

# An Exploration of the Experiences of Minority Faith and Minority Worldview Students of a Roman Catholic School Ethos in Post-Primary Schools in the Republic of Ireland

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Philosophy Degree

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## Declaration

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## List of Acronyms

AMCSS	Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSP	Catholic Schools Partnership
DCU	Dublin City University
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ERB	Education about Religion and Beliefs
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute ESRI
ETBI	Education and Training Board Ireland
EPASI	Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality
DES	Department of Education & Science
IHRC	Irish Human Rights Commission
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
JMB	Joint Managerial Board
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex.
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
OIDHR	Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe
REDCo	Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in Transforming societies of European Countries
RE	Religious Education
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education

VEC	Vocational Educational Committee
RTE	Radio Telefis Eireann
UN	United Nations
UDHR	United Nations Declaration of Human Rights
NUIG	National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG)

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## Abstract

Catherine Stapleton

### **An Exploration of the Experiences of Minority Faith and Minority Worldview Students of a Roman Catholic School Ethos in Post-Primary Schools in the Republic of Ireland.**

#### **Abstract**

This study explores the school-based experiences of a sample of students of minority faith or minority worldview attending Post-Primary schools with a Catholic ethos. The primary aim of this research is to give voice to these students regarding their experiences of a Catholic school ethos and how this ethos caters for the spiritual and moral development of this cohort of students. A secondary aim of the research is to explore the relevance and practise of identity humility theory in relation to these students' lived experiences of schools whose ethos may be at variance with the students' espoused belief systems.

This qualitative study draws on semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of eighteen self-selecting students who identified as people of minority faith or belief worldviews attending a Catholic post-primary school. Interpretative Phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to interrogate the data set. The emerging themes were further reflected on in terms of the theoretical perspectives of identity humility, hegemony, identity development, agency, othering, and conformity.

The findings of the research suggest that students' identity development, sense of belonging and well-being may be impacted by negative stereotyping, Catholic centric practices and an implicit or explicit expectation of acquiescence to Catholic norms. However, students also described a positive, safe school atmosphere and an interest in World Religions and meditation. Students wanted to learn about religion together and particularly valued class discussion. The diversity of the reported students' experiences is attributed to both student and teacher agency and the autonomy afforded to schools by the State. The value of identity humility theory and practice is posited (1) as a possible avenue to address the needs of an increasingly diverse school population as an alternative and more practical solution than a segregationist policy of diversification of school patronage (2), as a way of balancing the constitutional right of the Catholic majority, to choose a Catholic religious education with the rights of minority belief students to attend their local school and have their moral and spiritual educational rights equally supported.

# **Chapter One: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The focus of this study is an exploration of the school based experiences of a sample of students of minority faith or minority worldview attending Post-Primary schools with a Catholic ethos. Firstly, the research background is presented and the rationale for the study is provided. Secondly, the theoretical perspective underpinning this research is named as identity humility theory and briefly described. Next, the aims, motivations and significance of the research are clarified. An overview of the research design is also presented. Finally, a synopsis of the contents of the remaining chapters is provided.

## **1.2 Background and Rationale**

Globalisation, immigration, socio-political shifts and increasing individualism are changing Irish society. The 2016 census reported significant changes in relation to religion. While a large majority at 78% of the population identify as Roman Catholic, those of no religion are at 10% and Minority Faith are at 9%. Moreover 17% of the population of Ireland are born abroad (Census, 2016). Although Ireland remains predominantly Catholic, religious practice is also changing, particularly among young people, and terms such as cultural Catholicism, describe a less traditional practice (Breen and Reynolds, 2011; Anderson 2010; Maher, 2009; Inglis, 2007; Demearth, 2000). A recent large-scale European study of 18 to 34 year olds found, 80% of Irish participants reported they could be happy without a religious belief (Myres and McDermott, 2017). These changes are creating both challenges and opportunities for a traditionally Catholic school system. Currently, over 70% of Irish state-funded Post-Primary schools are managed solely by a religious patron or by a religious patron in partnership with the State (Catholic Schools Partnership, 2014). The remaining schools are mostly Education and Training Board Ireland schools (ETBI) and mainly have Catholic representatives on their boards of management and traditionally have a Catholic ethos in order to cater for a majority Catholic school population. There are nine Educate Together schools which are multi-denominational in ethos. Hence, increasing numbers of students attend schools with a belief system different to their parents or their own. Ultimately, schools with a Catholic ethos are increasingly challenged to provide religious education which is compatible with students and their

parents' varied religious and non-religious belief systems. Another important challenge relates to school provision ensuring all students can exercise their human rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is upheld. This right is described in Article Eighteen of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. Currently, school provision upholding religious freedom is to allow students to opt out of religion classes, however this is problematised both at a practical and personal level (O'Mahony, 2015; Mawhinney, 2012). Controversial laws are also problematised; the Equal Status Act (2000-2015) section 7.3(c), allows schools to refuse students entry as quoted "refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school", and the Employment Equality Act (1998-2015) section 37, allows favourable treatment on religious ground to an employee or prospective employee in Voluntary secondary schools. In essence, these laws support discrimination against non-co-religionist students and teachers in access to State-funded schools. Tensions have arisen as the Council of Europe, the United Nations and the Irish Human Rights commission have repeatedly called on the government to end discrimination on religious grounds in the State-funded education system (Council of Europe, 2017; United Nations, 2014; IHRC, 2010). Tension is also evidenced by the emergence of grass roots lobby groups, namely Equate and Education Equality. These groups have a mandate to advance equality of education provision for students of minority faith and belief in Irish schools. The impact of the above changes, tensions and challenges was unclear. Hence, a rationale for this research was based on the premise that it was unclear how Catholic Post-Primary schools include non-Catholic students on a day to day basis. Moreover, the researcher was concerned in relation to provision of equality of opportunity for the spiritual and moral development of minority belief and minority worldview students within the system.

### **1.3 Theoretical Perspective –Identity Humility**

The theoretical perspective underpinning this research study is identity humility. The theory was developed by the researcher from theories of cultural humility and cultural competence, which have proven to be helpful within caring professions worldwide, to address the needs of increasingly pluralist communities (Leininger and McFarland, 2006; Chang, Simon and Dong, 2012; Lund and Lee, 2015; Frusti, Niesen and Campion, 2003; Kardong-Edgren and Campinha-Bacote, 2008; Education II, 2008; National Education Association, 2008; Klotz, 2006; Juarez, Marvel, Brezinski, Glazner, Towbin and Lawton, 2006; Fisher-Borne, Montana Cain and Martin 2015; Hook,

Davis, Owen, Worthington and Utsey, 2013; Clark, Calvillo, Dela Cruz, Fongwa, Kools, Lowe and Mastel-Smith, 2011). The six core elements of identity humility theory employed in this research are individual identity, fluidity, communication, human rights, power relations and reflexivity. In brief, identity humility theory posits the uniqueness of peoples' identity, thus the focus is on the individual rather than a culture, and this approach avoids inadvertently stereotyping minorities. The fluid nature of identity, social norms, culture and education provision is also acknowledged and advanced. Moreover, the important role of communication in understanding difference and finding workable solutions is posited. This element aligns with a constructivist epistemology, as it is understood that we all create our own realities, which can lead to misunderstandings and conflict. The importance of human rights, particularly the right to both religious practice and freedom is pertinent to this research study. The relevance of power relations to people's experience is addressed in this study through the theory of hegemony. Hegemony theory addresses and identifies the power relations at play in Irish schools and society and aids the analysis of the minority belief students' experiences. Finally, the necessity of reflexivity is posited in order to enhance progression and to analysis the student experience and also as an important consideration in research practice. These six concepts of identity humility theory align with the Council of Europe policy on teaching RE (Jackson, 2014).

#### **1.4 Research Aims**

A main purpose of this research is to give voice to minority faith and minority worldview students regarding their experiences of a Catholic school ethos, in order to understand at a more informed and deeper level possible challenges and opportunities. Another aim was to explore the relevance and practise of identity humility theory in relation to the students' lived experience. The following are the key research questions which evolved from the literature review and directed this study.

- How may a Catholic school ethos impact on minority faith and minority worldview students' school experience?
- How the human right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is facilitated for minority faith and minority worldview students' in Irish Post-Primary schools with a Catholic ethos?
- How do minority faith and minority worldview students experience religious education in Irish Catholic Post-Primary schools?

- How is the moral and spiritual development of minority belief students supported in Irish Post-Primary schools with a Catholic ethos?
- Could identity humility theory and practices support a plurality of beliefs in Catholic schools and avoid a segregationist policy?

## **1.5 Research Motivations**

The motivations for this research study stem from the researcher's understanding of legal inequalities in relation to student and teacher access to and experience of education in Voluntary Post Primary, State funded schools. A concern for the lack of student voice on the lived experience of minority belief students attending schools with a Catholic ethos was a further motivating factor. Furthermore, the literature review evidenced a scarcity of research on the experience of students of minority faith and non-religious world views. This research is being undertaken by a post-primary teacher not working in the area of religious education so the positionality is from the perspective of a concerned class teacher and tutor. This concern emerges from the experience of the researcher who has been sensitised to the experience of being viewed as different while working in cultures different to her own and has led to attempting to understand at a deeper level the experience of students of minority belief who maybe seen as different within schools with a Catholic ethos.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This is a small scale study which provides some insights and a student perspective on the current debate on religious education in Irish schools. The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism (2012) recommended "divestment of Patronage in areas of stable population" (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012 p.105). However, this could be viewed as a segregationist policy and could deny opportunities for social cohesion as envisioned in the *Toledo Guiding Principles* (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, OIDHR, 2007). Moreover, the workability of providing a school which caters for the beliefs of all students and parents in every community is untenable (Hickey, 2012). Research from Finland, England, Malta and Sweden which represented the experiences of minority faith students in both denominational and secular schools found that regardless of the school management body, students faced challenges attributed to their religious identity (Zilliacus & Holm 2013; Moulin, 2012, 2016; Darmanin, 2015; Berglund, 2017). This research, by adopting the theoretical perspective of identity

humility, explores the reality of supporting a diversity of beliefs within schools of Catholic patronage. The significance lies in the endeavour to explore the workability of identity humility practise in balancing the constitutional right of the Catholic majority to choose a Catholic religious education with the rights of minority belief students to attend their local school and have their moral and spiritual educational rights equally supported. Identity humility is not about diluting anyone's religion or belief system but rather seeks to understand and make space for everyone's belief, regardless of patronage. It is an aspiration of the research to give voice to the research participants' lived realities and contribute to debates concerning the provision of religious education for a plurality of beliefs in an Irish Post-Primary school context.

### **1.7 Research Design**

The conceptual framework for this study is comprised of four components: epistemology, theoretical perspective, theoretical framework and methodology, which will be explained in detail in chapter four. The methodology is identified as qualitative comprised of eighteen semi-structured student interviews. This method was chosen to help the researcher understand at a deeper level the experiences of minority belief students of a Catholic school ethos (Stokes and Bergin 2006; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Nine students identified as non-religious, eight held minority faith beliefs while one student preferred not to label her worldview. Students were interviewed in their schools, with the exception of one student who chose to be interviewed at her place of worship. Interviews were held over an eight month period in 2015/16. All interviews were recorded using a mobile phone and uploaded to a password protected laptop, transcripts were uploaded to Nvivo 10 computer software and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the analytical strategy used, as IPA gives experience precedence (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). As described above the theoretical perspective underpinning this research study is identity humility

### **1.8 Layout of the dissertation**

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter one has provided a brief account of the research background, rationale, theoretical perspective, aims, motivations, significance and design for the research. The literature review is detailed in chapters two and three. Chapter two outlines the history of Catholic Post- Primary schooling in Ireland and the developments which have shaped and formed Catholic schools today. Next the relevant

constitutional and legislative provisions for education in Ireland are critiqued and analysed in relation to their impact on the provision for minority faith and minority belief students. Chapter two concludes with an examination of religious education (RE) in Catholic schools from the perspective of the *Toledo Guiding Principles* and key RE theorist's.

Chapter three describes the underpinning theoretical perspective and theoretical framework for this thesis. The theoretical framework includes, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, theories of conformity, othering, agency and adolescent identity development. The theories were used in conjunction with identity humility to develop the research questions and methodology and also supported the analysis of the research data.

Chapter four described and justified the research design process. Initially it provided an outline, description and explanation for the conceptual framework or blueprint for this research study. Next the methodology is identified as qualitative comprised of semi-structured student interviews. The positionality of this method is described and justification for its use is detailed alongside a description of its implementation. The researchers' epistemology is identified as constructivism; how this aligns with both identity humility and the use of semi-structured interviews is explained. Furthermore, an explanation is provided of how the theories relate to the theoretical perspective of identity humility and also how the theories are employed to analyse the data, thus facilitating the reader in evaluating the research (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Mertens, 1998). Ethical considerations are explained, as are issues of validity, reliability, challenges and reflexivity. Chapters five, six and seven present the research findings and analysis. Each chapter presents a thematic map or coding structure which outlines the primary, secondary and tertiary themes. Chapter five presents the theme of personal identity and analyses students' personal accounts of identity exploration, stereotyping and their sense of belonging. Chapter six presents the theme of conditional shared space and analyses students' experiences of religious education, compromise and school ethos. Chapter seven presents the theme of hegemony and analyses students' accounts of hegemony in relation to school practice and society, students' experiences in relation to opting out of RE and also teacher and students, attitudes to religious diversity. Chapter eight presents a summary of the research findings pertinent to the research

questions. It then identifies the research implications, areas for further research and arising recommendations.

