did they challenge or disregard anyone's faith or belief system. Cullen (2006, 2017) proposes the use of the term "conversation" instead of "dialogue". Looking at the interactions between the children in this study, the former term appears to be more appropriate. It even suggests that children at this age do not dialogue with each other but in fact converse in a friendly and open manner. This researcher respectfully suggests that this is what schools and communities should be fostering in children: a sense of interreligious conversation that allows them to appreciate the other. At a later juncture, the rigor of dialogue can be introduced.

The children became active agents in their own learning and in doing so highlighted an apparent deficiency in their RE to date – lack of engagement with world religions or interreligious conversation. This deficit has been highlighted before as part of the REDCo project (REDCo Research Project, 2009) which found that "all pupils regard teaching an interreligious understanding at both the personal and the societal level as necessary and possible" (Wessie 2010 p.198). While the children highlighted this deficiency, they nevertheless saw a value in RE and felt that it was important for all to be involved. They went as far as to offer several models for use into the future, which would offer valuable insight to the NCCA regarding its consultation document, *Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum*. This consultation document proposes a change of name for RE and its relocation to "flexible time" on schools' timetables. This is not what the children involved in this study would recommend, as they value the place of RE in their classroom and school.

Withdrawal of the children during preparation for sacraments or during class visits to the local church was not discussed. However, their withdrawal from RE lessons each day was.

While there is much debate and recommendation surrounding children being withdrawn from RE (Faas et al. 2015; Coolahan et al. 2012), the participants in this study viewed their withdrawal from RE as a choice and the exercise of a right. Children who were not taking part in RE lessons admitted to listening in at times and sometimes saw it as interesting. For most of the time they were happy doing other work during this period. Though this group of children perceive withdrawal from RE in this way, it is not the view of children in other school situations (Coolahan et al. 2012; Mawhinney 2009). Mawhinney et al. (2012) found that while children in Northern Ireland can and do opt out of RE, pupils who do so consider that their religion or belief was not respected or celebrated in or by their school. Smyth and Darmody (2011) meanwhile discovered that some children forgo the opt out possibility for fear of being seen as "different" in their schools and/or by their peers.

The findings of the theme "Religious Education and the Curriculum" show that children are positively disposed to the learning of RE in schools and they value its place within the curriculum. They highlight a significant deficiency in RE that is learning about and from the religious others in the classroom. This is noteworthy considering Signpost (Council of Europe 2014) and the *Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religious education and beliefs in public schools* (ODIHR/OCSE 2007). For most children of the Catholic tradition who took part in this research, the only site of RE is the school. This, of course, differs to those of minority faiths within the school, where much RE, of necessity, takes place at home.

4.3.5 Religious Education and the Curriculum: Key Findings

1. Children struggle to explain what RE is.

2. Children strive to see the RE taught and/or learned at school as relevant to other areas of their lives.

3. Similarities and differences in the sacraments between Christian traditions are identified.

4. Children see being withdrawn from RE as a choice.

5. Children are happy with the ethos of their school.

6. Children appreciate the visit of the local priest to their classroom.

7. Children clearly state that they do not wish to see RE being removed from nor diminished within their curriculum.

4.4 Gender and Engagement in Matters of Religion and Beliefs

"Voice" is one of the four elements of the Lundy Model of Participation (2007) and children must be "facilitated in expressing their views freely" (DCYA 2015, p.21). The sample group comprised thirty-five participants, both male and female. When all three themes were interested in a matrix against the lines of gender, an unexpected finding of this study is that, though boys and girls contributed on all three themes, at no point, did the males' engagement outstrip that of the females.
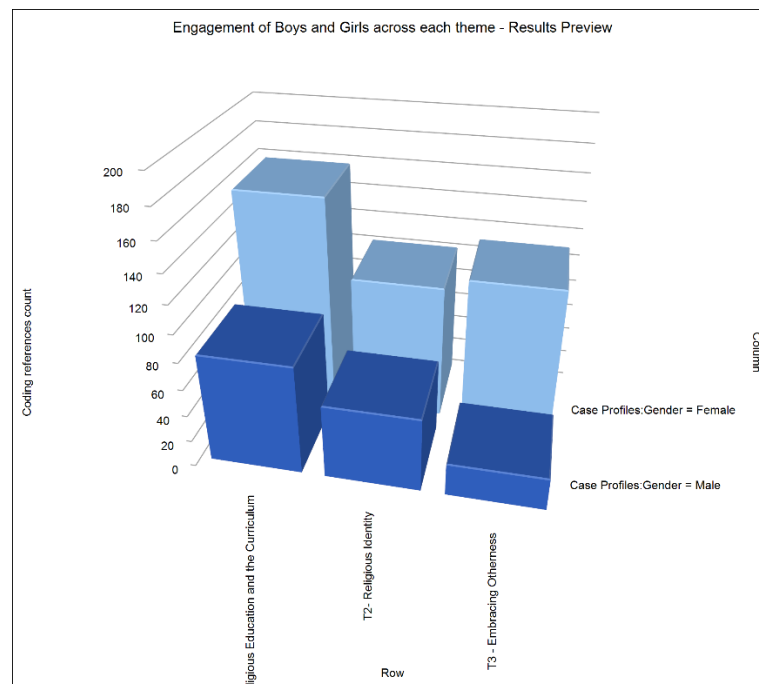
Figure 4.22: Boys and Girls Engagement across all Themes

The lowest level of engagement on behalf of the boys who took part in this research was regarding the theme of "embracing otherness". They contributed just twenty-five statements while girls offered 109 statements on the topic. If one were to deduce that the girls were more engaged in these religious themes than the boys and were therefore more engaged in matters of religion, one would be moving towards concurrence with Smith et al. (2003), Francis (2001) and Kay and Francis (1996) who all claim that girls have a greater level of religious observance than boys and, in turn, are more engaged. Alternatively, it may be that the girls who took part in this study are more comfortable with revealing their thoughts to classmates and are more willing and able to express their opinions of religious matters than their male counterparts. A separate point with regard to gender is that Francis et al. (2016) found that female parents were perceived by their daughters to be more

engaged in religious matters. Interestingly, only one child who took part in this study spoke specifically of his father's involvement with religious matters.

> **4.4.1 Gender and Engagement in Matters of Religion and Belief: Key Findings**
>   1. Girls are more engaged in matters of religion than boys.

4.5 Conclusion

Three themes emerged following the six steps of coding of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. In this study an interpretive paradigm was used. This was concerned with understanding the world as it is from the subjective reality of the individual. The study findings as outlined in this chapter are grounded in the children's own experiences and perceptions within the qualitative field of study. The children highlighted how their families' belief systems had an influence on how they perceived their religious selves, with many trying to reconcile the different religious or belief systems that were to be found within their homes in the articulation of their own belief systems. A total of 71% of children who identified as accessing the Catholic tradition cited grandparents as an important influence on their belief system. All children articulated the desire to learn more about other religious or belief traditions as part of their RE curriculum in school. Identification of, and respect for, diversity was evident but little knowledge was articulated in relation to the content of the religious traditions of others.

Interest was shown in learning about the religious other in their environment when children engaged in what Ipgrave (Mc Kenna et al. 2008, pp.13-25) called "spiritual sharing" by learning the stories of religious or belief traditions beyond their own. The findings suggest that children have a clear sense of "being" religious or having a belief system that is valued. They identify how it is to "behave" in a certain way because of this, through personal prayer and the values of respect for others and care for the environment. However, the children of the Catholic tradition struggled with a sense of belonging to communities of faith practice, with many only attending for major feasts or key moments in their lives. This is not the case for children of the other traditions who took part in this study. All children attested to valuing the place of RE in the curriculum, irrespective of whether they accessed RE as an element of their curricular experience.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This study invited children to become co-researchers in a participatory-based exploration of their views in religion and RE. The methodology enabled the children to become active participants in the data gathering process and facilitated their development as reflective interpreters of meaning. The children shared their views about religion and RE in a willing, happy, confident, diverse, imaginative and critical way, offering a significant contribution to RE in Ireland at this time. This concluding chapter explores Bradford's (1995) requirements that RE must meet the religious needs of children and examines them in light of the discussions and findings, in Chapter 4. Recommendations for practice that arise from this research will be presented in two categories - those for school communities and curriculum design and those for future research in this area. Finally the significance of this research is considered.