## **Chapter Two: Reviewing the Context**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the context in which minority faith and minority worldview students' experience resides. Initially the development of Irish Post-Primary education is outlined and the resultant impacts on minority belief students is addressed. Next the pertinent constitutional and legislative provisions are explained. The final section reviews religious education from both an Irish and European perspective in order to further illuminate the context of students' experiences.

### **2.2 Development of Catholic Post-Primary Schooling in Ireland**

In the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Post-Primary schools were established in Ireland by the British Government. The purpose of these schools was to foster the English language, culture and the Anglican religion. (Coolahan, 1981, p.52). However, under the Penal Laws (1702-1782) Catholic education was prohibited. This religious discrimination and imperialism by a minority Protestant ascendancy resulted in the Catholic majority reacting by setting up unofficial and secret "hedge schools" as a way for Irish children to be educated. The religious discrimination and persecution resulted in the Irish strongly protecting and valuing Catholic education, which arguably still impacts on education today (White 2010; Keogh and McCarthy, 2005). Following on from the 1778 rising was the passing of the Catholic Relief Act (1782) which was an attempt to create a multi-denominational school system. This act allowed Catholics to teach and conduct schools without fear of persecution. In 1831 E.G. Stanley, Chief Secretary to Ireland, wrote a letter to the Duke of Leinster, in which he outlined the intention to establish a board to oversee a National state-funded, mass-education school system. The Stanley letter and two special reports in 1838 and 1858 urged support for schools on a multid denominational basis.

However, the majority of the Catholic hierarchy opposed multi-denominational education. (Raftery, 2009 p. 19). The Synod of Thurles (1850) condemned the state system of mixed education and warned that Catholic students should be educated

separately. Furthermore teachers were to be trained in denominational training colleges (Hyland 1992 p. 91). The right to a segregated Catholic education was of paramount importance; moreover Protestants also supported separate schooling (Kieran, 2008). Archbishop Paul Cullen of Dublin spearheaded Catholic resistance to the government's proposed system of multi-denominational schooling. He established a Catholic education system which supported an intensifying Catholicisation of social life. Catholic influence over Irish education was further strengthened in 1922 with Irish independence from the United Kingdom and the establishment of the Irish Free State. The new State continued to depend on the Catholic Church to provide financial support for schools and students were educated through Catholic values (O'Flaherty, 1992).

The State effectively handed control of education to the Catholic hierarchy. An implication is that an anomaly now arises whereby religious orders own the school grounds while the State pays the teachers and the schools running costs, which has resulted in difficulties in progressing the divestment of Primary schools to other patrons as recommended by the forum on patronage and pluralism (Coolahan, Hussey & Kilfeather, 2012). The implications of the above in terms of provision of education today is that some minority faith and minority worldview students have little choice but to attend a Catholic school which does not reflect their own or their parents' belief system.

### **2.2.1 Current Post Primary School Structure**

Today, non-denominational bodies may also apply to become school patrons, for example, Educate Together. In the main schools are financed by the State and all students follow a common curriculum. Currently, in Ireland's free education scheme, there are seven main categories of Post-Primary schools: Voluntary Secondary schools, Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI) schools, Community schools and Colleges, Comprehensive schools, Gaelscoileanna and Educate Together schools.

### **2.2.2 Voluntary Secondary schools**

Today, Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools account for 52% of all second level schools with an enrolment of 59% of the student population (185,607) (Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), 2013a). Although traditionally owned and managed by religious congregations, due to a decline in religious personnel, many schools have

been handed over to Denominational Educational Trusts. Trusts were established in order to ensure the provision of Catholic education into the future. For example the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) was established in 2008, “the Trust is an independent lay company and recognised charity” with responsibility for the development of the Edmund Rice schools charism. (<http://www.erst.ie/about-us/our-history/>). Another example is, Catholic Education an Irish Schools' Trust (CEIST) which is trustee for 110 Voluntary Secondary Schools in Ireland (<http://www.ceist.ie/>).

### **2.2.3 Education and Training Board schools (ETBI)**

Originally named Vocational Educational Committee (VEC) schools, ETBI schools were established by the State and intended to be secular schools. However, Clarke (2011) argues that the Catholic Church directed by Archbishop McQuaid of Dublin insisted the State provide a Catholic ethos in VEC schools. In 1942, memorandum V.40 posited that education in Vocational schools should reflect Irish tradition and loyalty to God. According to Hyland (1999 p.134), “Memorandum V.40 committed the vocational schools to faith and fatherland”. Moreover, Tuohy (2013) explains: “The link with moral formation of the person and religious instruction was regarded as unproblematic and axiomatic” (p.246). Today ETBI schools cater for 25% of the student population (DES 2013). In the main they are managed by people who belong to the Catholic faith and cater for a predominantly Catholic student population. So in many ways a typical ETBI school is a place where a Catholic ethos and Catholic school practices are a part of school life. A recent controversy in an ETBI college reflects the maintenance of a Catholic ethos. The controversy centred on the appropriateness of a May altar at the school’s entrance and resulted in a ruling which upheld the college’s right to reflect its Catholic ethos (Workplace Relations Commission, 2017).

### **2.2.4 Community Schools**

Community schools are owned by the Minister for Education and managed by both Religious and ETBI Trustees. There are 78 schools with more at planning or construction stages (ESRI 2013 b). These schools are non-selective and co-educational. Community schools were intended to be multi-denominational but in reality are de facto denominational schools and largely Roman Catholic, only five are Church of Ireland. A Deed of Trust provides guarantees in terms of school ethos and culture, while the Board of Management is mandated to ensure religious worship and

instruction is provided in accordance with the religious denomination to which the pupil belongs. Tuohy (2013 p. 249) explains “that in the articles of management there is a clear understanding that the contribution to spiritual welfare is more than just information, as it allows for other supportive practices and rituals as well”. The Opt-out provision is sanctioned if it is requested in writing from a parent. Moreover a chaplain is provided outside of the normal school quota and is nominated by the religious authority. (Articles of Management of Community Schools, section 3). It is noteworthy that the provision of a chaplain was challenged as unconstitutional on the grounds that it endowed a religious group. However Justice Barrington and the Supreme Court found it was constitutional as the State had a positive duty to assist parents in this aspect of education. Payment of a chaplain was not an endowment, no more than payment of teachers in a denominational school (Campaign to Separate Church and State v Minister for Education [1998] IR 321 at 357-8). It is clear that Community schools are mandated to promote a religious habitus. It is less clear how religious instruction and rituals can be facilitated for minority religious or worldview groups as the numbers in different groups may be very small. It is also unclear how students who opt out of religious instruction and worship are cared for. In light of the above, a recent development at Primary level whereby Community National schools may no longer provide practical or Catholic faith formation education during the school day evidences a seismic shift in policy and demonstrates the fluidity of the current system. The change may have been informed by research conducted by Faas, Smith and Darmody in Community National schools, which reported that students do not want to be separated according to their religion and prefer a whole class approach to learning about other faiths and beliefs (Donnelly, 2017). Moreover there is mounting pressure from lobby groups such as ‘Education Equality and Equate’ for provision of non-denominational schooling due to rising numbers of individuals identifying as having no religion (Census, 2016).

### **2.2.5 Remaining schools**

Other schools completing the Irish Post-Primary landscape include; Community Colleges, Comprehensive schools, Educate Together Schools and Gaelscoileanna. Community colleges are owned by the ETBI and are usually managed by a board of management which is a sub-committee of the ETBI. According to the Catholic Schools Partnership (2011), “these colleges mirror the structures of community schools”

including paid chaplaincy services (p.16). Comprehensive schools are denominational in ethos and are either Roman Catholic or Protestant (Hyland, 1996). While Educate Together Schools, represent a new departure in Irish education provision, as these schools do not necessitate a religious representative on their board of management. They are multi-denominational in character and teach a course on Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB). Practical RE or faith formation is facilitated within the school but outside the school day and participation is voluntary. There are currently five Post-Primary schools under the sole patronage of Educate Together and four having ETBI and Educate Together as Joint Patrons (<https://www.educatetogether.ie/our-schools/second-level>). The final school type are the Gaelscoileanna which were founded in 1973 under the umbrella of Gaelscoileanna Teo, “a national, voluntary organisation”, which supports the “development of Irish-medium schools at both primary and at post-primary level”. The schools “religious ethos varies depending on the school’s patron” (<http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie/en/resources/eolas-do-thuismitheoiri/>).

### **2.2.6 Conclusion**

In summation the Catholic Church has secured a role in the establishment and running of Voluntary Secondary schools (excepting, Church of Ireland and Jewish schools), ETBI (VEC) schools, Comprehensive schools, Community schools and Community Colleges. Hence Post-Primary schooling in Ireland could be described as a Church/State co-operative with the Church, or Church representatives, having a dominant role in the day to day management of the vast majority of schools. The implications for minority faith and minority worldview students is that many have no choice but to attend a school with a Catholic ethos, which does not reflect their belief system. Their situation is exacerbated as their numbers remain small in comparison to a 78% Catholic population, hence their diverse needs are difficult to facilitate. Parker-Jenkins and Masterson (2013) report that Post-Primary schools are now struggling to acknowledge religions and worldviews which are not Catholic. However, the situation is fluid as evidenced by the development of Educate Together as a school Patron and most notably the change in provision of RE in Community National schools.

## **2.3 Constitutional and Legislative Provisions for Education in Ireland**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

The focus of this section is on the Constitutional and Legislative Provisions for education in Ireland. Irish, European and International law all play a part in shaping how Irish schools operate on a day to day basis. In order to understand and illuminate the current climate, pertinent laws are examined in detail. Initially the focus is on Articles 41, 42 and 44 of the Constitution of Ireland 1937. Reference is made to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) ratified by Ireland in 1992, and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms (1950). Secondly, relevant sections from the Education Act 1998 are examined. Thirdly, attention is drawn to controversial laws namely the Equal Status Acts 2000-2011 and the Employment Equality Act 1998-2011.

### **2.3.2 The Constitution of Ireland**

The Irish Constitution was written in 1937 by the then President Eamonn DeValera, with the assistance and advice of John Charles Mc Quaid the Archbishop of Dublin (Keogh & McCarthy 2005). Article 42 of the Constitution of Ireland is pertinent to this research. It infers that the State guarantees parents the right to choose the religious and moral education of their child and the State ensures this right is provided. The current system works well for the majority of parents who decide on a Catholic education for their child and are provided for at post-primary level in Catholic Voluntary Secondary schools. For various reasons, parents may choose Education Training Board, Comprehensive and Community schools and Colleges which also have either a Catholic or Protestant ethos. In addition the State provides a block grant to some minority religious students to attend a school of their parental choice. Those included in the scheme are Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and the Religious Society of Friends (Dempsey, 2003). A similar scheme provides funding for Jewish students (Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality (EPASI), 2008). However, those of no religion, or who are Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Orthodox, Apostolic, Pentecostal and from other minority religions are not funded under this scheme. Even if funded, the reality for these minorities is that there are no schools of their religion or philosophical belief available in their locality. Realistically, their numbers would not support a viable post-primary school. Therefore the State's endeavours to supplement and give

reasonable aid to some minority or non-religious parents as proposed under article 42.4, appears inadequate and inequitable. The question needs to be asked as to how the aforementioned parents of these non-Catholic children are provided for by the State. It may be argued that these students can be taught at home thus ensuring their parents' rights are respected. In reality, many parents do not have the means nor ability to provide home schooling. Moreover, parents may not consider it the best option for their child. This issue was clarified in the case of Louise O'Keefe when the European Court of Human Rights decided that home schooling was not a "realistic and acceptable alternative" to attending the local State school (O'Keefe v Ireland, 2012). Louise O'Keefe and her legal team fought for fifteen years before the European Court of Human Rights found that the State was liable to compensate her for the sexual abuse she had suffered, perpetrated by a school teacher while a pupil in Dunderrow Primary school in the 1970s. The Irish Supreme court had previously ruled against her, supporting the States claim they were not liable as the school was under the patronage of the Bishop of Cork and Ross. It is considered a landmark case and it may necessitate a more proactive and responsible role by the State in education. In essence, the legality of the State passing on to school patrons its duty to protect citizens' human rights is challenged. In answer to the original question, the reality of the current situation is that the State is in the main 'providing for' the education of the children of no religion and minority religions in denominational schools or in schools with a Catholic ethos. While details of the O'Keefe case also support the opinion that for many parents the local school is the only realistic option. Furthermore, children must receive a minimum education as compulsory under article 42.3.2. A lack of school choice means some parents are obliged in violation of their conscience and lawful preference to send their children to the local school, thus it is debatable if article 42.3.1 of the constitution is upheld for these parents. If schools fail to have policies and procedures in place to care for non-co-religionist students, then the parents' rights under article 42.1 which guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide for the religious and moral education of their child, is seriously undermined. Furthermore, Article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution should protect non-co-religionist students from attending religious instruction at that school. It states:

Legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools under the management of different religious

denominations, nor be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school (Irish Constitution, 1937. Article 44.2.4 p.170).

However, for schools with a religious ethos, religion may permeate all teaching. Included in the day may be prayer led assemblies, prayers at the start of class, religious rituals and habitués. Furthermore Catholic values may underpin the operative ethos. It is unclear how schools deal with these situations and whether it is currently workable for students not to attend all religious instruction. School Principals and Boards of Management decide how to address the needs of non-co-religionist students in an ad hoc manner. Evidence suggests some schools send text messages home, advising the parent that if the child is not attending a Catholic service the parent should collect and supervise their child outside of the school, others allow the child to sit at the back of the class or church, while some expect the child to partake (O’Kelly 2015). Concerns were articulated in the Report on the Constitutional Review Group (1996) which stated;

Article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution was meant to protect the conscientious objections of minorities in the education system. In regard to Article 44.2.4 and Article 42.3.1 of the Constitution: “if Article 44.2.4 did not provide these safeguards, the State might well be in breach of its international obligations, in as much as it might mean that a significant number of children of minority religions (or those with no religion) might be coerced by force of circumstances to attend a school which did not cater for their particular religious views or their conscientious objections. If this were to occur, it would also mean that the State would be in breach of its obligations under Article 42.3.1” (p.366-367).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Article 4 (Protection of rights) also states that the government must take responsibility to ensure children’s rights are respected. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has held that:

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion is one of the foundations of a ‘democratic society’ [...]. It is, in its religious dimension, one of the most vital

elements that go to make up the identity of believers and their conception of life, but it is also a precious asset for atheists, agnostics, skeptics and the unconcerned. The pluralism indissociable from a democratic society, which has been dearly won over the centuries, depends on it. (Kokinnakis v. Greece (European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), App. No. 14307/33, 1993), para.31. (cited in OIDHR , 2007 p.30).

The United Nations Human Rights advisory committee has repeatedly (2011), (2015), called on the Irish Government to address the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion for minorities in Irish schools. Furthermore, the Irish Human Rights Commission has repeatedly supported the need for change (IHRC, 2011, 2014). The reality of the situation on the ground is unclear due to the autonomy afforded to schools by the State, hence a rationale of this research is to understand current provisions for students of minority faith or minority world view.

### **2.3.3 Article 41 of the Constitution, International and European Law**

In order to further understand the legal situation, it is important to examine Article 41 of the Constitution of Ireland. Shannon (2014) argues that articles 41 and 42 of the Constitution demonstrate a strong commitment to the conception of the family as an autonomous decision-making body. The family is described as the “primary educator” of children, its significance assured by the Constitution’s depiction of it as a “moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights”. As the “natural primary and fundamental unit of society” (Irish Constitution, 1937), it is thus heavily protected from State interference. Inalienable and imprescriptible rights are the most fundamental set of human rights. They include an absolute right to liberty which includes no coercion from governments or any other institution including schools. This right is akin to the United Nations declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) both of which state: “everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”. (Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).

Yet in Ireland, the State insists that children receive an education, and due to a lack of “realistic and acceptable alternatives”, parents are forced to send their children to denominational schools which may be contrary to the inalienable and imprescriptible right of liberty of conscience of those parents who are not Catholic. In July 2008 and

again in July 2014 the United Nations Human Rights Committee stated that they were concerned with Government practices and efforts to ensure the facilitation and respect for the rights of non-Catholic school children and parents (Mawhinney, 2010; IHRC, 2011, 2014). The situation at Post-Primary level has not been examined in the same detail to date. The reasons may include the fact that ETBI and Community schools are described as multi-denominational, although from a historical perspective and in the opinion of the Catholic schools diocesan advisory service, these schools also have a Catholic ethos (Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, 2013). The European Convention on Human Rights 1998 in Article 2 protocol 1- makes it clear that no person, whether religious or secular, should be denied their right to an education, which respects their and their parents' religious and philosophical convictions (European Court of Human Rights, 1998). The word respect in relation to a person's rights supports an undertaking not to interfere with the right but also an obligation on the State to vindicate that right. Again this links with article 42.4 that the State should endeavor to supplement and give reasonable aid to parents especially in the matter of religious and moral formation. However in Irish schools the main provision is to allow students to opt out. Parents and students of 18yrs have a legal entitlement to opt their children or themselves out of religious services and classes as stated in Article 44.2.4 and Article 42.1 of the Irish Constitution. Furthermore, section 30 (2)-(e) of the Education Act 1998 also underpins this legal right. Again research is warranted on the reality of the situation on the ground.

### **2.3.4 Education Act 1998**

The Education Act (1998) provides a statutory framework for Irish Post-Primary schools. The Act outlines educational objectives and principles. It also clarifies the roles and the responsibilities of teachers, Principals, school patrons, Boards of Management and the Minister. The pertinent sections for this research are identified as follows: Part II section 9 (d) states a school should “promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school” (Education Act, 1998, p.13). It is noteworthy that the section does not include the wording religious development but instead uses the word spiritual and personal. This choice of words is significant as it is accepted that all people have an innate spirituality which is a vital element of the human condition (de Souza, 2009; Schneiders, 2003;

Hull 2002). However all people do not have a religion. Part IV section 15 (b) states the school should uphold the ethos or characteristic spirit articulated by the schools' patron;

Uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school, and at all times act in accordance with any Act of the Oireachtas or instrument made thereunder, deed, charter, articles of management or other such instrument relating to the establishment or operation of the school (Education Act, 1998, p.19).

If analysed in isolation these sections could be interpreted as the school having a right not to cater for the needs of a child of a different religion or worldview to the schools religious ethos. Indeed this was the interpretation made by Justice Barrington (2010) when he stated in the Supreme Court that a denominational school is not obliged to change the school atmosphere for a child of a different religion. This is reiterated in the 1998 Employment equality Act (section 37). It is accepted that schools have a right to create a religious ethos but schools under the Education Act part iv section 15 (e) “ must have regard to the principles and requirements of a democratic society and respect and promote respect for the diversity of values, beliefs, traditions, languages and ways of life in society” (p.20). What is meant by the principles and requirements of a democratic society needs to be unpacked. According to Ghiorgis (2012), democracies must protect fundamental human rights including the right to freedom of speech and religion, and commit to tolerance, cooperation and compromise. Hence the State should protect the fundamental right to freedom from religion, and in a spirit of cooperation and compromise, endeavour to address the spiritual and personal needs of all children regardless of their religious or worldview persuasion. This closely aligns with the theoretical perspective of identity humility which underpins this research endeavour. In tandem, Laguardia and Pearl (2009) identified inclusiveness, equality and guaranteed inalienable rights as principles of a democratic society. The definitions concur with the section of the 1998 Education act which identifies the requirement of schools to promote respect for the diversity of values and beliefs of all students.

Therefore, taken as a whole rather than any section in isolation, the Education Act (1998) makes it clear that schools can promote a religious ethos but must actively provide for non-co-religionists. The Act requires all schools to care for all students educational needs in a caring and respectful manner regardless of the students or the schools religion. In addition the Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers requires that teachers demonstrate respect for spiritual and cultural values, diversity, social justice, freedom and democracy in the classroom (Teaching Council, 2012). It is incumbent on the State to assist teachers to achieve these objectives by providing adequate training and supportive structures for teachers. How the Education Act has been implemented at school level is unclear, due to the many different Patrons and the management autonomy they are afforded by the State. It is very difficult to assess or generalise the reality of the current situation. Furthermore, times and views are changing and schools ethos's have a degree of elasticity. Research is necessary to attempt to understand schools' lived interpretations of the laws.

### **2.3.5 Controversial Laws**

Both the Equal Status Act (2000-2015) section 7.3(c) and the Employment Equality Act (1998-2015) section 37 are currently under scrutiny.

#### ***2.3.5.1 The Employment Equality Act***

The Employment Equality Acts (1998-2011) Section 37, clearly outlines a patron's right to maintain a particular ethos in a school. It also allows favourable treatment on religious ground to an employee or prospective employee. Teachers who are non-Catholic may feel a need to hide their beliefs at interview and throughout their working life in order to gain employment and have any chance of promotion (Irwin, 2010; Dunne 1991). Moreover Catholic schools can and have appointed priests, nuns, brothers and monks as employees in schools without interview or other employment processes (Radio Teilifis Eireann, 2017). In 2015, the Taoiseach and Minister for Education met with Atheist Ireland to discuss educational and constitutional issues which discriminate against them. Neither the teacher or student representative allowed their name or photo to be published as they feared recriminations from their schools (Atheist Ireland, 2015). The IHRC have also recommended that section 37 of the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2012 be amended to protect the employment rights of

religious and worldview minorities in access to employment and promotion in education and health sectors (IHRC, 2014).

### *2.3.5.2 Equal Status Act*

The Equal Status Act (2000-2011) Section 7.3 (c), “allows schools to refuse students entry if necessary to maintain the schools ethos”. Schools can give priority of admission to co-religionists students and also exclude a child who is not a co-religionist, if it can prove refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school. The grass roots lobby group, Equate is campaigning for changes to the Equal Status Act. Moreover, the ombudsman for children, called for an end to religious discrimination on school admissions (O’Brien, 2016). Furthermore, a report commissioned by the Equality Authority (2011), suggests State-funded schools’ admission policies that are run on a “Catholic First” basis may be in breach of both equality legislation and the Constitution. There is a contradiction between article 44.2.4 of the Constitution, which asserts that legislation providing State aid for schools should not “affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money”, and section 7 of the Equal Status Act 2000 which gives religious-run schools the right to administer admission policies that “protect their ethos” (Ferriter, 2015 p.i). The Admission to Schools Bill 2016 still allows schools of a faith ethos to give preference to students who practise that faith (DES 2016). The need for this is understandable in order to protect the rights of minority religious schools, yet the implementation by Catholic schools that are in a majority, is questionable. According to the United Nation Human Rights Committee, (UNHRC) General Comment No. (22), in relation to religion it is important that the State maintains a neutral and impartial position at all times (OIDHR, 2007 p.33). However, it is acknowledged that the State may need to balance religious rights in the interests of society as a whole and suggests the idea of “mutual respect” as a “relevant touchstone” (OIDHR, 2007 p.33). Moreover it is recommended that where tensions arise, the State has a responsibility to ensure competing groups tolerate each other. “When tensions result from pluralism, “the role of the authorities ... is not to remove the cause of tension by eliminating pluralism, but to ensure that competing groups tolerate each other.” (European Court of Human Rights, cited in OIDHR, 2007 p.33). In an Irish context, it is argued that this directive would challenge the States support for section 37 of the Employment Equality acts (1998-2015) and section 3.7 (c) of the Equal Status Act (2000-2015), as both support removal or exclusion of the

other. Similarly, the State's efforts to support a variety of school patrons, could also be interpreted, as separation or removal rather than an expectation that religious diversity be supported in every school. It is challenging for the State from a historical and cultural perspective to maintain a neutral and impartial stance due to traditional and financial ties between Catholicism and education provision. However, in relation to the rights of minority belief people, which are important to this research, the Toledo Guiding Principles present the following European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) statement which maintains that minority belief or irreligious people have an equal right to religious people to have their beliefs respected as part of their identity within a democratic society (European Court of Human Rights, Kokinnakis v. Greece (ECtHR, App. No. 14307/33,1993 para.31 cited in OIDHR,2007 p.30). Likewise, the requirements of a modern democracy include respect of human rights, in other words, the majority who rule must actively ensure that minority human rights are respected. According to Douzinas (2000), "A society based on rights does not recognise duties; it acknowledges only responsibilities arising from the reciprocal nature of rights in the form of limits on rights for the protection of the rights of others" (p.10).

Patrons who set up schools have a right to promote their own religion but when funded by the State there is a responsibility on both Church and State to recognise and respect minorities. Paul Colton, Church of Ireland Bishop is aware of democratic responsibilities and stated, "The educational system is thus fundamentally denominational in character and as a result the representatives of only a few interest groups exercise this powerful position of patronage. As a matter of justice, this ought to be an issue of concern for those who exercise patronage also" (Colton, 2009, p.258). Some may argue that in a democratic society churches have a right to run schools they built according to their own ethos and this is protected in these sections, this argument is valid so long as the rights of others are also protected. Identity humility theory seeks to protect the rights of all in diverse societies.

### **2.3.6 Compromise**

In summation, the Constitution of Ireland and the 1998 Education Act and International organisations all support ideals of equality and respect for freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Moreover, the Constitution of Ireland (Article 44 (3)), supports freedom of thought conscience and religion for all citizens (Irish Statute Book, 2015). While the 1916, Proclamation of the Irish Republic states that "all children should be

cherished equally" ([http://www.firstdail.com/?page\\_id=75](http://www.firstdail.com/?page_id=75) p.i). In reality ideals are easier articulated and written than achieved. Awareness of the limitations of rights and the need for compromise and proportionality is necessary in order to provide a workable solution. The European Convention on Human Rights, article 9.2 provides a balance to the conundrum on religious/no faith rights in a society as follows: "Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others" (ECHR 2010, p.10).