5.2 Religious Needs of Children

This study has been about (a) giving children the opportunity to exercise their rights in having their voice heard in relation to issues of conscience and religion, as set out in Article 14 of the UNCRC (UN 1989), and (b) identifying their needs, in particular those of their religious lives.

Coles also gave children an opportunity to exercise these rights (1990). He described the children as pilgrims who understood that life was a journey and were anxious to make sense of it. He claimed that they were interested in the meaning of life and questions of ultimate concerns. This study concurs with Coles, as we see children trying to make meaning of life and struggling to answer questions of ultimate concern to them and the people around them.

Bradford (1995) argues that meeting the religious needs of children can be explored under three categories:

4. Helping them to be aware of their religious identity and to value what is positive within it.

The present research study suggests that children attach their own significance to their personal beliefs, as they draw on their social networks, including family, school community and, for some, their communities of belief practice. This study shows that children who took part in this study within the Catholic tradition at times blend their

religious identity with the influences they experience in their homes. The complex nature of religious identity is evident in the statement "I am a Catholic Buddhist" is, for Hannah, an attempt to respect the belief tradition of her mother, while at the same time seeing herself as a Catholic, as a result of her grandmother's influence. The research shows that this a replicated by other children.

> Ronald: My parents ... well, my dad's atheist, my sister is Christian, my mother is Catholic, 'cause they're Armenian, so they're really religious. Um, my brother I think he's atheist as well. There's a few atheists in my family but a lot of them are Russian Orthodox and Christian, I am Catholic, I think!

Interestingly the children from minority religious traditions are more certain and, in the case of the children from the Orthodox tradition, have a greater vocabulary and more in-depth knowledge about their religious identity.

5. To provide opportunities for them to link with people of other traditions and to share knowledge and opportunities for shared worship.

This original study finds that while the children who took part in it are able to articulate their personal belief systems, to various degrees, they have little knowledge of the belief system of others with whom they share their classroom. This research highlights that the PSC does not provide the opportunity or space for education and dialogue pertaining to other belief systems in a meaningful way for the children. This is surprising given that the REDCo project (2009), with slightly older children, identified school as the place where children of religious and non-religious backgrounds met those of religions and beliefs other than their own. Furthermore, REDCo found that it was at school that the children were prepared to enter into dialogue with people of other faith traditions in a respectful manner. The present study shows that, while children had little real knowledge, they were extremely interested in exploring the religious traditions of the others in their classroom, especially when space is created for this to happen. The current research shows that when space is created, as was during this study, the children were not engaging in authentic interreligious dialogue but in what the researcher would call interreligious conversation. He contends that while dialogue involves criticality, conversation encompasses friendly interaction. The research shows that the children were at the preliminary stage of dialogue.

> Rose: They have the bread and the wine and we have bread and wine but it's different

> Tajina: Yeah we also have bread and wine so, we do different things with different breads it looks like.

> Anne: It's like the body of Christ. But sometimes it gets stuck at the top
> of your mouth. It's not a good thing.

As the children were largely unaware of the belief systems of the others in the classroom, there was no possibility for shared worship, as suggested by Bradford, at this time.

6. To integrate their faith, experience, attitudes and lifestyle gradually to allow them to fully express their identity.

Bradford promotes a holistic integration of learning, faith and life for children that will lead one day to a holistic engagement with a faith community and allow for an authentic expression of their religious identity. This study illustrates that the majority of the children from the Catholic tradition who took part in this research have little if any connection with an active faith community based on the religious tradition learnt in school. For those who do connect with a faith community, it is usually with and/or through their grandparents. As shared by Rose: "I go to Mass with my gran, she is very religious". There is a generational disconnection that is a critical issue with significant implications for the future of faith- based RE and for the Catholic Church in Ireland. In contrast, the children of minority religious communities who were co-researchers in this study were more likely to be engaged with a living faith community and were more articulate in speaking about what happens at their community celebrations and how it relates to their lives.

> Noah: Our community sings a lot and we praise Jesus, people sit around
> and are very happy, after about a half hour we move to bible reading and
> people share their views and them more community worship.

In light of Bradford's three requirements to meet the religious needs of children, the researcher claims that the Irish education system at primary level needs to have a space in which the children can learn, experience and share conversation around religion and beliefs, relevant to their own religion or belief and that of the others in their school and wider community. In his work, Bradford (1999) identified three ways of exploring spirituality, secular, religious and practical (Section 2.1.4.1). The researcher proposes that Bradford's delineations can also be used to explore religious literacy and can be presented as three stages of religiosity:

1. Human Religiosity: Each child has a need to be religiously or belief literate to engage in the contemporary world. This may be referred to as "human religiosity".

The education system must foster the human sense of curiosity about the world and its religious and belief traditions.

2. Devotional Religiosity: For some, there is a need to move beyond conversation and to engagement with a particular religious tradition, such as developing a prayer life and learning the in-depth teachings and traditions of the religion. Devotional religiosity is supported by a community of faith practice

3. Practical Religiosity: A person who professes to belong to a religious tradition, because of its communitarian dimension, should not make it a private activity but should allow it to influence all that they do. It should afford him/her a certain way of looking at the world with which (s)he engages. Practical religiosity is when one's religious views offer a means of engaging with the wider community, within the public square. For religiosity to become practical people need to be religiously literate on many levels – literate in their own tradition and regarding the traditions of others – so as to be able to respectfully engage in conversation for the good of all.

This study concludes that children are open to religion and RE, and value the place of it in their lives. This concurs with O'Farrell (2016) which found that children value the opportunities for spiritual expression and development, through the exploration of the Bible. In this study the children clearly state that they do not wish to see RE being removed from nor diminished within their curriculum. They wish to learn about the traditions of others, while developing within their own traditions. The research concludes that the challenge for the education system is to meet children's needs and to ensure that when their voice is sought that it has influence, (Lundy's Model of Participation (Section 2.2.2)). Section 5.4 provides some recommendations that will offer children a voice.

5.3 Limitations and Delimitations of this Research

The scope of this research is limited by the following factors:

Some 8.8% of the whole school population identify themselves as atheist or of no religion. Despite this, neither group was represented within the group who participated in this research, though the sample group did include a variety of religious traditions that were representative of the school in general.

The researcher works in the area of primary level RE in Initial Teacher Education. This gave the researcher a level of understanding when designing the tasks for the children and

his experience allowed him to conduct the workshop sessions in an efficient way. Nevertheless, his work in Initial Teacher Education and the participatory-based nature of this research carried out in the form of a case study allowed for the use of insider knowledge by the researcher (Reilly 2010).

A further limitation of the study is researcher bias, especially as the researcher was heavily involved in the process of data gathering and analysis generation. How the researcher overcame this is dealt with under verification of data and peer debriefing (3.6.2).

A concern for the researcher was that the children would build a relationship with him over the workshop sessions and might begin to offer what they considered he wanted to hear. To overcome this, at the start of each session the children were reminded that this was a safe place to express their views and that all in the room would respect what each other said.

Of concern to the researcher, from the beginning, has been sample size. Initially, though letters of invitation were sent to more than ten large schools in the area, only two principals agreed to put the proposal to the schools' Boards of Management. Access was eventually given to one school only. This study focussed therefore on the co-researchers from this one school, in this urban area, at a particular time in history. It is consequently a snapshot in time.

The next section provides some recommendations that will offer children a voice.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, that are as a result of the co-researchers' (the children and the researcher), interpretation of the data gathered, the following recommendations are offered for consideration

5.4.1 Recommendations for School Communities and Curriculum Design

1. The co-researchers in this study attested to valuing RE (4.3.2.9), its place within the curriculum and the importance of being religiously literate in the multi-belief globally connected contemporary world. RE, It would helpful therefore, that RE be clearly identifiable as a curriculum area in the PSC and not be replaced with the title "Patron's Programme", as proposed by the NCCA.