Tuohy (2013) argues:

Above gives rise to claims "for" and "from" religion and that these rights are equal. In an educational context this implies that schools have an equal right to manifest one's religion as non-believers have a right to freedom from interference of that religious manifestation with their school life. At a basic level others must refrain from coercion, proselytising and indoctrination (p.123).

In addition, schools must show respect for non-co-religionists by providing for and caring for them. School boards of management have autonomy in developing their own ethos. A continuum between intolerance and inclusiveness to minority faith and non-religious students is possible. The reality of the situation on the ground is unclear and warrants research. An emerging research question is; How is the human right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, facilitated for minority faith and minority worldview students' in Irish Post-Primary schools with a Catholic ethos? Moving on, the next section explores religious education.

## **2.4 Religious Education in Ireland**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

This section provides an overview of religious education (RE) from an Irish and European perspective. Initially, definitions of RE from a legal and educational context are examined. Next, the purpose of RE from the perspective of the Toledo Guiding Principles, the Catholic Bishops Conference and the National Council for Assessment (NCCA) are examined, followed by review and analysis of developments in RE in Irish education. The chapter then examines both State and

teacher accountabilities inclusive of the idea of proportionality. Next religious pedagogies are outlined and critiqued. Penultimately, international research by REDCo (Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries) is reviewed in order to understand students' perspectives on RE. Finally school ethos is explored. A conclusion draws together and summarises the key points.

#### **2.4.2 Definitions of Religious education**

Religious Education (RE) may be defined as a bruised term (Cullen, 2013). Hence at the outset of this section it is necessary to consider current understandings. In the first instance, religious education is defined in terms of the Irish Constitution; Article 44.2.4 makes a distinction between 'Religious Education' and 'Religious Instruction'. Religious education or a school's religious ethos is protected under the law, whereby a school is not obliged to change its ethos to facilitate a non-co-religionist student (O'Mahony, 2015). However, under article 44.4 of the Irish Constitution and the 1998 Education Act, 30.2e, students are allowed exemptions from religious instruction or formal religion classes. Hence from a legal view point it means "students have a right to opt-out from timetabled religious instruction but not a right to be insulated from the general school ethos", as clarified by Barrington, J. in the Supreme Court decision in *Campaign to Separate Church and State Ltd v Minister for Education* [1998] 2 I.L.R.M. 81 at 101. (Renehan, 2011; IHRC, 2010, p. 9; Mullally, 2010, p.12).

However there are other understandings of the meaning of religious education which are somewhat contradictory (Devitt, 2008; Irish Human Right Commission, 2010; Renehan, 2011; ODHHR, 2007; Cullen, 2013). For the purposes of the remainder of this section and to assist in describing the key constituents of RE, the researcher will use the terms "practical" and "theoretical" religious education as described by Renehan (2011, p.7). Practical RE refers to a catechetical approach, inclusive of "convictions, attitudes, emotions and such like manifested in acts of worship, prayer or moral commitment" (Renehan, 2011 p.7). In essence practical religious education is inclusive of faith formation and is denominational in nature. In an Irish Catholic Post-Primary school context, this includes the promotion of a set of values consistent with Roman Catholicism (Catholic Bishops Conference, 2007). Practical RE may also be understood as confessional RE. While theoretical RE refers to "religious studies, providing teaching about different religions and beliefs which is not devotionally or

denominationally orientated” (Renehan, 2011 p.7). Theoretical RE is also understood as non-confessional RE. Hence theoretical religious education should not impact negatively on any child or parent’s freedom of thought, conscience or religion and it is reasonable to suggest would not be covered under article 44.2.4 of the Irish constitution. However *Share the Good News, the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland* states;

Religious education, encourages Catholic students and others to engage with religious questions from within the context of their own lived religious faith. Religious education holds open the possibility of helping all people to grapple, within their own reality, with crucial life questions central to life and to living, playing its part in personal faith formation if the young person is open and interested and supported in following this through in their lives (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010 pp.57-58).

Hence in an Irish Catholic school context it is reasonable to suggest RE has both practical and theoretical elements. Furthermore Cullen (2013) describes RE in Irish Post Primary schools as a communicative engagement with the religious impulse:

Religious education is always a hermeneutical and communicative interpretation of religious traditions and people’s engagement with these. The purpose is not to give the impression that religion is something out there that other people do and which can be known about; rather its purpose is to help people to understand the religious impulse and the nature of religion, so as to be able to draw on that as a source of wisdom for their own lives and the lives of others (pp.19.-20).

It is unclear how minority belief students experience RE in Irish Post-Primary schools, where both practical and theoretical RE reside in the same space.

#### **2.4.3 The Toledo Guiding Principles and the Purpose of RE**

The Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) initiated the development of the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* (2007) in order to promote security and stability across the OSCE region. The *Toledo Guiding Principles* promote the study and knowledge about many religions and beliefs in schools (OIDHR, 2007). They present a clear rationale for

theoretical religious education as follows; “knowledge of religions and beliefs is an important part of a quality education and it can foster democratic citizenship, mutual respect, enhance support for religious freedom, and promote an understanding of societal diversity” (p.18). Conversely, ignorance tends to drive intolerance, discrimination, negative stereotypes, hostility, conflict, and at times violence (OIDHR, 2007). It is noteworthy that “students are not pressed to accept, conform or convert to any belief” which makes clear the distinction between theoretical religious education and practical religious education (OIDHR, 2007. p.20). It is also significant to this research study to report that 55 of the 56 States in the OSCE, including Ireland, accepted the Toledo Guiding Principles, however the Holy See rejected them stating that teaching religion in Catholic schools is the responsibility of the Bishops and the Holy See:

The nature and role of religious education in schools has become the object of debate. In some cases, it is now the object of new civil regulations, which tend to replace religious education with teaching about the religious phenomenon in a multi-denominational sense, or about religious ethics and culture – even in a way that contrasts with the choices and educational aims that parents and the Church intend for the formation of young people (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2008, p. 1). In 2014 the Irish Bishops clarified their vision of the religious education of Catholic students:

The Primary aims of all schools are educational, including in the area of Religious Education, but Catholic schools should also provide opportunities for catechesis, for formation in faith in the living God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. The programmes in Religious Education at Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate levels provide many such opportunities. (Catholic Schools Partnership, 2014. p.25-26).

Moreover, Mullally (2010) states that “denominational schools, with a particular characteristic spirit or ethos, should be and are entitled to teach the syllabus through the lens of their own religious tradition” (p.10). Hence in Ireland we have a tension between the State and the Catholic Bishops regarding the recognition of the *Toledo Guiding Principles*. It is important in relation to this research study to endeavor to

understand the impact of this tension on developing religious education in Irish schools. The next section outlines some recent developments.

#### **2.4.4 Developments in Religious Education in Ireland**

The following section provides some background on the development of RE in Ireland. Murray (2008) reports that prior to 2000, “responsibility for RE was seen as exclusively belonging to Christian churches and particularly the Roman Catholic Church, which managed the vast majority of Post-Primary schools” (p.99). This exclusivity meant the mode of religious education of Catholic students in Irish schools was determined by the Catholic Bishops, who in turn are responsible to the Holy See. However, a change occurred in 2000 when the Department of Education & Science (DES) through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) prepared a Junior Certificate Religious Education syllabus (2000) and a Leaving Certificate Religious Education syllabus (2003). The syllabi were prepared by the NCCA but “drafts were sent to representatives of the main churches as well as to religious leaders of other groups including the Baha’i community, a Buddhist organisation and the Association of Irish Humanists” (Lynch & Lodge, 2004. p.52). In the initial drafts prepared by Anne Looney of the NCCA, she envisaged a “creative divorce between Catechesis (practical RE) and religious education” (theoretical RE) (Murray, 2008. p.101). The aim of Junior Certificate Religious Education;

Is to provide students with a framework for encountering and engaging with the variety of religious traditions in Ireland and elsewhere. The syllabus seeks to promote an understanding and appreciation of why people believe, as well as tolerance and respect for the values and beliefs of all. As part of preparation for the responsibilities of citizenship, the course makes particular reference to the Christian tradition, acknowledging the unique role of this tradition and its denominational expressions in Irish life (NCCA, 2001 p.2).

The course is structured to facilitate a Christian and other faiths view so it is possible not to cover the section on world religions. (DES, 2000 p.7). It is also important to note that the section on atheism, agnosticism and secularisation come under the section on Challenges to Faith (DES, 2000 p.31). It is difficult to see how respect for a non-religious belief system is possible when it is portrayed as a challenge in the RE syllabus. Moreover, the syllabus states that the non-religious interpretation of life is to

be 'acknowledged' (p.5) rather than respected, interpreted or explored. However, the word 'respect' is included in the Leaving Certificate syllabus (p.5) (DES, 2003). Furthermore, despite concessions, which "facilitated a flexible approach to the syllabus combined with an inherent "faith bias", tensions arose between the NCCA which supported a separation between theoretical and practical RE and the Catholic Bishops and the Religion Teachers Association which supported an integrated or "shared praxis" approach in order to best serve Catholic students (Murray, 2008 p.102). Furthermore, Murray (2008), reports that the debate on RE curriculum centered exclusively on the needs of Catholic students, "the debate seem to focus on the underlying assumption that the students taking the syllabus will emerge from some type of Catholic background. "The 'Other', if now inside the State, is still outside the classroom" (Murray, 2008 p.103). This particular statement is very important for this research thesis as it suggested a systemic Catholic centric focus regarding RE. It is important to acknowledge that the Joint Managerial Board (JMB) in conjunction with the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools AMCSS produced guidelines on; *The inclusion of students of other faiths in Catholic schools* (Mullally, 2010) however there is no research into the implementation of these guidelines, hence their impact is unclear. The NCCA responded to the challenge against a divorce between catechesis (practical RE) and religious education (theoretical RE) by including Thomas Groome's Shared Praxis Approach in its suggested methodologies for Leaving Certificate RE (DES, Religious Education Guidelines for Teachers, 2005. Moreover the DES also excluded diocesan advisors from teachers' in-service days (Murray, 2008). This action could be responsible in part for the diocesan advisors' response, which was to discourage schools from adopting the State RE syllabus (Murray, 2008). In order to further clarify, it is important to explain, the role of a diocesan advisor. Bishops appoint diocesan advisors who are responsible to oversee religious education in Catholic schools. "A primary role of the Diocesan Advisor is to ensure that the provisions for teaching religious instruction are upheld, particularly in terms of content and in terms of timetabling allocation. Within the Catholic school, there is an obligation on catechists to impart knowledge that respects the teaching of Christ and the Church" (p.12). Moreover the diocesan advisor has a" right to appoint or to approve; to remove or demand to be removed teachers of religion" (Code of Canon Law #805). The Diocesan Advisor may be required to participate in selection/interview boards for teachers of religion in Voluntary Post-Primary schools, ETBI and

Community schools, and in this role he is the representative of the Catholic bishop (Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, 2013. p.7). A consequence of the tensions described above in introducing the new syllabi, may in part explain why in 2016, only 2.6% of Leaving Certificate students and 44% of Junior Certificate students sat the State RE exam, (State Exams Commission 2016; O'Brien and O'Caollai, 2016). This statistic may suggest that a majority of school personnel decided not to prepare students for the State exam in RE. The crux of the matter may be explained by Murray (2008), who reports teachers find it impossible to teach RE in a way which allows the attainment of high grades in the RE State examinations while “simultaneously nurturing students’ faith in a meaningful manner” (p.103). However other factors may also have impacted on schools’ decisions, including exam overload. Further critique of the above developments, questions the concession made by the State in allowing schools to decide whether to teach RE as an exam subject or not. It is inconceivable for this to happen in any other curriculum subject. Charter and Erricker (2013) argue that “religion works to a different rationale and pedagogical rules from other subjects and is not required to explain itself in terms of the rest of the curriculum” (p.103). In relation to the RE needs of minority faith and minority belief students the teaching of practical or faith formation as part of RE means some parents may find it necessary to opt their children out of RE in order to avoid this element of RE. While the decisions made at local level regarding whether RE will be provided as an exam subject or not, leaves minorities vulnerable to confusion and uncertainty regarding RE provision. Moreover “local determination of ethos creates the possibility of excellence and innovation but also permits unaccountability, confusion, mediocrity or egregious models of the subject” (Charter and Erricker, 2013 p.103). Moreover Devine (2005) and O’Sullivan (2005) report an inconsistency and lack of State accountability within the system in relation to minority students. Furthermore, the classification of atheism and agnosticism as ‘challenges’ in the Junior Certificate State RE syllabus, raises serious concerns regarding the identity of atheist and agnostic students in Irish Catholic schools. Moreover, the alliance between the Department of Education and Skills and the Catholic Bishops in developing the RE syllabi may be explained as a necessary hegemonic concession in order for the Church and State alliance to function. The elasticity and differential accountability to the State regarding RE is recognised as a necessary part of maintaining a Catholic hegemony in Irish Catholic schools. In essence, the DES, through the NCCA, appear to prioritise the maintenance of good

relations with the Catholic Bishops at the expense of providing for the religious educational needs of minority faith and minority worldview students in Catholic schools. The researcher contends the practise of identity humility through communication and reflexivity could find workable strategies to address the RE needs of all students in Catholic schools. It is noteworthy that academics, for example Kavanagh, 2013; Sugrue and Gleeson 2004; Granville, 2004 and Irwin, 2010 are critical of the NCCA regarding their willingness to compromise, in order to maintain good relations with the Catholic Bishops, rather than supporting real change. However, the fluid nature of RE is evidenced by the 2013 publication *Toward Mutual Ground* which brought together contributions from many education stakeholders in order to advance the idea of sharing the RE space among all stakeholders (Byrne and Kiernan, 2013). Furthermore, fluidity is recognised by a recent development in Community National schools, whereby it is posited to end the teaching of practical RE during the school day. Moreover, Michael Moriarty general secretary of ETBI has been outspoken about RE at Post-Primary level stating that Department circulars on RE “belong in a different era” and need to be modernised. He further explained that a diversity task force has been established to “address the characteristic spirit of ETBI -primary schools” (O’Brien, 2017). A development in 2015 by the State, through the DES and NCCA, was the publication and subsequent implementation of a *Framework for Junior Cycle*. An examination of the NCCA ‘Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Junior Cycle Religious Education’ (2017), represents a significant development in RE. The brief places a strong emphasis on developing students’ critical thinking skills and situates RE in both a local and global context. Moreover it addresses the need to provide opportunities for critical reflection, discussion, and meaning seeking relevant to student’s lives. It also links RE with students’ well-being and sense of belonging. However difficulties may arise in the detail, as on the one hand the new specification aims to consider, “How the specification can be flexible and sensitive to accommodate a range of school contexts and forms of patronage” (NCCA, 2017 p.41), whilst also considering “How R.E. can equally recognise, value and contribute to the experience of students from a plurality of religious traditions and cultures as well as those students who hold a non-religious worldview”, (NCCA, 2017 p.41). In essence Catholic schools may be required to equally recognise and value other religious traditions and non-religious worldviews. Another development within the *Framework* is whereby teachers are encouraged to develop short courses that “engage with additional religious, spiritual

and philosophical themes”. In response the Irish Catholic Bishops Conference explains that while schools may also develop short courses they mandate that RE is to continue to be taught in “conjunction with the Bishops’ Conference *Guidelines for the Faith Formation and Development of Catholic Students* “(Irish Catholics Bishops Conference 2017. p.11. p.8). However, the researcher suggests the freedom or agency afforded to schools and individual teachers to develop short courses on philosophical, spiritual and religious themes, could be viewed as a concession to the State or “wriggle room” for agentic teachers (Coe, Jordhus-Lier, 2011, p. 229). However, Meehan (2017) reports the new Junior Cycle Framework is coherent with Christian values and visions for education and states, “Parents who wish to have their teenage children educated in their faith tradition can rest assured that it sits easily within the new Junior Cycle framework” (p.150). Meehan’s view is interesting and highlights continuing differences in emphasis between the NCCA and Catholic Bishops views on Junior Cycle RE. However, the final specification will not be introduced until 2019, and will be developed with education partners, hence it remains to be seen how the new framework will impact on RE in Irish Post-Primary schools.

In essence, a conundrum exists in how best to balance the right of the Catholic majority to choose a Catholic religious education with the rights of non-Catholic minorities to attend their local school and RE classes, which respect their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The Catholic patrons are accountable to Catholic parents, who send their child to a Catholic school to ensure their child receives an education which helps form the Catholic faith of the child. The State under article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution and section 30.2e of the Education act 1998 is mandated to insure that a child not attend religious instruction contrary to their beliefs. However, it is also relevant to this research, and important to acknowledge, that when children opt out from RE, an important aspect of their education is neglected in school. The concept of proportionality is important in endeavours to find resolutions where conflicting rights occur and is addressed in the following section.

#### **2.4.5 Opting out of RE**

According to the OIHR everyone has “an absolute right to hold to the pattern of thought, conscience or religion of their choice, free from any interference from the state under any circumstances. In consequence, no one must be subjected by the state to any

form of coercion that would impair their freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of their choice or to change their religion or belief” (OIDHR p.30). In relation to this research, O’Mahony (2015), questions the appropriateness of a child who has been opted out of RE remaining in the classroom as sufficient measure to ensure freedom of conscience. Moreover he draws attention to Article 44.2.4° of the Irish Constitution which uses the phrase “without attending religious instruction”. “The use of the word “attending” (as opposed to “participating in”, or something similar) could reasonably form the basis of an argument that anything short of leaving the room fails to vindicate the right to opt-out” (p.1). Even more serious breaches of religious freedom have been reported by students, for example; a student was prohibited from opting out of religion class in an ETBI Post-Primary school. Following publicity and negotiations, the solution in the end, was to allow her to sit at the back of the class during RE (Hayes, 2015). In relation to State accountability versus teacher accountability, research by Parker-Jenkins and Masterson (2013) in Irish Post-Primary schools report “a lack of direction from the DES left teachers in limbo when faced with increasingly contentious issues of both religious identity and linked to this religious instruction”. In the report one Principal admitting to having to “make it up as you go along” and being left to deal with parents discontent (p.482).

#### **2.4.6 Religious Pedagogy**

Pedagogy refers to the methods and practises which are used in teaching: “Pedagogy gives life to educational aims and values, lifts the curriculum from the printed page, mediates learning and knowing, engages, inspires and empowers learners-or, sadly, may fail to do so”. (Alexander, 2010, p.307). There are four main types of RE pedagogy, namely phenomenological, interpretive, dialogical and divine. According to the *Toledo Guiding Principles*, the phenomenological approach presents “different religious positions from the insider’s point of view” (OIDHR, 2007 p.46) and advances the non-promotion of any particular faith or world view. In an Irish context, practical RE is not consistent with a phenomenological approach. The interpretive approach to teaching RE is attributed to Jackson (1997). The main aim of this approach is to enable students to find their own positions within key debates on religious plurality by facilitating opportunities for critical reflection while developing skills of interpretation (Jackson, 2004). Jackson (2004) recognises the need for an individual rather than a cultural focus when teaching RE in order to understand “the inner diversity and fuzzy

edged-ness and contested nature of religious traditions” (p.8). In an Irish context this fuzzy edged-ness was apparent in the campaign for marriage equality whereby some members of the LGBT community spoke out against marriage equality, while the statistics suggest many Catholics voted in favour of Marriage Equality (Mills, 2017). It is reasonable to extrapolate that the interpretive approach to teaching RE supports this type of non-stereotypical reality and also the exploratory stage of adolescent identity and moral development. In relation to the theoretical perspective of identity humility, this flexibility is necessary in addressing individual religious understandings. A number of important common beliefs underpin an interpretive pedagogy and identity humility, most notably, the need for an individual focus, the avoidance of stereotyping, and the requirement to question our interpretations and to be reflexive in practise. Baumann’s words powerfully explain the thoughts underpinning an interpretive or identity humility approach to RE:

“Try to unrefify all accepted reifications by finding crosscutting cleavages. Whenever the reifying discourse talks about citizens or aliens, purple or green ethnics, believers or atheists, ask about rich or poor citizens, powerful or manipulated ethnics, and married or sexual minority believers. Who are the minorities within majorities, who are the unseen majorities right across minorities? Combine every method of questioning to every possible category around you, for the permutations are endless when it comes to questioning reifications”.

(Baumann, 1999, p. 141).

Chapter three on identity and moral development supports the need for this level of critique as many examples of the fluid and diverse nature both between and within beliefs are addressed. Furthermore an interpretive pedagogy also aligns with a constructivist epistemology which supports the idea of multiple individual realities. A third type of RE pedagogy is dialogical and is also supportive of Baumann’s words. Different dialogical approaches have been developed most notably in Britain, Norway and Germany in response to increasingly diverse demographics. “All approaches claim the relative autonomy of the individual, but recognise the contextual influence of social groupings, such as family, peer, ethnic and religious groups” (Jackson, 2004 p.9). The personal knowledge and experience of the students are used as an important resource for RE. Other resources from a range of different areas are also utilised which aim to facilitate communication and reflection. Leganger-Krogstad (2000), developed a

dialogical approach in Norway which emphasised the need to gradually broaden a student's religious/belief perspective from the personal to the global in order to develop a student's ability to continually learn from new perspectives and knowledge with sensitivity. This approach of broadening a student's perspective maybe a reason why the Leaving Certificate religious syllabus pays more attention to a non-religious interpretation than the Junior cycle syllabus in relation to Catholic students' education. However a dialogical pedagogy may be practically challenged in rural Post-Primary schools, where very low numbers of students may hold minority beliefs. For example in Tipperary only 13% of the population identified as non-Catholic in contrast to Dublin City, Dun Laoghaire and Galway City where more than one in three of the population identified as non-Catholic (Irish Census, 2016). However, teachers may be able to address this low level of diversity by using other resources as suggested by Jackson (2004). The final pedagogy is described by the Irish Episcopal Conference (2015) as a divine pedagogy and advances that "Religious education must remain faithful to God's Revelation and Church teaching must be presented in its fullness and provide a creative dialogue between life experience and the unique light of the gospel". (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2015, p.25). This pedagogy is part of the newly developed "Grow in Love" RE programme for Irish Primary schools. It emphasises the need to form the faith of the student in the Catholic tradition and could be argued as part of a socialising process inherent in education. It is noteworthy that this pedagogical approach is intended for use with Primary school children, while it is unclear if it is intended to be employed at Post-Primary level. However, research by Parker-Jenkins & Masterson, (2013) found "Roman Catholicism informed the teaching and ethos" in Irish Post-Primary schools and within RE classes; "the new syllabus provided some input on other faiths" but teaching remains predominantly on Catholicism (p.483). Moreover, "students who do not subscribe to Catholicism are not catered for" (p.482). Mawhinney (2009) concurs regarding provisions for non-co-religionists and raises concerns regarding "involuntary religious indoctrination" (p.192). In conclusion the operative pedagogy is closely linked with the aims of RE. Hence a divine pedagogy aligns with the Catholic Bishops aims for RE to support the faith formation of the student. While phenomenological pedagogy aligns with the aims of the *Toledo Guiding Principles* to enhance social cohesion. The interpretive and dialogical pedagogies could be viewed as aligned with the NCCA's understanding of RE in promoting opportunities for critical thinking and developing all students individual identities. From the perspective of identity humility,

communicative skill is needed in order to negotiate and lever power imbalances, without stereotyping or marginalising any stakeholder, moreover the concepts of multi-perspectivity and proportionality may be helpful.

#### **2.4.7 Theoretical Religious Education**

In acknowledging that teaching RE through a Catholic lens or any other lens including a non-religious lens may present challenges, the next section sets aside the practical, confessional or faith formation element of RE and critiques the theoretical element of religious education. It is posited that individual and group worldviews alongside cultural and historical lens impact on the delivery of theoretical RE. According to Renehan (2011), all worldviews encompass a set of values; “it would be an inaccuracy to think that either religious or nonreligious views of life are value free” (p.8). Moreover, research has found that teachers can find it challenging to cater for and respect all religious beliefs, this is true for teachers across all school types, including Educate Together Schools (Neary, Irwin-Gowran and McEvoy, 2017). It could be argued that teaching theoretical religious education, which according to the *Toledo Guiding Principles*, “does not impose any particular view; it educates about religions and beliefs without promoting or denigrating any of them”, is in fact promoting a pluralist, liberal, Western, human rights viewpoint. Likewise, Chater and Erricker, (2013) report that teachers of theoretical religion tend to promote a positive protection of religion “lacking scrutiny of the incoherent unacceptable practises of some religions” (p.87), hence serving a desire for religion to retain an acceptable face within democratic ways of life. In developing this point, Chater and Erricker (2013), challenge religious educators to present world religions; warts and all. Whilst acknowledging the lens of a western human rights perspective, examples of contentious issues include; the gendered hierarchy promoted in Roman Catholicism and Islam; the homophobic dogma of Roman Catholicism and Islam; the Crusades in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries; interfaith conflicts and religious fundamentalism most notably ISIS; recent scandals in the Catholic Church, for example the Tuam Mother and Baby Home. Moreover, they suggest theoretical religious education deserves to die “if it declines to submit itself to the full accountability of young peoples’ gaze and neglects their aspirations for the world they will inherit” (p.146). Chater and Erricker (2013) also contend that religious education has the power to change the learner, the subject matter and the world, if given freedom to do so. In essence they contend that theoretical religious education should