2. Giving the finding that children value the importance of learning about other faiths (Section 4.3.4). It is recommended that time to be allocated, and a physical space created, in schools so as to facilitate children to engage in interreligious

conversation, whereby children are enabled to share their own religion or belief traditions, as well as learn from others in an age-appropriate way.

3. Consideration be given to the provision of guidelines for schools to support children's interreligious conversations, these need to be adapted by each school, depending on its particular ethos, pupil intake, traditions and situation. It is suggested that these guidelines offer innovative methodologies, for example photovoice and scrapbooking as used in this study, which will help to create a supportive environment for interreligious conversation. This recommendation is made in light of the issues being faced by the NCCA in implementing a curriculum on ERBE. These guidelines might offer a middle ground to the NCCA and the different patron bodies, so as to meet the needs of the children in the classroom.

4. In light of Daniel's comments "I feel like it's just...like it's totally my decision. I don't feel like if I don't do it I'm like separated or that. I am happy with it, it's a choice" (Section 4.3.2.6). As a matter of priority, consideration be given, nationally and locally, to accommodating the needs of children who are currently withdrawn from RE (religious instruction) programmes.

5. It is suggested that relevant continuing professional development programmes are provided for teachers regarding the implementation of the guidelines proposed above, with particular emphasis on the teaching of knowledge about religion and beliefs as part of disparate curriculum areas. It is recommended that these programmes be offered in a similar way to those provided in all other curriculum areas, with paid substitution or school closure, rather than using the model that is currently in use for RE (DES permits attendance at continuing professional development for RE. However, paid replacement is not provided by comparison to all other curriculum areas).

5.4.2 Recommendations for Future Research

1. A comparable study be carried out in a number of schools to ascertain if the findings of this study are indeed replicable, as the researcher, given his experience, believes they can.

2. As has been already identified Growing Up in Ireland (ESRI 2008) (2.2.3) does not explore the religious or spiritual opinions of the children involved. It is recommended that the research be amended to include the areas of religious and spiritual opinions in the lives of the children. As Growing Up in Ireland is a

longitudinal study, this inclusion would allow an opportunity to ascertain children's opinions with regard to these areas over an extended period of time.

3. A similar study to be carried out to explore with the teaching staff of a school on how they voice their religion and beliefs in a safe and respectful space in a school. This may help to build understanding among staff and also help to develop appropriate continuing professional development programmes. Most research with teachers is based on interviews and questionnaires and this results in research fatigue. The participatory method methodologies used in this study (photovoice and scrapbooking) might help overcome research fatigue, as they are innovative and would also be appropriate for teachers to use in their classrooms.

4. Doyle: "My mom is Catholic and my dad is atheist, my brother and sister are Catholic, but I see myself as a Catholic Atheist."

    This study found that many children live in blended religious or belief family contexts. Other studies as noted in Chapter 2 have considered the voice of parents with regard to religion and RE. Consequently, this research study did not. However, it is recommended that a future study explore an intergenerational model of research, inviting parents, children and grandparents to come together to explore their religion and beliefs.

5.5 Significance of the Study

This study makes a significant contribution to the educational landscape in Ireland at this time. Its consequence with regard to religious education in the country is particularly noteworthy.

1. The voice of children regarding religion and RE is paramount. Nevertheless, theirs is the voice most often missing in education. This study allows this almost unheard voice to be discerned. It offers policy makers and those involved in curriculum design an important insight into the views of children. The interpretive paradigm that is used is concerned with understanding the world as it is from the subjective reality of the individual. This qualitative study is grounded therefore in the children's own experiences and perceptions.

2. In particular, this study offers those involved in policy formation and curriculum design insight into children's views regarding the value of RE, its place in the curriculum and the approach to RE that is presently offered to them in Catholic

schools. It highlights the children's identification of the current lack of an opportunity to learn about religious beliefs and traditions other than their own.

3. This research offers the stakeholders involved in RE some views from its youngest. It highlights the disconnect between faith practice in parishes and the teaching of the Catholic tradition in the school. The RE programme is taught in schools. However, faith practice in parishes needs to be more attractive to young people who are interested in, and engaged with, religion. The researcher utilised methodologies such as photovoice and scrapbooking. These are innovative ways of conducting research in the area of RE. He contends that these and other creative ways may prove beneficial for future researchers in the study of this and other educational disciplines.

4. This study extends the Irish Centre for Religious Education's corpus of research into children's experience of religion and spirituality in Ireland.

5.6 Conclusion

Historically, Irish people identified strongly with a community of faith practice. For centuries, the majority identified strongly with Catholic belief traditions. This research shows that currently Catholic children, more than those of other belief traditions, can struggle with a sense of belonging to a community of faith practice. Many now only attend Church gatherings for major feasts or key moments in their lives. Education must continue to meet the learning needs of the very young. The child's voice has not been to the fore in Irish education, particularly with regard to RE. This study redresses this and suggests that, when consulted and enabled, children are willing, happy, confident, imaginative and critical. Children are the future of Ireland's education system. Adults ignore them at their peril as children have much to contribute to education, to educators, policy makers and academics. This study is a snapshot of one school at a particular time. However, it is a school that mirrors so many other schools in Ireland where a plurality of religions and beliefs is to be found. Identification of, and respect for, diversity was evident, but little knowledge was articulated in relation to the diverse religious traditions of others.

Nevertheless, the co-researchers of this study articulated clearly their desire to learn more about other religious or belief traditions as part of their RE curriculum. Interest was shown in learning about the "religious other" in their environment, when children engaged in what Ipgrave (McKenna et al. 2008, pp.13-25) called "spiritual sharing", through learning the stories of religious or belief traditions beyond their own. The findings suggest that children

have a clear sense of "being" religious or having a belief system that is valued. They identify how it is to "behave" in a certain way because of their religious or belief tradition, through personal prayer and the values of respect of others and caring for the environment. Teachers, policy makers and academics in this multi-belief society must listen to and learn from the child's voice as it respects and values his/her own traditions and the education (s)he has received to date and as it highlights the significant challenge of his/her deficient knowledge about other religious and belief traditions of the other in the classroom

Finally, the co-researchers of this study attested to the positive value they place on RE in the curriculum, irrespective of whether or not they access RE as an element of their curricular experience each day in school. In the words of one child:

> Senan: We like RE, it as an important and would not like to see it removed or changed, only to learn about other religions. Religion time allows us to stop!

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Appendices

Appendix A

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

Maurice Harmon
Institute of Education

20th September 2016

REC Reference: DCUREC/2016/139

Proposal Title: Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and worldviews and the value of that voice to the education system

Applicant(s): Maurice Harmon & Dr Sandra Cullen
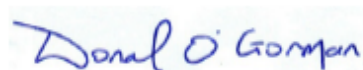
Dear Maurice,

Further to review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Dónal O'Gorman
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee

Research & Innovation

Appendix B

Plain Language Statement and Consent –Board of Management

DCU

Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and non-religious world views and the value of that voice to the education system

The above research study is being conducted by myself, Maurice Harmon, a doctoral student at Dublin City University (DCU), in its Institute of Education, under the supervision of Dr Sandra Cullen. This study will form part of my EdD thesis, and has been approved by the Ethics Committee of DCU.

My contact details are: Maurice Harmon – Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick –

Dear ……….,

I am a doctoral student at the Institute of Education at Dublin City University (DCU) and a lecturer at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick. I am in the process of completing my doctoral thesis entitled: *Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and non-religious world views and the value of that voice to the education system*. As we are living in an Ireland that shares a diversity of belief systems I am interested in exploring how children express their belief system and how they appreciate others' belief systems.

The aim of this research is to work with young people (6th class, age 12-13) in primary school in order to identify how

- they appreciate their own belief system
- they appreciate the belief systems of others, and
- their voice is valued in the education system.

This study has been granted ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee, DCU.

The research, which will be organized and conducted completely by myself, involves active and innovative workshops (photovoice, scrapbooking and a focus group). It is designed in line with active in-school methodologies, such as talk and discussion, active learning, collaborative learning, written activities and visual image and Circle Time, and as an enjoyable, personally respectful and open, non-intrusive and non-threatening experience for the children.