provide "a space for critical examination of our inner and outer worlds, of the relations of power that exist in religious and secular movements of thought and the way our lives and allegiances are organised" (p.3). Their views could be considered counter hegemonic to the *Toledo Guiding Principles* whereby it recommends "education about religions and beliefs without promoting or denigrating any of them". However, the suggestion of a counter-hegemony may be an overzealous claim. Enabling critical analysis is not akin to promoting or denigrating, however the line between both is fine and requires skilful teaching in order to avoid such accusations. Hurley (2016) contends that working with religious belief can be a "challenging pedagogical situation" (p.211). Religious ideologies may be rigidly held and passionately protected, critique may be very challenging and there may exist a fear to engage. Fear may relate to a possibility of marginalising students, particularly minority students. It may also be related to a fear that opening up difficult conversations might be viewed as against a prevailing or accepted ethos or indeed a hegemonic position. Ambrose (2014) recognises this reticence and fear and suggests "This is a reasonable fear, as unfortunately religious ideology often can suffocate rhetorical communication or avoids rhetorical communication altogether" (Amorose, 2014 cited in Hurley, 2016. p.211). The researcher suggests critical analysis of religious and non-religious world views could be particularly challenging in Post-Primary schools, as adolescence is inclusive of struggles with emotional regulation (Hare, Tottenham, Galvan, Voss, Glover & Casey, 2008). Furthermore, the predominance of one religious group may present further challenges for minorities, particularly in relation to the possibility for othering. Although the value of critical analysis is commendable, the challenges associated with critical analysis of doctrinal religions is inherently fraught with sensitivities and would necessitate substantive training in order to facilitate it at school level. In relation to this research the critical self-reflection element of identity humility could assist teachers by supporting the need to acknowledge when communicating with others, what they are feeling about the other. An awareness of internal conflicts is necessary to ensure a professional approach. Weisse (1996; 2003) agrees that dialogue in RE can lead to conflict but suggests this is normal and students can learn how to work through this and agree to differ. Moreover he acknowledges that not all conflicts are solved. While Donnelly (2004) suggests that without real dialogue which addresses differences, the status quo is maintained. This view aligns with the communication element of identity humility and its potential to have a transformative impact, it also aligns with a radical

constructivist understanding of the need for negative feedback, while also acknowledging Chater and Erricker's (2013) view on the power to change the world through religious education (p.3). In tandem Meehan (2017) suggests RE has much to offer young people in their precarious "spiritual hunger for completeness" (p.150). Chater and Erricker (2013) acknowledgement that religious education is "saturated with power relations" (2013, p. 1) this understanding aligns with Gramsci's theory of hegemony and the power of thought whether liberal, religious, secular, socialist or pluralist to control peoples' actions. The different power claims and the fluidity of the current situation is evident in RE curricular developments, the intention of Community National schools to remove practical RE from within the school day and ETBI statements about shared patronage with Educate Together schools. The next section presents a large scale research study on European students' views on RE.

#### **2.4.8 REDCo (Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries)**

Between 2006 and 2009, the REDCo project (funded by the European Commission) carried out a "European comparative research project on young people's views of religion, religious diversity and possibilities for dialogue, as well as of classroom interaction and teacher-strategies" (Weisse, 2009. p.1). The participants were students in the 14-16 age group from the following eight countries: Germany, England, France, The Netherlands, Norway, Estonia, Russia and Spain. This section presents students opinions on RE and resulting recommendations. The Key findings included acknowledgement of a diversity of beliefs. Schools after families were the main source of knowledge about beliefs. Students appreciated diversity but also expressed prejudiced views. Students were interested in learning about religions in school and wanted more theoretical RE and less practical RE. They valued well-structured, safe discussion and dialogue about religions but wanted to avoid conflict on religious issues. Students showed a tendency to socialise with peers from the same background as themselves, tolerance of diversity was expressed at a "more abstract than a practical level. Moreover, the tolerance expressed in classroom discussion is not always replicated in their daily life-world". Shared education about religious diversity resulted in enhanced tolerance of difference. Religious expression was supported by students in most countries. While religious students tend to respect others religions more than those who do not consider religion important (Weisse, 2009 p.2-3). In light of these findings,

REDCo recommend shared dialogue and active tolerance policies which address stereotyping and teacher competencies as necessary, in order to engage with the diversity of religious and non-religious world views. From an Irish perspective, some of the recommendations may be challenged as RE in Catholic Post-Primary schools traditionally has a practical RE element, which can make participation difficult for non-Catholic students. Research in an Irish context on female students aged 13-15yrs describe a cohort with a respect for the importance of religion, inclusive of religiously unaffiliated students whereas practising, sliding and lapsed Catholic students consider Catholicism as part of their identity. Religious diversity tolerance is reported, however practising Catholic students are less likely than their Scottish peers to be open to having personal relations with those of other faiths (Francis, Byrne, Sweetman and Penney, 2016). In conclusion research suggests that students are interested in RE and benefit from sharing the RE space.

#### **2.4.8 School Ethos**

According to Aristotle ethos includes habits of mind, morals and emotions, while Norman (2003) describes ethos as the characteristic spirit. However, understanding or describing a school ethos is difficult, as Martin (2015) explained that not all Catholic schools are the same, as they have different origins which are linked to religious congregations. Besides all congregations have their own charism, or a way of reading and responding to the Christian message. Many congregations have inclusiveness at the core of their mission statement. Moreover the pillars of identity humility are evident, for example in the charism of the Sisters of St Louis, the ideal of promoting awareness of different perspectives is aligned with reflection and self-awareness and an orientation to the other. Moreover the aim of “experience interconnectedness” is linked with the idea of belonging and a shared space. Likewise, the Sisters of Mercy Statement could be interpreted as focused on reflexivity, a pillar of identity humility. To further understand school ethos, another source of ethos identification was found in an ESRI report on Governance and funding of Second level schools in Ireland. In this report many Principals described their school ethos as a safe environment for all students, all inclusive, holistic and supportive. Principals in Voluntary Secondary schools described the methods used to develop the schools ethos as follows: Daily prayers, Iconography, prayer room, regular liturgy, prayer and retreats. Religious education is a core subject, there is also a Pastoral care system (ESRI, 2013). Research on the operative ethos of

boys' single-sex Catholic schools in Ireland found a competitive and individualistic ethos with an emphasis on academics and sport alongside a gendered curriculum (O'Higgins Norman, 2010, 2008; Boldt, 2000; and O'Keefe, 1998). While in girls' single-sex voluntary secondary schools, Norman (2008) concurs with Lynch and Lodge (1999), finding girls were encouraged to be lady-like, and the level of control was high and the ethos asexual. Lynch and Lodge (1999) also found an emphasis on academic achievement and a gendered curriculum. Moreover Lynch, Grummell & Devine (2012) report schools with a Catholic ethos tended to have conservative cultures dominated by control, discipline and maintenance of the status quo, alongside hierarchical models of power relations. The ETBI website suggests a key characteristic is inclusiveness which is supported by open enrolment policies (<http://www.etbi.ie/>). Research from the University of Limerick reports, "a strong sense of shared values, reflecting an awareness of demographic and cultural change in Ireland with a generalised commitment to civic values enshrined in education and equality legislation", (O'Flaherty, McCormack, Liddy, Liston & O'Grady, 2017, p.28). However a brief examination of individual school websites found an explicit mission or ethos statement was not always prominent or as well developed in ETBI schools when compared to Voluntary Secondary schools websites.

#### **2.4.9 Conclusion**

In defining RE, it is useful to distinguish between practical and theoretical RE. From the perspective of the *Toledo Guiding Principles*, RE is theoretical and not practical. It is noteworthy that the Irish State signed up to the *Toledo Guiding Principles* while the Holy See did not. Hence a situation has developed whereby the State, through the NCCA, has tended to promote theoretical RE while the Catholic Bishops support a faith development approach (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010). From the perspective of this research and the experiences of minority faith and minority belief students, a number of issues arise. In particular their description as 'Other' or in the case of non-religious students' 'worldview', is described as being a challenge in Junior Cycle RE. Moreover, RE which integrates both practical and theoretical RE raises some concerns regarding inclusion of minority belief students. In essence, there is validity in Sullivan's (2017) description of RE as "A space like no other" (p.7).

## **Chapter Three: Theoretical Perspective and Theoretical Framework**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter three explains the theories underpinning this research. The theoretical perspective is identity humility. The theoretical framework includes theories of

hegemony, conformity, othering, agency and identity development. A conclusion draws together the key points.

## **3.2 Theoretical Perspective: Identity humility**

### **3.2.1 Introduction**

Initially a number of cultural competence and cultural humility frameworks were studied, (Leininger and McFarland 2006 ; Chang et al. 2012; Lund & Lee, 2015 ;Frusti et al, 2003: Kardong-Edgren & Campinha-Bacote, 2008; Education II, 2008 ; National Education Association, 2008; Klotz, 2006; Juarez et al, 2006; Fisher-Borne et al, 2015; Hook et al, 2013; Clark et al, 2011). In particular the theories of cultural humility were examined as they have been reported as valuable within caring professions to find workable strategies to identify and best meet the needs of diverse societies, (Dogra, Reitmanova and Carter-Pokras, 2010; Lam, Lam and Yu, 2009; Azad, Power, Dollin and Cherry, 2002; Loudon, Anderson, Gill & Greenfield, 1999; Flores, Gee & Kastner, 2000; Chenowethm, Leon & Burke, 2006). However further reading on the experiences of Jewish students in English Post Primary schools by Moulin (2015), found he used the conceptual framework of ‘Students Multiple Worlds’ to analyse the impact of school experiences on Jewish students construction of their Jewish identity (Phelan, Yu & Davidson, 1994. p.418). A multiple Worlds framework is based on the concept of three distinct Worlds, namely family, peer group and school, within which adolescents have to negotiate their own identity. Hence the impact and recognition of the importance of school experiences on student’s identity is supported. However, the researcher decided cultural humility theory was more comprehensive than multiple Worlds theory in addressing the multiple factors which impact on student’s identities. Hence elements within cultural humility theory and multiple world theory were used in order to generate a theoretical perspective which could support this research study. In essence, cultural humility theory was reconstructed whereby the concept of culture was replaced by the concept of identity, as a more useful and appropriate focus. Culture is defined as follows:

“Culture is understood as everything that a society or group creates, accomplishes or elaborates, and especially to patterns of meaning – constitution that are not simply ephemeral. At its core are the interrelated

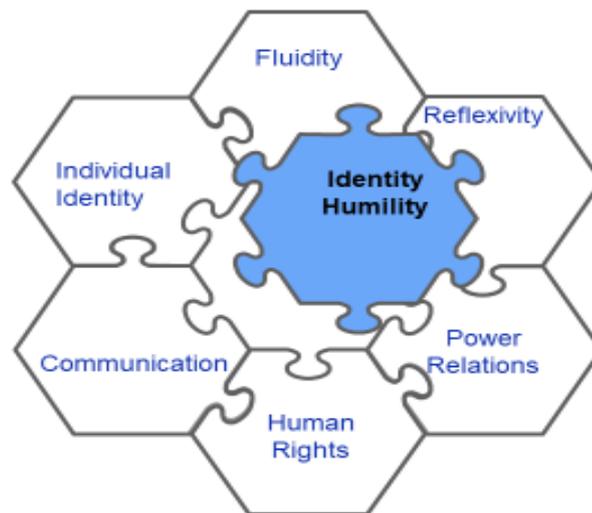
cognitive, normative and linguistic systems, the “world-view”, including centrally the society’s or group’s image of itself in the world (in relation to the other)... it is stabilised and sedimented in structures, habits, rituals, language, images and artefacts” (Figueroa, 1999, p.284).

While Carter (1954) describes culture as something beyond the individual and different from society (p.200), Kroeber and Kluckholm (1952) describe culture as patterns of acquired behaviour, this definition links with the concepts of hegemony as both promote a distinct worldview. In relation to education and relevant to this research study, both Kavanagh (2013) and Granville (2004) report that the NCCA operates within a subject centred culture of compromise, pragmatism and conformity which restricts substantive change. Hence this culture may be problematic as both Figueroa (1999) and Baumann (1999), suggest that culture is fluid. Furthermore Baumann (1999), posits an increasing globalisation of culture, which it is reasonable to suggest results in substantive change. It is important to this research study to highlight the fact that culture is a group term. The researcher questions the use of a group term when cultural humility theories propose an individual focus. Moreover the usefulness of the term culture in today’s multi-cultural communities is problematic. Interfaith and inter-ethnic marriages, result in children’s cultures becoming increasingly difficult to define or ring fence. Moreover, incongruity may be problematic when describing an individual’s culture, for example, some may view being lesbian as incongruous with a Muslim culture, yet being Muslim and lesbian maybe part of a person’s identity. Modood (2007), agrees that in post-immigration societies like Britain, cultural practises adapt or decline and he agrees identity maybe more useful. Identity is defined as the “characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is” (Oxford English Dictionary online, 2017). The researcher understands this maybe a more useful focus and wording. Identity in this case, is understood as a personal rather than a group phenomenon, hence essentialism is avoided. Identity also accommodates more easily Baumann, (1999) concept of “cross-cutting cleavages” (p.141). For example in an Irish Catholic Post Primary school a student maybe part of a majority Catholic culture, but may also affiliate with a minority Polish culture. Another relevant point is the association of cultural humility with human dignity and human rights, both of which belong to humans or individuals rather than to organisations. Furthermore, in alignment

with a constructivist epistemology, whereby it is understood individuals “construct meaning in different ways even in relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 1998 p.9), the concept of identity is again more useful in addressing the complexities of understandings which enable empathy and understanding between people. The researcher posits, that the concept of culture or grouping may tend toward an oversimplification in a complex, challenging and evolving space. On a different note but also relevant, the researcher is aware of the newly emerged importance people place on developing their identity via online media. While, Burger (2015) states “some of these forms are noisy and narcissistic, they are meaningful to the individual who creates them. While public self-expression affords the ordinary person the power to (re-)imagine the self in the wake of the many changes the world faces due to globalisation and hegemonic power relations” (p.264). The increasing importance of “identity creation or engagement with self by ordinary people” and particularly adolescents supports a focus on identity rather than culture (Burger, 2015, p.282). In similar vein the understanding of the globalising effect of social media on adolescents’ identities, means possible identities are increasingly diverse. In consideration of the above, it is posited that the concept of identity is more appropriate and useful than the concept of culture. However, it is only fair to acknowledge that cultural humility theories address the issues of stereotyping and the importance of an individual focus, hence the researcher suggests the change from cultural humility to identity humility maybe a matter of language rather than content in relation to some core elements. Yet the importance of language and words alone makes it a worthwhile and necessary change. In relation to the importance of language at this juncture it is necessary to draw attention to the different meanings attached to the word humility; it is derived from the latin word *humilitas* meaning from the earth or grounded (Merriam – Webster, 2017). In a religious context it can mean a recognition of self in relation to God or deities, and submission to said deity as a member of that religion (Herbermann, 1910 ; Herzog, 1860). In more general terms and in relation to this research, humility is understood as self-restraint from excessive vanity, inclusive of a moral and/or ethical dimensions (Peterson, 2004). To clarify, for the purposes of this research identity humility is understood, as a capacity to have and show empathy for all people, essential elements include critical self- reflection and good communication, it is understood to be a fluid process whereby both individuals and institutions are accountable for promoting human rights. The next section examines the core elements of an identity humility perspective,

as used to guide this research. The elements are also central to cultural humility theories but are adjusted to posit identity in favor of culture. The six core elements of identity humility employed in this research are Individual Identity, Fluidity, Communication, Human Rights, Power Relations and Reflexivity. They are represented in the following figure in the shape of a jigsaw, which represents the fact that all elements are interlinked and important.

**Figure 1: Core Elements of Identity Humility**



### **3.2.2 Individual Identity**

Both identity humility and cultural humility supports an individual focus rather than a cultural focus as necessary, in order to respect the beliefs, uniqueness, individuality and human dignity of every person and avoid stereotyping (Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, 2015; Tervalon & Murray Garcia, 1998). There is an understanding that no culture or belief is monolithic and knowable (Gerdien et al, 2007; Ismail, 2004 & Cesari & McLoughlin, 2005). Noddings (2008) and Dennett (2006) suggest it is impossible to truly understand a person's belief system. Likewise, a number of researchers report the rise of individualism and eclecticism around spirituality among young people (Wright, 2004; Crawford and Rossiter 1996; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; De Souza, Cartwright, McGlip 2004 & Tacey, 2003). Further justification for a focus on a persons' individual identity rather than culture is supported by research which criticised some cultural competence models, for inadvertently promoting religious and racial

stereotypes (Betancourt, 2003, 2004; Dunn, 2002). It is noteworthy that within the Irish school system, Carr (2016), identified stereotyping of Muslim students as an issue, hence every effort was made to avoid inadvertently stereotyping any participant. Moreover theories of identity development established the uniqueness of students' religion or world view as an important part of their identity (Blewitt & Broderick, 1999). While Bhabha (1994), reports education needs to acknowledge the complexity and hybridity within a person and resist stereotyping others. The link between identity humility and theories of adolescent identity development is established, as both address issues of stereotyping and the importance of an individual rather than a group focus. Furthermore both theories are used in this research to analyse the students' experiences, most notably in relation to the theme of personal identity. It is also relevant to acknowledge that an individual focus aligns with a social constructivist epistemology. Social constructivism acknowledges there is a potentially unlimited number of descriptions and interpretations' possible of a phenomenon (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1999). Furthermore, given the context of this research, whereby participants were between 15-19yrs, it is especially important to respect individuality and to accept and understand the often fluid nature of adolescents' identities. The next section addresses the importance of fluidity as an element of identity humility.

### **3.2.3 Fluidity**

The importance of understanding the fluid nature of human identity and how changing cultures and contexts affect that identity is realised in the core element of fluidity. In relation to this research, the fluidity of adolescent's identities is marked by an exploration phase whereby different identities maybe considered and tested (Luyckx, Duriez, Kilmstra, Van Petegem & Beyers, 2011). Just as adolescents are exploring different identities the home, school and peer cultures to which they are part, are also fluid. Bauman (1999) suggests:

Culture is as much about inventing as it is about preserving; about discontinuity as about continuity; about novelty as about transcendence of norm; about unique as much as about the regular; about change as much as about monotony or reproduction; about the unexpected as much as about the predictable (p.xiv).

Irish Post Primary schools are afforded autonomy to manage and create their own ethos or culture, each schools unique culture is fluid, as members of the Board of management, Principals, teachers and students change over time. Also impacting on the fluid nature of schools is societal attitudes to religion which again are fluid and changing, Maher (2009), suggests, “It is difficult to think of any area of Irish society that has changed so dramatically in recent decades as the attitude to organised religion and Roman Catholicism in particular” (p.3). Similarly, it is acknowledged that there is a growing diversity of beliefs and religions in Irish schools among both students and teachers (Devine, 2005; Irwin, 2010). Likewise, Kumashiro (2000) suggests identities are fluid and ever changing, hence challenging educators to acknowledge and “affirm differences while tailoring their teaching to individual students” needs (p.28). Identity humility and cultural humility theories agree with Kumashiro and support change is addressed by a process which is knowledge seeking, individualised, ongoing and fluid, (Crigger, Brannigan, Baird, 2006). The researcher posits that identity humility theory necessities teachers are educated to understand and support students during identity exploration and to empathise with identities different to their own. However, it is not considered possible to know and become competent in understanding all beliefs, identities or cultures (Tervalon and Murray-Garcia 1998). The difficulty attributed to competence leads on to another core element of identity humility, which is the need for sustained communication.

### **3.2.4 Communication**

Humility requires continual engagement with individuals to listen to their stories and agree workable strategies in order to support the best possible educational provision. Personal humility and dialogue replace an attempt at competence. Gatens and Lloyd (1999), report the need for all institutions to continually engage in dialogue especially with those on the periphery. Moreover, Gatens and Lloyd (1999) argue that transformation can result when we communicate with others “the development of reason, and the creation of a reasonable citizen, depends on our exchanges with others, and on our ability to become something other than what we were, through the collective endeavour to understand something we did not understand before” (p.127). Likewise, Fielding (2004) supports the benefits and transformative potential of reciprocal dialogue, “The strength of dialogue is in its mutuality. Its transformative potential lies in its reciprocity because it is in these kinds of person –centred arrangements that trust and

creativity are most likely to grow” (p.208). However, in the context of Irish education, Long (2008), describes a “malaise” or inaction in relation to addressing cultural issues, hence the status quo perpetuates. He describes a “culture of noise”; whereby there is a lot of talk without listening or action (p.132). Another obstacle to good communication is a language and knowledge barrier, it may be particularly challenging for recently arrived parents and students who have limited English and/or knowledge of the Irish education system to engage in meaningful conversations. Gramsci’s theory of hegemony also describes the concept of “fatalism” whereby minority groups or those on the margins, decide not to engage in dialogue as they consider their input as worthless or valueless (Gramsci, 1995 p.324). While Irwin (2010) and Dunne (1991) report non –Catholic teachers and students remain silent about their religious difference. However, Jani, Pierce, Ortiz, and Sowbel (2011), suggest it is essential that people get involved and act to prevent inequalities persisting “without this element the default positions on practice that inadvertently reinforce the status quo’ are unchallenged and the process of cultural humility is hampered” (p. 296). In an Irish context, religious educators Byrne and Kiernan (2013) also support the need for dialogue between all education stakeholders. While Gash (2016), supports the need for humility in relation to religious and belief differences, while explaining the link with personal identity, “negotiating between different strongly held views requires that each different view can appreciate the other view sufficiently for the two different views to co-exist. The violence expressed towards the Other in each rival covers the fear that the Self will cease to exist” (p.184).

On a different note, in relation to the choice of methodology for this research, the decision made to interview students and the use of semi-structured interviews, aligns with the communication element of humility. Alternative methods including document analysis, teacher or parent interviews or a quantitative methodology were considered but it was decided to listen to the students’ individual stories. Giving voice to students’ stories also forges a link with the human rights element of identity humility.

### **3.2.5 Human Rights**

The protection and advancement of human rights is a core element of identity humility theory. Article one of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states; “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood,”

(UDHR, 1948). Dinstein (1976) explains the United Nations declaration correspond with Aristotle's concept of "natural justice" or the inherent rights of human beings. In relation to this research study, the pertinent human right is the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. According to article 18 of the UNDHR (1948) and supported by Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1976), "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance". Vatican II also supported religious freedom in its declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965). However it is noteworthy that article 18 has not gained Universal acceptance, for example apostasy carries a death sentence in 13 countries (Dinstein, 1976); International Humanist and Ethical Union, 2012). Hence the relevance to this research is the understanding that individuals have a right to teach about their religion but also a right to freedom from religion. In essence, Irish Catholic Post Primary schools have a right to teach Catholicism but minority faith and minority worldview students have an equal right to freedom from this teaching. This understanding leads on to an examination of the concepts of individual and collective human rights. According to Buchanan (1993) "individual rights "are ascribed to individuals, who can, in principle, wield the right—that is, exercise the right...or invoke it to make a claim...or waive...— independently, in her own name, or her own authority" (p.44). However collective rights are more difficult to define. Freeman (1995), suggests collective human rights are rights the bearers of which are collectivities, which are not reducible to, but are consistent with individual human rights" (p.38). However difficulties arise in what constitutes collectivities. In relation to this research the difficulty with defining collectivities is pertinent, as defining a minority worldview such as a non-religious world view is problematic. Despite this difficulty, the need for the recognition and protection of collective human rights is supported by The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992). The declaration offers guidance to help States to manage diversity and ensure non-discrimination, and to aid minorities to achieve equality and participation. This is particularly important in States which have hegemonic control. Freeman (1995), makes an interesting observation regarding the challenges associated with addressing both collective and individual human rights. He suggests the creation of a 'third space' in which the value of both

individual autonomy and collective solidarity can be recognised and has the potential to advance policies to reconcile justice and peace (Freeman, 1995 p.40). Freeman's observation aligns with the theory of identity humility theory, as both support the development of solutions for a diversity of rights. While, Jovanovic (2010) and Buchanan (1995) both report that collective rights may prevail over human rights in order to balance conflicting interests of the collective. While Badger (2011) concurs by reporting that current practice tends to defer to the needs of the indigenous group (p.514). Jabareen (2015), further explains that the State must implement special measures in order to protect "minority groups' unique and often fragile identity and interests". Regarding this research it is fair to say the State has enacted special measures most notably the Equal Status Act (2000-2015) section 7.3(c) and the Employment Equality Act (1998-2015) section 37, which protect the majority Catholic population rather than minority faith or worldview groups in the Irish state funded education. Hence minorities' identities remain fragile within Irish education. However, it is important to acknowledge that any patron can apply to the State to establish a school, and Educate Together has made numerous successful application in recent years. However, for some minority faith groups this is not a workable option as their numbers are too few. It is noteworthy, that within an Irish educational context, a human rights agenda is theoretically supported by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment NCCA. The NCCA (2006) guidelines on Intercultural education state; "It is education which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination and promotes the values upon which equality is built" (p.1). Likewise the Teaching Council, more recently developed four core values of the teaching profession, namely; respect, care, integrity and trust. Respect is articulated as teachers upholding human dignity and promoting equality and value for diversity, social justice and freedom. Care necessitates empathy in practice. Integrity encapsulates honesty, reliability and moral action. Trust embodies fairness, openness and honesty, (Teaching Council 2012). It is clear that both the Teaching council and NCCA prescribed values equate with a human rights agenda. Hence the use of identity humility as the theoretical perspective for this research is theoretically relevant and professionally prescribed.

### **3.2.6 Power relations**

An essential element of identity humility is addressing power relations which impact on an individuals' identity. Drawing on the understandings of power relations described by

Gramsci, Bourdieu and Foucault it is essential to acknowledge existing power relations which impact on the experiences of individuals in society and to address any imbalance or inequalities which impact on human rights. It is understood that this can be a difficult undertaking as Gramsci suggests, hegemony promotes one worldview which leads to inherent inequalities for those not sharing that world view. Similarly, Bourdieu theory of power and privilege describes how those who follow ascribed doxa are privileged with cultural capital while others are disadvantaged. While Foucault explains that those who are socialised within a hegemony may find it difficult to recognise how the norms of the dominant world view affect the human rights of others (Foucault, 1991; Bourdieu, 1980). All three understandings of power relations support maintenance of the status quo, hence addressing inherent inequalities is problematic.