What will this mean for your school?

If you permit this research in your school, I will visit the school on 4 different occasions for one or two class periods each time. I will conduct a lesson (workshop) with the selected class group on each of these occasions. The workshops will take the following format:

Lesson one (Day 1): 45 minutes

- introduction – greetings and explanations
- discussion on religious world views
- outline of plan for sessions
- discussion on the ethics around photographs
- children will choose which group (4-5 members) to be part of
- each child will be given a camera to take pictures over 3 days that explore their religious/ belief world view

After three days I will collect the cameras and have the photographs developed.

Lesson two (Day 2): 45 minutes

- introduction – review of the experience of taking the photographs
- each group is given all of the images they took the last day
- each group selects 15 images that best represent their perspective as a group
- children are invited to explain why they chose each image and why they didn't choose others
- each child is invited to write a reflection, if (s)he wishes, on the how the pictures were chosen

Lesson three (Day 4/5): 80 minutes

- introduction – review of images chosen and reflections made afterwards
- in groups as before children use photographs, images, song lyrics, etc., to represent, in scrapbooks (provided), their understanding of religions and beliefs/non-beliefs in the world
- children provide titles for the images and write 3-4 lines about each image
- children are invited to explain their scrapbook and why they wrote/choose certain images, etc.

Lesson four (Day 14/15): 80 minutes

- I will reflect back to the students the data that I have gathered over the previous sessions, asking questions like: Does this represent what you said? Do you feel this is accurate? Is there anything I need to change?
- 6-8 students will be chosen randomly to partake in a small group interview/ chat. In the chat we will explore more deeply things that have come up in the class conversations and if they have any other views they may wish to add.

What are the benefits/risks?

There is always an element of risk and inconvenience to participants, especially when they are young. By conducting the research in the natural environment of the school and class, in the presence of their peers and teacher(s), using familiar educational techniques in an engaging and enjoyable way, the risks will be at a minimum. Participants will also be kept anonymous and will be able to withdraw at any stage during the research process if they experience discomfort or embarrassment; nearby teachers will be alerted to the possibility that a child may wish to excuse herself/himself from the process and parents/guardians will be alerted to any anxieties any child may have at home. All national child protection guidelines (*Children First*, 2011) and those of your school will be followed and confidentiality will be maintained within the parameters of the law and the requirements of DCU. The research is grounded in the belief that the benefits of the study outweigh any potential risks as there is currently a gap in the research in relation to young people's views on religion and beliefs.

What happens to the information?

I and my supervisor will be the only people with access to the data. The information will be stored in a secure location at MIC for a period of 5 years or as the University determines. The data, anonymized, will make up part of my doctoral thesis.

When the project is completed in 2018, I will return to the school to make a presentation on the findings and outcomes of the research.

Wish to partake?

This plain language statement is for you to keep. If you would like your school to participate in this research project, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and returning it to me.

Right to withdraw

The involvement of your school in this research is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage prior to submission (June 2018). Should any parent or child decide that (s)he wishes to withdraw from the study, (s)he may do so also.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact - The Secretary, Dublin City University Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel: 01 7008000.

Informed Consent Form Board of Management

Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and other worldviews and the value of that voice to the education system

The above research study is being conducted by myself, Maurice Harmon, a doctoral student at Dublin City University (DCU), in its Institute of Education, under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Cullen. This study will form part of my Doctorate in Education thesis, and has been approved by the Ethics Committee of DCU.

The research will take place at …*name of school*

My contact details are: Maurice Harmon – Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick

Consent from Board of Management:

Board of Management– please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)
- We have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)   Yes/N
- We understand the information provided   Yes/No
- We have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study   Yes/No
- We have received satisfactory answers to all my questions   Yes/No
- We are happy for the children in *(name of school)* to partake in the research project Yes/No

Voluntary Involvement in the Research Project

- We are aware that the school may withdraw from the project at any time
  Yes/No
- We are aware that any parent may withdraw his/her child from the project at any time
  Yes/No

Confidentiality:
Maurice Harmon and his supervisor will be the only people with access to the data. The information will be stored in a secure location at MIC for a period of 5 years or as the University determines. Children's names, the name of their class and school are completely confidential and they will not be identifiable in any way in the completed thesis. At all times the project will be conducted within the guidelines of best practice for child protection and the law.

Signature:
We have read and understood the information in this form. Our questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher and we have a copy of this consent form. We consent to this school taking part in this research project.
Chair of Board on behave of Board of Management Signature:_____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness:_____   Date: _____

B.4

Appendix C

Plain Language Statement and Consent -Principal

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DCU

Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and non-religious world views and the value of that voice to the education system

The above research study is being conducted by myself, Maurice Harmon, a doctoral student at Dublin City University (DCU), in its Institute of Education, under the supervision of Dr Sandra Cullen. This study will form part of my EdD thesis, and has been approved by the Ethics Committee of DCU.

My contact details are: Maurice Harmon – Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick –

</div>

Dear principal,

I am a doctoral student at the Institute of Education at Dublin City University (DCU) and a lecturer at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick. I am in the process of completing my doctoral thesis entitled: *Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and non-religious world views and the value of that voice to the education system*. As we are living in an Ireland that shares a diversity of belief systems I am interested in exploring how children express their belief system and how they appreciate others' belief systems.

The aim of this research is to work with young people (6th class, age 12-13) in primary school in order to identify how

- they appreciate their own belief system
- they appreciate the belief systems of others, and
- their voice is valued in the education system.

This study has been granted ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee, DCU.

The research, which will be organized and conducted completely by myself, involves active and innovative workshops (photovoice, scrapbooking and a focus group). It is designed in line with active in-school methodologies, such as talk and discussion, active learning, collaborative learning, written activities and visual image and Circle Time, and as an enjoyable, personally respectful and open, non-intrusive and non-threatening experience for the children.

What will this mean for your school?

If you permit this research in your school, I will visit the school on 4 different occasions for one or two class periods each time. I will conduct a lesson (workshop) with the selected class group on each of these occasions. The workshops will take the following format:

Lesson one (Day 1): 45 minutes

- introduction – greetings and explanations
- discussion on religious world views
- outline of plan for sessions
- discussion on the ethics around photographs
- children will choose which group (4-5 members) to be part of
- each child will be given a camera to take pictures over 3 days that explore their religious/ belief world view

After three days I will collect the cameras and have the photographs developed.

Lesson two (Day 2): 45 minutes

- introduction – review of the experience of taking the photographs
- each group is given all of the images they took the last day
- each group selects 15 images that best represent their perspective as a group
- children are invited to explain why they chose each image and why they didn't choose others
- each child is invited to write a reflection, if (s)he wishes, on the how the pictures were chosen

Lesson three (Day 4/5): 80 minutes

- introduction – review of images chosen and reflections made afterwards
- in groups as before children use photographs, images, song lyrics, etc., to represent, in scrapbooks (provided), their understanding of religions and beliefs/non-beliefs in the world
- children provide titles for the images and write 3-4 lines about each image
- children are invited to explain their scrapbook and why they wrote/choose certain images, etc.

Lesson four (Day 14/15): 80 minutes

- I will reflect back to the children the data that I have gathered over the previous sessions, asking questions like: Does this represent what you said? Do you feel this is accurate? Is there anything I need to change?
- 6-8 children will be chosen randomly to partake in a small group interview/ chat. In the chat we will explore more deeply things that have come up in the class conversations and if they have any other views they may wish to add.

What are the benefits/risks?

There is always an element of risk and inconvenience to participants, especially when they are young. By conducting the research in the natural environment of the school and class, in the presence of their peers and teacher(s), using familiar educational techniques in an engaging and enjoyable way, the risks will be at a minimum. Participants will also be kept anonymous and will be able to withdraw at any stage during the research process if they experience discomfort or embarrassment; nearby teachers will be alerted to the possibility that a child may wish to excuse herself/himself from the process and parents/guardians will be alerted to any anxieties any child may have at home. All national child protection guidelines (*Children First*, 2011) and those of your school will be followed and confidentiality will be maintained within the parameters of the law and the requirements of DCU. The research is grounded in the belief that the benefits of the study outweigh any potential risks as there is currently a gap in the research in relation to young people's views on religion and beliefs.

What happens to the information?

I and my supervisor will be the only people with access to the data. The information will be stored in a secure location at MIC for a period of 5 years or as the University determines. The data, anonymized, will make up part of my doctoral thesis.

When the project is completed in 2018, I will return to the school to make a presentation on the findings and outcomes of the research.

Wish to partake?

This plain language statement is for you to keep. If you would like your school to participate in this research project, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and returning it to me.

Right to withdraw

The involvement of your school in this research is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage prior to submission (June 2018). Should any parent or child decide that (s)he wishes to withdraw from the study, (s)he may do so also.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact - The Secretary, Dublin City University Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel: 01 7008000.

Informed Consent Form Principal

Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and other worldviews and the value of that voice to the education system

The above research study is being conducted by myself, Maurice Harmon, a doctoral student at Dublin City University (DCU), in its Institute of Education, under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Cullen. This study will form part of my Doctorate in Education thesis, and has been approved by the Ethics Committee of DCU.

The research will take place at …*name of school*

My contact details are: Maurice Harmon – Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick –

Consent from Principal:

Principal– please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)
- I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)   Yes/No
- I understand the information provided   Yes/No
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study   Yes/No
- I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions   Yes/No
- I am happy for the children in *(name of school)* to partake in the research project Yes/No

Voluntary Involvement in the Research Project

- I am aware that the school may withdraw from the project at any time   Yes/No
- I am aware that any parent may withdraw his/her child from the project at any time
  Yes/No

Confidentiality:
Maurice Harmon and his supervisor will be the only people with access to the data. The information will be stored in a secure location at MIC for a period of 5 years or as the University determines. Children's names, the name of their class and school are completely confidential and they will not be identifiable in any way in the completed thesis. At all times the project will be conducted within the guidelines of best practice for child protection and the law.

Signature:
I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher and I have a copy of this consent form. I consent to this school taking part in this research project.
Principal Signature:_____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness:_____   Date: _____

Appendix D

Plain Language Statement and Consent –Teacher

DCU

Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and non-religious world views and the value of that voice to the education system

The above research study is being conducted by myself, Maurice Harmon, a doctoral student at Dublin City University (DCU), in its Institute of Education, under the supervision of Dr Sandra Cullen. This study will form part of my EdD thesis, and has been approved by the Ethics Committee of DCU.

My contact details are: Maurice Harmon – Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick –

Dear ……….,

I am a doctoral student at the Institute of Education at Dublin City University (DCU) and a lecturer at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick. I am in the process of completing my doctoral thesis entitled: *Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and non-religious world views and the value of that voice to the education system*. As we are living in an Ireland that shares a diversity of belief systems I am interested in exploring how children express their belief system and how they appreciate others' belief systems.

The aim of this research is to work with young people (6th class, age 12-13) in primary school in order to identify how

- they appreciate their own belief system
- they appreciate the belief systems of others, and
- their voice is valued in the education system.

This study has been granted ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee, DCU.

The research, which will be organized and conducted completely by myself, involves active and innovative workshops (photovoice, scrapbooking and a focus group). It is designed in line with active in-school methodologies, such as talk and discussion, active learning, collaborative learning, written activities and visual image and Circle Time, and as an enjoyable, personally respectful and open, non-intrusive and non-threatening experience for the children.

What will this mean for your school?

If you permit this research in your school, I will visit the school on 4 different occasions for one or two class periods each time. I will conduct a lesson (workshop) with the selected class group on each of these occasions. The workshops will take the following format:

Lesson one (Day 1): 45 minutes

- introduction – greetings and explanations
- discussion on religious world views
- outline of plan for sessions
- discussion on the ethics around photographs
- children will choose which group (4-5 members) to be part of
- each child will be given a camera to take pictures over 3 days that explore their religious/ belief world view

After three days I will collect the cameras and have the photographs developed.

Lesson two (Day 2): 45 minutes

- introduction – review of the experience of taking the photographs
- each group is given all of the images they took the last day
- each group selects 15 images that best represent their perspective as a group
- children are invited to explain why they chose each image and why they didn't choose others
- each child is invited to write a reflection, if (s)he wishes, on the how the pictures were chosen

Lesson three (Day 4/5): 80 minutes

- introduction – review of images chosen and reflections made afterwards
- in groups as before children use photographs, images, song lyrics, etc., to represent, in scrapbooks (provided), their understanding of religions and beliefs/non-beliefs in the world
- children provide titles for the images and write three to four lines about each image
- children are invited to explain their scrapbook and why they wrote/choose certain images, etc.

Lesson four (Day 14/15): 80 minutes

- I will reflect back to the children the data that I have gathered over the previous sessions, asking questions like: Does this represent what you said? Do you feel this is accurate? Is there anything I need to change?
- Six to eight children will be chosen randomly to partake in a small group interview/ chat. In the chat we will explore more deeply things that have come up in the class conversations and if they have any other views they may wish to add.

What are the benefits/risks?

There is always an element of risk and inconvenience to participants, especially when they are young. By conducting the research in the natural environment of the school and class, in the presence of their peers and teacher(s), using familiar educational techniques in an engaging and enjoyable way, the risks will be at a minimum. Participants will also will be kept anonymous and will be able to withdraw at any stage during the research process if they experience discomfort or embarrassment; nearby teachers will be alerted to the possibility that a child may wish to excuse herself/himself from the process and parents/guardians will be alerted to any anxieties any child may have at home. All national child protection guidelines (*Children First*, 2011) and those of your school will be followed and confidentiality will be maintained within the parameters of the law and the requirements of DCU. The research is grounded in the belief that the benefits of the study outweigh any potential risks as there is currently a gap in the research in relation to young people's views on religion and beliefs.

What happens to the information?

I and my supervisor will be the only people with access to the data. The information will be stored in a secure location at MIC for a period of 5 years or as the University determines. The data, anonymized, will make up part of my doctoral thesis.

When the project is completed in 2018, I will return to the school to make a presentation on the findings and outcomes of the research.

Wish to partake?

This plain language statement is for you to keep. If you would like your school to participate in this research project, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and returning it to me.

Right to withdraw

The involvement of your school in this research is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage prior to submission (June 2018). Should any parent or child decide that (s)he wishes to withdraw from the study, (s)he may do so also.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact - The Secretary, Dublin City University Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel: 01 7008000.

Informed Consent Form Principal

DCU

Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and other worldviews and the value of that voice to the education system

The above research study is being conducted by myself, Maurice Harmon, a doctoral student at Dublin City University (DCU), in its Institute of Education, under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Cullen. This study will form part of my Doctorate in Education thesis, and has been approved by the Ethics Committee of DCU.

The research will take place at …*name of school*

My contact details are: Maurice Harmon – Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick –

Consent from Teacher:

Teacher– please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)
- I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)   Yes/No
- I understand the information provided   Yes/No
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study   Yes/No
- I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions   Yes/No
- I am happy for the children in my class to partake in the research project Yes/No

Voluntary Involvement in the Research Project

- I am aware that the school or my class may withdraw from the project at any time
Yes/No
- I am aware that any parent may withdraw his/her child from the project at any time
Yes/No

Confidentiality:
Maurice Harmon and his supervisor will be the only people with access to the data. The information will be stored in a secure location at MIC for a period of 5 years or as the University determines. Children's names, the name of their class and school are completely confidential and they will not be identifiable in any way in the completed thesis. At all times the project will be conducted within the guidelines of best practice for child protection and the law.

Signature:
I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher and I have a copy of this consent form. I consent to this school taking part in this research project.
Teacher Signature:_____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness:_____   Date: _____

Appendix E

Plain Language Statement Parents

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DCU

Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and non-religious world views and the value of that voice to the education system

The above research study is being conducted by myself, Maurice Harmon, a doctoral student at Dublin City University (DCU), in its Institute of Education, under the supervision of Dr Sandra Cullen. This study will form part of my EdD thesis, and has been approved by the Ethics Committee of DCU.

My contact details are: Maurice Harmon – Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick –

</div>

Dear parent,

I am a doctoral student in the Institute of Education at Dublin City University (DCU) and a lecturer at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick. I am in the process of completing my doctoral thesis entitled: *Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and non-religious world views and the value of that voice to the education system*. The Ireland that we live in had many different ways of looking at the world. We know that Ireland has a wide variety of religious ways of looking at the world. Because I am involved in education I am interested in exploring how children express their own belief system and how they appreciate the belief systems of others. I want to hear what they have to say. I want fellow teachers to hear the voice of the children, too.

The aim of this research is to work with young people in primary school (6th class) to identify their perspectives on how they appreciate their own belief system and the belief systems of others, as well as see how it is valued in the education system. This study has been granted ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee, DCU.

The research, which will be organized and conducted completely by myself, involves active and innovative workshops (photovoice, scrapbooking and a focus group) and is designed in such a way as to be a fun and enjoyable experience for children. It uses the methods of engaging with children that will be familiar to pupils in Irish primary schools.

What will this mean for your child?

If you wish for your child to be part of this research it will be conducted in his/her school and has the permission of the Principal. Your child's teacher(s) will be present throughout. I will visit the school on four different occasions for one or two class periods each time. I will conduct four lessons (workshops) with your child's class group. The workshops will take the following format:

Lesson one (Day 1): 45 minutes

- introduction – greetings and explanations
- discussion on religious world views
- outline of plan for sessions
- discussion on the ethics around photographs
- children will choose which group (four or five members) to be part of
- each child will be given a camera to take pictures over three days that explore their religious/ belief world view

After three days I will collect the cameras and have the photographs developed.

Lesson two (Day 2): 45 minutes

- introduction – review of the experience of taking the photographs
- each group is given all of the images they took the last day
- each group selects 15 images that best represent their perspective as a group
- children are invited to explain why they chose each image and why they didn't choose others
- each child is invited to write a reflection, if (s)he wishes, on the how the pictures were chosen

Lesson three (Day 4/5): 80 minutes

- introduction – review of images chosen and reflections made afterwards
- in groups as before children use photographs, images, song lyrics, etc., to represent, in scrapbooks (provided), their understanding of religions and beliefs/non-beliefs in the world
- children provide titles for the images and write three or four lines about each image
- children are invited to explain their scrapbook and why they wrote/choose certain images, etc.

Lesson four (Day 14/15): 80 minutes

- I will reflect back to the students the data that I have gathered over the previous sessions, asking questions like: Does this represent what you said? Do you feel this is accurate? Is there anything I need to change?
- Six to eight children will be chosen randomly to partake in a small group interview/ chat. In the chat we will explore more deeply things that have come up in the class conversations and if they have any other views they may wish to add.

What are the benefits/risks?

If at any stage your child feels uncomfortable or simply wants to withdraw from the research they are free to do so and there is no sanction of any kind. I want **no risk for any child** if they participate in this study. Their names, the name of their class and school are **completely confidential** and they will not be identifiable in any way in the completed thesis at the end. My approaches in the class will be familiar to modern day Irish pupils. I follow the Children First guidelines and those of the school. In this way, I will keep the element of risk to a minimum. The benefit of this research is that teachers will have the possibility of hearing the voice of children themselves in relation to religious beliefs. The voice of children is not normally reported on and my research intends to fill this gap in what children think about religion and beliefs.

What happens to the information?

I and my supervisor will be the only people with access to the data. The information will be stored in a secure location at MIC for a period of 5 years or as the University determines. It will make up part of my doctoral thesis.

When the project is completed in 2018, I will return to the school to make a presentation on the findings and outcomes of the research.

Wish to partake?

This plain language statement is for you to keep. If you would like your child to participate in this research project, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and returning it to your class teacher. I would appreciate if you could discuss this with your child and sign his/her assent form and return it to the class teacher.

Right to withdraw

The involvement of your child in this research is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw them from the project at any stage. The school also has a right to withdraw from the project at any time.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact - The Secretary, Dublin City University Ethics Committee, c/o Research and innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01 7008000.

Informed Consent Form - Parents
Consent from Parents:

DCU

Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and other worldviews and the value of that voice to the education system

The above research study is being conducted by myself, Maurice Harmon, a doctoral student at Dublin City University (DCU), in its Institute of Education, under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Cullen. This study will form part of my Doctorate in Education thesis, and has been approved by the Ethics Committee of DCU.

The research will take place at …*name of school*

My contact details are: Maurice Harmon – Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick –

Parents – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)
- I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)   Yes/No
- I understand the information provided   Yes/No
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study   Yes/No
- I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions   Yes/No
- I am happy for my child to partake in the research project   Yes/No
- I am aware that my child will be audiotaped during each of the four workshop sessions outline in the Plain Language Statement   Yes/No
- I am happy that any picture drawn or taken by my child may be used in an anonymous form in any publications that arise from the project.   Yes/No

Involvement in the Research Project
- I am aware of my right to withdraw my child from the project at anytime   Yes/No
- I am aware of my child's right to withdraw him/her self from the project at any time   Yes/No
- I am aware that the school may withdraw from the project at anytime   Yes/No

Confidentiality:
Maurice Harmon and his supervisor will be the only people with access to the data. The information will be stored in a secure location at MIC for a period of 5 years or as the University determines. Your child's names, the name of their class and school are completely confidential and they will not be identifiable in any way in the completed thesis at the end. At all times the project will be conducted within the best practice for child protection and the law.

Signature:
I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent for my child to take part in this research project

Parents Signature:_____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness:_____   Date: _____

Appendix F

Student Plain Language Statement – Children

DCU

Appreciating the voice of young people: exploring their religious and other worldviews and the value of that voice to the education system

The above research study is being conducted by myself, Maurice Harmon, a doctoral student at Dublin City University (DCU), in its Institute of Education, under the supervision of Dr Sandra Cullen. This study will form part of my Doctorate in Education thesis, and has been approved by the Ethics Committee of DCU.

The research will take place at …*name of school*

My contact details are: Maurice Harmon – Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick

Hello - my name is Maurice

I will be visiting your school over the next few weeks, as I would like to talk with you about how you see the world as I am writing a book on it. I would like to know about your religious and other worldview and what you think about them. Over a number of weeks we will work together. I will give you a camera to go and take some picture and then we will discuss them. You and your friends will be asked to make a post out of pictures, magazine and paper cuttings. Finally, you may wish with some of your friends to have a chat with me about the work you have done and tell me what you think. During all of this I will be interested in you telling me about what you think about religions and other different worldviews.

However, you do not have to talk with me if you don't want to. If you want to stop answering questions or doing the project work all you have to do is say "I'd like to stop". If you do not want to take photographs or make a poster with your friends that is alright too. You can leave the group at any time and go back to your other work.

I am going to be recording what you say so that I can listen carefully to it again later as what you will say is very important. I have a recorder here to do this. When I press the green button, the recorder is on and when I press the red button the recorder is off. We will see if the recorder is working before we begin. When I press the green button, we can all say 'hello' together and I will play it back to you so that you can check if it is working.

When I write my book nobody is going to know who you are. They won't even know the name of your class or teacher. Only I and my boss will know who said what. No one else can find out unless the law says so. I will keep all the information safe until my university gives me permission to destroy it; this will be in 5 years' time. This is what we mean when we say the research is anonymous and confidential.

Before we start, I would like to be sure that all of you are happy to start so I brought along a sheet for each one of you to sign for me. I will read the writing and you can put a mark on the green

hand if you agree with (or are happy with) all the things that I say and a mark on the red hand if you do not agree with (or are not happy) with all of the things that I say. Remember you don't have to talk to me if you don't want to so it is alright to put a mark on red hand.

Pupil Assent Form

Pupil's Name:

I am happy to work with you and my class on this project?

I am happy for you to record what I say on your recorder?

I am happy to take photographs and make a poster about my religious and other worldviews?

I am happy for you to put my pictures in your book?

I know I can ask to stop talking to you or been part of the project at any time

I agree (would like) to be part of this project

Pupil's Signature:_____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

F.4

Appendix G

Voice of Children on Religion and Religious Education

Codes\\Phase 5 Defining and Naming Themes (*NVivo 11*)

Requires the researcher to conduct and write a detailed analysis of each theme (the researcher should ask 'what story does this theme tell?' and 'how does this theme fit into the overall story about the data?'), identifying the 'essence' of each theme and constructing a concise, punchy and informative name for each theme.

Name	Description
T1- Religious Identity	Religious identity is, by its very nature, complex, and European Religious Education in Multicultural Context (REMC) (ESRI, 2010) would suggest that for children it can be quite fluid. Children can hold views similar to, or different from, their parents or other significant adults in their lives, and can also be influenced by the environment around them. Religious identity must be placed within a social context, Hemmings (2011) outlines four areas that are worth noting:- see lit review
T1.1 Religious Identity	The religious/ belief identity of the children, as they self-identify and set out what they see as important in that tradition. All children self-identify with some religious grouping. No person describes him/herself as atheist
T1.1.1 Attributes of faith	What the children see as important to been a Christian/ Catholic. This gives some insight into where the children may be in their faith development and can be linked to stages of faith for example Goldman, Fowler 1981, Gottlieb 2006 see lit review
T1.1.2 Spiritual Religious	In self-identification the children did not use the words religious or spiritual, but when highlighted they toiled with the idea of spiritual or religious. Many writers link spirituality to religion, however, it is fair to say that the majority would have a more broad understanding of spirituality and this understanding does not have a religious component to it. One such writer Meehan would describe a secular spirituality as 'seeking to find meaning and purpose in universal human rather than religious.
T1.2 Family who influence faith-belief system -	The importance of parents in the religious identity of young people cannot be under estimated and this is well chronicled in the work of Francis (2001) and Kay and Francis (1996), which shows that parents who themselves have a strong religious identity will in fact have children who will demonstrate high levels of religiosity. However,

Name	Description
	this research will see a great influence by grandparents with these children.
T1.2.1 Grandparents	These are major players in the children's religious development and shaping their belief system.
T1.2.2 Parents	Parents are seen as the primary educators in religious identity, this is not held out in this work. The parents do influence the children to think wider, but the children are more influenced by their grandparents. see Religious Education in Multicultural Context (REMC) and lit review on EVS
T1.3 People who influence in the wider world	Young people have two main environments they engage in – that of home and school – and within these areas they come in contact with a variety of people. Media too plays a role and we see this through the children's view on one political leader at the time of the data gathering. In this code you will see a collection of these people. Interesting the class teacher does not appear.
T1.3.1 President Donald Trump and Religion	At the time of the research President Donald Trump is a major figure in world news and his ban on Muslims entering the USA. This is a major issue for the children and his lack of respect for diversity.
T1.3.2 Jesus	Main person in Christian religion
T1.3.3 Mother Teresa	Mother Teresa become a major figure in the work and conversations that the children have. She has not been covered during the current year at school.
T1.3.4 Pope Francis	The Pope is the head of the Catholic Church and is a very popular person for the children. The issues he highlights are connected to their lives.
T1.3.5 Priest	The children connect with the local priest from the parish and look forward to his visits to the classroom- they do not seem to really know him from life in the parish
T1.3.6 Irish Saints	They connect with a number of Irish Saints and in particular with St Patrick and Brigid.
T1.4 Faith Practice	Faith practice is seen by many as key to a religious identity- Rolheiser's (1998) Bradford's (1999). Here we look at the types and places of religious practice
T1.4.1 Faith Festivals	Major feasts and religious seasons

Name	Description
T1.4.2 Places of Faith Practices	The children explore places of faith practice and when they use them. Interesting they tend to visit these places when community worship is not taking place.
T1.4.3 Types of Faith Practices	Different types of community gatherings for different belief systems. Do the children recognise this?
T1.4.4 Prayer	Prayer is for some an expression of a religious tradition and the development of a personal relationship with God - Rolheiser, Bradford, Nye,
T 1.4.4.1 Non-directive Prayer	Children visit local church as a group outside of school and engage in personal prayer
T 1.4.4.2 Prayer with Family	Part of Christian Orthodox and Evangelical community children's experience at home. At grandparents' house it happens for Catholic children in that majority
T1.5 Environment that shapes	People are shaped by their environment and this is nowhere truer that in religious identity. In this code we explore the different environments that have shape the child in their everyday lives. Refer to the work of Karl Kitching https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/academic/education/images/ChildrensBeliefsandBelongingKitchingandShanneik2015.pdf and Religious Education in Multicultural Context (REMC)
T 1.5.1 Environment Home	Home is where children come to first meet and encounter God- These codes take account of what happens in the home for these children
T 1.5.2 Environment Parish	Parish is the place where people come to celebrate their religious identity with the larger community. In this code we see how children see parish and in the whole the lack of parish involvement for these children. Religious Education in Multicultural Context (REMC)
T 1.5.3 Sacramentals	Sacramentals are items in the environment that lead people into reflection about their belief tradition- statues, holy water etc.
T2 - Embracing Otherness	The school have a diverse community of culture and belief systems. Looking at that diversity, how is it celebrated and more particularly religious diversity? The desire for the children to learn about other faiths is highlighted. Towards Mutual Ground (Byrne &Kieran (2013); Religious diversity in primary school (Faas et al 2015) REMC (2015), Ipgrave (2008). See also the RE Curriculum and Developing Inter-religious Literacy p.37 SGN #21, 148

Name	Description
T2.1 Welcoming of all	The children emphasis that the school is open and welcoming to all people- they use images from around the school to highlight this. It is noted that we do not see an explicit celebration of religious diversity. This is clearly Stage 1 of Ipgrave
T2.3 Learning about other religions	The children emphasis their desire to learn about other faith traditions. This is seen as important and required to be part of the world and of course key to any Catholic RE. In this we see Ipgraves first two steps of dialogue. Primary dialogue is the acceptance of diversity, difference and change. Secondary dialogue involves being open to, and positive about, difference – being willing to engage with difference and to learn from others.
T2.3.1Benefits of Project	Children list the benefits if the project from both personal and class level.
T2.3.2 Children teach World Religions	When given a change to choose a topic, they choose world religions. They know very little but demonstrate their desire to learn.
T2.3.3 Eucharist in Christian Orthodox	Children explore the differences and similarities in the Eucharist between Catholicism and Christian Orthodox. This is where we see the second dialogue taking place- been open and trying to get to know the other. Ipgrave 2001, 2004, 2008 -
T2.3.4 Interesting facts about the others faith	This is where we see the second dialogue taking place- been open and trying to get to know the other. Ipgrave 2001, 2004, 2008
T2.3.4.1 General information about other children's background	Children link knowledge about children of different faith to interesting facts about their countries of origin and try to see similarities.
T2.3.4.2 Non-Catholic	These are observations by non-Catholic children towards Catholicism
T2.3.5 Serbian Orthodox	One child is Serbian Orthodox and is talking about her faith tradition with the other children. They are very interested and try to connect it to their tradition. Ipgrave secondary dialogue.
T2.4 Teacher and Religious Diversity	Children's views on why the teacher does not teach more on religious diversity
T3 - Religious Education and the Curriculum	This research is based in a Catholic school and so the discourse is based upon a religious education in that context, while at the same time respecting diversity within the school.

Name	Description
T3.1 What is Religious Education	A central question to the research and the children make an effort to answer that question. The children discuss the stories and song covered in RE and recognise Jesus as the key figure of the Catholic tradition, while also referring to Mary. We see no reference to sacraments or developing a faith for the children who align themselves with a faith tradition. REF: Aims in RE Curriculum and Rights of the Child UNCRC (1989) #12, 14.
T3.2 Religious Education Within the school	This codes brings together things that the children said about religious education in their school. This code also takes account of those who do not take part in formal religious education during the school day and are withdrawn from the curriculum area.
T3.2.1 Liturgical and Sacramental Education	The Church's liturgy is an essential element of Catholic Religious Education (CCC 1075).Children become familiar with short responses and parts of liturgy by experiencing and using them; teaching about the Eucharist includes helping children read the liturgical signs (CCC 1075); the intimate relationship of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist is emphasized and each sacrament is presented as the action of Christ. Interesting to note the Christian Orthodox Children in this section.
T3.2.1.1 Sacraments and the school	'The sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist - lay the foundation of every Christian life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life' (CCC1212). Catholic schools in conjunction with parishes support parents by providing the knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith, including knowledge about the sacraments. The children speak about the sacraments- 3 ref.
T3.2.1.1.1 Eucharist	'The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life' CCC1324- Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the true presence of Jesus Christ- the children do not see this, but refer to it as a symbol. The Eucharist is a community celebration and the children do not attend this event. Refer to the work of Karl Kitching https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/academic/education/images /ChildrensBeliefsandBelongingKitchingandShanneik201 5.pdf NOTE: The Christian Orthodox child.
T3.2.1.1.2 Confirmation	For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, the baptised are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed. CCC1285. This sacrament is the final sacrament of initiation and is

Name	Description
	received by the children in 6th class. The children refer to this but their knowledge is limited, they talk about their parish programme that they are undertaking and the names
T3.2.1.1.3 Baptism	The children see baptism as the link they share with other Christian faiths- ref. to Ipgrave Stage 1and 2 of dialogue between faiths. -Primary dialogue is the acceptance of diversity, difference and change. Secondary dialogue involves being open to, and positive about, difference – being willing to engage with difference and to learn from others.
T3.2.1.2 Sacred texts	Each religious tradition has a sacred text. The children talk about their texts and what they know about them. Comparing it to children in other research projects- O'Farrell (2016) Berryman, Nye, Hay, these children show little knowledge of the scriptures.
T3.2.1.3 Prayer as part of RE at school	Prayer is a central part of religion (Coleman, 1999). Prayer is defined in a variety of ways but they are interconnected Brueggemann (1986) described prayer as the 'hopeful imagination' for Christians. In the Islamic tradition prayer is seem as a foundation of the religious tradition. Rolisher sees prayer as one of the keystones in a Christian Spirituality. How do the children give expression to their prayer life in school? Very little!
T3.2.2 Like about Religious Education	Children Identify what they like about Religious Education in their school. Positive feelings towards RE. This can be also seen in part in Children's Beliefs and Belonging Karl Kitching UCC https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/academic/education/images/ChildrensBeliefsandBelongingKitchingandShanneik2015.pdf
T3.2.3 Religious Education learned at School and rest of their lives	Religious Education is part of the curriculum but religion is part of the world the children live in. This codes explores with the children if the religious content learned at schools has any connection to their lives as a whole. They see limited connection, in fact they see greater connection for English or maths. They do refer to the celebration of marriage and attending Mass (minimal) and saying prayers at home. The main things is that they take the prayers and use them at Mass. (John Bradford 1995)
T3.2.4 What would the children teacher in RE	During the scrap booking session children were asked to design a class for RE that they would teach in their school. These are some of the topics that the children would teach- Christianity, world religions, care of environment and Mother Teresa.

Name	Description
T3.2.4.4 Common Home	Care for Creation and the Pope. Environmental issue are a focus for the children. However, they struggle to link it to a religious tradition.
T3.2.4.1 World Religions	The children showed a great interest in World Religions- They talk about teaching about other traditions, but do not pick tradition of anyone in the room and stay more general.
T3.2.4.2 Mother Teresa	Mother Teresa become a major figure in the work and conversations that the children have. She has not been covered during the current year at school.
T3.2.4.3 Christian	One projects took a Christian focus. The Rosary and the person of Jesus within it.
T3.2.5 Children withdrawn from Religious Education	These are the view of children who are withdrawn from formal religious education in the school. This is a major issue on the political landscape at the moment- Forum on Patronage and Pluralism (2012). DES is to launch guidelines for children who do not take part in RE- https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/pupils-who-opt-out-of-religion-to-be-taught-other-subjects-1.3265040 See also IBC document
T3.2.6 Assessment of RE	Assessment is key in any curriculum area and these are the children's review on how it works in RE. Child would not like to see RE been assessed in the traditional way, they feel it would not be right. Children clearly see RE as different from the other subject areas. This I would claim is not positive- all education needs to be assessed from an academic perspective and not a faith position and this is clear from the new RE curriculum in Ireland where we see the difference between faith objects and learning
T3.2.7 Non verbal RE	One child is non-verbal in the room- she is of Muslim faith and using photo voice to articulate information about her faith community- she refers mainly to prayer rituals community gatherings in her pictures. The pictures are taken from the internet and we see that she is disconnected from her faith community by where she lives.
T3.3 Religious Education in Parish	Religious Education does not just happen in the school, it happens in the home and parish. Here we look at the parish involvement in the Religious Education of these children.
T3.4 - What for the future of RE and Catholic Schools	What about the future of RE and the current political debates: should we have RE; timetable and children with drawn from RE. Link to current policy- ERB, Forum on Patronage.

Name	Description
T 3.2 School Ethos	From the first moment that a pupil sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics. The inspiration of Jesus must be translated from the ideal into the real. The Gospel spirit should be evident in a Christian way of thought and life which permeates all facets of the educational climate (Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, 1988, n.25). Children explore past and future.
T3.2.1 Welcoming of all	The children emphasis that the school is open and welcoming to all people- they use images from around the school to highlight this. Again we do not see any celebration of religious diversity.
T3.2.2 Change of Ethos	The children were asked to know what would happen if the ethos of their school was to change. They could not say what, but were not in favour of it.
T3.2.3 Religious Sisters	This school was founded by a Religious Order of Sisters and this brings together the knowledge the children have around the involvement of the sister. Very little, but they do know some of the history of their school.
T3.2.4 Non- Catholic Child	Views of non-Catholic children on the ethos of the school
T3.1 Future of RE	This theme looks at the children's views of RE into the future.
T 3.1.1 Teachers of RE	The place of RE and who should teach it was discussed. The children offer their model for the future.
T 3.1.2 Time for RE	Consultation: Structure and Time in the Primary Curriculum http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary-Education/Primary_Developments/Structure-and-Time-Allocation/consultation.html The children discuss the need and importance of RE and the time given to it

Appendix H

Phase 2- Generating initial codes- Opening coding, 1255 opens codes mapped to 97 categories	Interviews & Images Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
International Woman's Day	1	1
Future of RE in their lives	1	5
Science	1	2
Religious Freedom	1	2
O'Connell and Religious Freedom	1	1
Creativity	1	1
Interesting facts about the others faith	2	10
Catholic	1	4
Non-Catholic	1	12
General information about other children's background	3	7
Important thoughts	2	6
Benefits of Project	2	3
Work for Children withdrawn from RE	2	7
Withdrawn from RE	2	9
Miracles	2	15
Social Justice	2	2
Religious Education	3	40
Integration	1	3
Religious Education in Germany	1	3
Do not do religious education at school	2	8
Assessment of RE	3	7
Children who do religious education	3	15
Formal RE at home	3	4
Future structure of RE	3	53
Teachers of RE	1	5
Time for RE	1	5
Religious Education in Schools	4	10
Learning about other faiths	5	38
Church of Ireland	0	0
Non-Catholic	1	12
Catholic	2	5

Phase 2- Generating initial codes- Opening coding, 1255 opens codes mapped to 97 categories	Interviews & Images Coded	Units of Meaning Coded
General information about other children's background	2	8
Interesting facts about the others faith	2	10
Catholic	1	4
General information about other children's background	1	5
Non-Catholic	1	12
Knowledge about other faith	2	11
Like about RE	5	42
Muslim Faith	5	8
Serbia- Orthodox	5	9
RE in the Parish	6	6
Why Religious Education	6	30
RE at Home	7	15
Connection of RE to rest of lives	12	33
What would they teach in an RE class	3	4
Sacraments	4	11
What is RE	4	18
Saints and People of Interest	5	10
Sacred Texts	5	11
Sacramentals	5	7
People who influence faith-belief system	5	11
Non-verbal RE	6	7
Faith Practice	8	41
Prayer	10	27
Religious Identity	10	49
Community	11	14
Environment	11	14
School Ethos	12	61
Belief - Religious	13	44
Religious Diversity	13	64

H.2