Another challenge is identified by Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, (2015 p.174), who suggest a linkage between “individual accountability and institutional accountability, which need to work in concert with one another in order to incite long-term change”. The interconnectedness of both is of particular relevance in Irish Post Primary schools, as teachers, parents and students ability to challenge inequality is affected by some institutional practices, indeed current legislation most notably the Equal status Act (2000-2011)(section (7)(3)(C) and the Employment Equality Act (1998-2011) (section37(1), may mitigate against teachers, parents and students in denominational schools from challenging Catholic centric practices which can lead to systemic inequalities and denial of minorities human rights. For example, teachers and Principals may feel giving admission preference to Catholic students over non-Catholic students is unfair but may feel unable to challenge this as the legal system supports the practice. Likewise Irwin (2010) and Dunne (1991) suggest “an exile, silence or cunning” among teachers regarding religious issues in schools (p.45). Hayward (1998) understanding of power, is helpful in this case whereby it is understood teachers, parents and students capacity to counteract inequalities is constrained by an everyday social order with inherent boundaries. Boundaries include people’s abilities to recognise the social boundaries and their ability to change these boundaries (Hayward 1998). Despite inherent boundaries, counter hegemonies or challenges are evident. For example Carr, (2016); Mawhinney, (2012), and lobby groups namely Education Equality and Equate are trying to reshape current socially constructed and legally supported boundaries in relation to school admission policies. Carr (2016), suggests

“Ireland’s education system is effectively segregationist because of its “hugely problematic” enrolment policy”. Likewise, European human rights commissioner Nils Muiznieks recently criticised the Irish Government with regard to religious discrimination in schools particularly in relation to section (7)(3)(C) of the Equal Status Act (Phelan, 2017). Hence it is argued that within Irish Post Primary schools there exist structural inequalities due to the establishment of the patronage model which gave power to mostly religious patrons to manage schools which has resulted in the privileging of co-religionist students and teachers (Mawhinney, 2012). Moreover minority faith and minority worldview students may be vulnerable to misrecognition (Irwin, 2010). The capacity to challenge truth claims is exasperated by the fact that a large majority of students and teachers are Catholic. Hence the status quo whereby traditional Catholic practices are engrained in the school ethos has resulted in unequal provision for non-Catholic students’ (EQUATE, 2017; Education Equality, 2017; Mawhinney 2012; Phelan 2012; Devine, 2012; Devine, Kenny, & Macneela, 2008; Irwin 2010).

The status quo and the inequalities are further secured as individuals who recognise educational inequalities, particularly those who work within hegemonies, may find it personally challenged if they address these inequalities. Norman (2008) found that teachers felt they were not free to engage in any dialogue on the issue of homosexuality as it might result in them been accused of not supporting the Catholic ethos of the school. Gorski, (2008) suggests, if one challenges hegemony and hierarchy by speaking the truth about inequalities, ones risks being disliked. The impact on a person of being disliked should not be underestimated. This consequence is evident most recently in the treatment of whistle blower, Garda Maurice McCabe, who suffered sustained character denigration by his superiors, in response to his raising concerns regarding senior Gardaí quashing penalty points (Gleeson, 2017). Likewise, suffragettes like Emmeline Pankhurst, Equality advocates for example Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela all suffered from being disliked by those invested in upholding hegemonies. Likewise, the Murphy Report (2009 cited in Littleton and Maher 2010), found outspoken victims of clerical sexual abuse, suffered denial and arrogance. In analysis of the above, the researcher suggests there exists a link between humility and been disliked. In essence humility requires a lack of vanity or ego which enables an acceptance of been disliked when pursuing an equality agenda which necessitates

questioning a hegemony. The researcher acknowledges there may be consequences for those who challenge hegemonic practices, inclusive of; been disliked, silenced, denigrated or worse. Hence it is acknowledged that it is often very difficult to challenge inequalities. However, Gorski (2008) reports, “If my educational practice is not seen by the powerful as threatening to their dominance, as terrifying to their sense of entitlement and control, then I am not an intercultural educator” (p.524). Gorski (2008), tone is challenging and could be considered anarchistic, it is argued this tone could deny acknowledgement of the complexity of any given hegemony. Hegemonies exist by making concessions and are multi-faceted and fluid. Moreover, his position is binary in nature and hence could be accused of lacking humility. In relation to this research the inherent human rights and social justice agenda of the Catholic Church is acknowledged, canon law prescribes that “The Christian faithful are also obliged to promote social justice” (Canon Law, 222§2 2017). For example; Edmund Rice, established schools which challenged educational disadvantage of the poor. Moreover, Vatican II and liberation theology place a social justice agenda at the core of Catholicism. Moreover, religious freedom is clearly articulated in *Dignitatis Humanae*. There are many examples of the Catholic Church promoting human rights and social justice, for example Fr. Peter McVerry, is a relentless homelessness advocate, Archbishop Romero, was murdered in San Salvador for his activism for human rights. It is also acknowledged that those in powerful positions may themselves be constrained by the hegemony. Hence, a binary view is rejected and central to the researchers philosophical conviction, is a belief that humility, human agency and the elasticity of interpretations of dogma, alongside a shared will for religious freedom can result in an education system which cherishes all children equally. In tandem with this, it is understood that a myriad of factors, including limited resources need to be highlighted in addressing inequalities. Furthermore, highlighting inequalities in order to address misrecognition may be a sufficiently powerful accelerator of change. In essence communication and leveraging may be required rather than attack. In summation within the Irish Education space, fault lines appear between legal, departmental, religious school ethos, human rights and societal diversity accountabilities. Teachers are positioned in a fluid and at times contradictory space, which may perpetuate confusion, silence and maintenance of the status quo. The next section examines the core element named reflexivity.

### **3.2.7 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is understood as the development of an awareness of ones' own feelings and how these feelings impact on our relations with others. Reflexive practice necessitates we take into account any stereotypes, opinions "assumptions and preconceptions" about people and acknowledge that as human beings "none of us are detached, objective observers". Our opinions and understandings are impacted on by our life experiences "our own patterns of thought and behaviour, our personal values, political leanings, culture, ethnicity, religion, age, gender and the job we do". Most important is the acceptance that our opinions affect how we relate to others (cxpartners, 2015 p.1). The challenge is to address the validity of our opinions and understand the need to engage and be open to new learning. Similarly, identity humility posit the need for on-going critical self- reflection. In relation to this research, the researcher posits there is a need for both external and internal reflexivity. External reflexivity addresses institutional practices, Dunn, (2002) explains, there is a need to recognise that among a dominant culture's 'deeply ingrained values are those that perpetuate separation and discrimination' (p. 107). While internal reflexivity constantly challenges how we view and relate to others. Researcher reflexivity is addressed in more detail in the methodology chapter. It is understood that educators who are theory driven regarding cultural differences tend to support and maintain the dominant hegemony (Nuttman-Schwartz, 2017; Nadan & Ben-Ari, 2012; Lum, 1996). Hence this research thesis studied theories but also the student experience by engaging in personal one to one communication with minority students. The researcher posits the following research question; could identity humility theory and practices support a plurality of beliefs in Catholic schools and avoid a segregationist policy?

## **3.3 Theoretical framework**

### **3.3.1 Introduction: Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony**

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian philosopher, politician and neo-Marxist theorist, who lived from 1891-1937. He was a founder of the Italian Communist party and was imprisoned in 1926 by Mussolini's Fascist party. While in prison he wrote his now renowned Prison Notebooks (Hoar & Smith, 1980). His writings on cultural hegemony are described in this section. Key concepts within hegemony theory are explained and their relevance to Irish education and culture are explored. Moreover concepts from

cultural hegemony theory are employed in the analysis of the student's data. Concepts include normal and common sense values, privileges, hidden curriculum, allegiances, concessions, unconscious control, counter hegemonies and fluidity.

### **3.3.2 Hegemony**

Gramsci described hegemony as how groups or individuals can maintain their dominance over other groups of individuals in a society via persuasion rather than violence (Gramsci, 1971; Simon, 2015). The dominant group asserts their worldview and people willingly comply regardless of their own worldview. He named the dominant group as the bourgeois and the dominated group as the subordinate or working class. Lears (1985; 1988) and Ratner (2013) suggest hegemony maintains a social order which enables countries to function. While central to Gramsci theory, is the power of thought. Gramsci understood that controlling people's ideas is the greatest form of power or authority, enabling an often small minority to subjugate a large majority (Simon, 2015). Power lies in getting others to believe in a given ideology and the creation of a status quo which all protect. The subordinate group are convinced to accept, adopt, and internalise the dominant group's definition of what is normal and what is "common sense", (Kumashiro, 2004; Heywood, 1994). Leaders establish the universalising of the bourgeois groups interests, as the interests of society as a whole and as common sense values (Heywood, 1994). Gramsci challenged the idea of "Common sense" as opposed to "Good sense" and explains there is a struggle between "Common sense" and "Good sense". "Common sense" is characterised by traditional intellectuals and includes bourgeois cultural values, popular culture, folklore and religious ideas. "Good sense" is developed by organic intellectuals and is more rational and corresponds more closely to the real needs of a society (Buroway, 2001. pp.326, 328, 346). In tandem with Gramscis' understanding of hegemony and good sense is Martin Luther King, Jr understanding;

"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice" (King, 1963. "Letter from Birmingham Jail,")

In essence inequalities in society prevail because people find addressing change difficult and prefer to go with the status quo rather than creating unease or friction. Apple (2001), explains most accept and agree to inculcate and maintain hegemony. While Gramsci maintained in order for “Good Sense” to prevail there is a need not only to socialise the means of production but also to promote the formation of the “Unitarian human” (Hobsbawm, 2011; Balampeka & Floriotis, 2012 p.291). Unitarianism is understood as a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, it has no creed but believes sources of spirituality are unbounded. Truth is drawn from world religion scriptures, science, nature, philosophy, personal experience and ancient traditions (Unitarian Universalist Association, 2017). Gramsci extended his concept of the Unitarian human to education. Gramsci supported the inclusion of learning about all world religions and believed truth could be found within all religious beliefs, this view is in agreement with the Toledo Guiding Principles (OIDHR, 2007). In the context of Irish education, although schools have evolved from a Monastic origin, today’s Catholic schools support a broad curriculum which weakens an argument that Catholic education is a hegemony. However the emphasis on Catholicism in RE and an integrated curriculum alongside a lack of education on philosophy, ethics and world religions could also be argued as supportive of a Catholic hegemony.

### **3.3.3 Hegemony and Privilege**

Hegemony can be understood from the perspective of privilege which McIntosh (1998) describes as “unpacking privilege” (p.33). From this angle, it is important to list the taken for granted privileges accepted by those who are not marginalised by hegemony. This list can then be used to explain and address issues caused by difference (Tooms, 2008). In an Irish Catholic Post Primary school context the list of privileges afforded to Catholic students include:

- Regular celebrations of my Faith
- Endorsements of my Catholic faith with Catholic Iconography predominant.
- Catholic Patronage
- School holidays which coincide with Catholic religious festivals
- Priority for school admission over Non- Catholic students
- Religious Education Programme consistent with my Beliefs

The above list is based on issues arising from the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in 2012 (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather 2012). This angle aligns with Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital whereby some are privileged because they belong and fit in with a habitus while others are unequally supported. According to Navaro (2008); Gaventa, (2003), education can play an important role in the process of socialisation into a habitus and has the capacity to increase a person's cultural capital but also to recreate inequalities. According to Young (2001), hegemonies allow certain groups benefit from 'differential power, material and cultural resources and authoritative voice' (ibid, p.108). Moreover Young (2001) suggests some are privileged while others are "misunderstood, devalued, or reconstructed to fit dominant paradigms," (p.71). Similarly, O'Donnell (2014) reports, "hegemonies tend to obscure the way in which norms viewed as impartial are often in fact biased" (p.71).

### **3.3.4 Normalisation of Hegemony**

To normalise and embed a given hegemony, Hirschfeld, (2010), posits that many different agencies in society are needed to support it, for example schools, media, universities, religious institutions, health care and politics (Apple, 2001). In relation to this thesis it is argued that in Ireland, Catholicism exerts its influence through many agencies. In education the majority of Post-Primary schools are part of the free education scheme and are de facto Catholic catering for a mainly Catholic student population (ESRI 2013a, Central Statistics Office 2016; Catholic Schools Partnership 2014). While teacher training institutions have traditionally been supported by mainly Catholic patrons. The homogeneity of schools is mirrored by teachers, as a recent survey from the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) found 95% of Post Primary student teachers were white Irish (Keane & Heinz 2015). Similarly, Devine (2005) reports "members of the teaching profession tend to be white, Catholic and sedentary, and therefore very much embedded in the life world of the dominant ethnic group in Irish society" (p.53). Other agencies which support a normalisation of Catholic practice include the National broadcasting authority RTE, who broadcast the Angelus on both radio and television at 6pm each evening. Similarly, the Dáil starts each day with a Catholic prayer (Gallagher, 2017). While the President of Ireland may only be inaugurated to office by taking an oath inspired by the Catholic faith, inclusive of asking for God's guidance (Citizens Advice Information, 2017). Furthermore, Gramsci, suggests hegemony is supported by a dominant cultures language, which is shaped and

constructed by social interactions and loaded with cultural meanings which condition us to think in a certain way. Frequently used and embedded phrases in an Irish context include; “Thank God” “oh my God”, “for God’s sake” or “God bless”. Likewise school and place names may affirm and embed a hegemony as normal, for example school names include; St. Marys, Loreto College, St. Patricks or Mary Immaculate College. Moreover, school names for example Colaiste Eamann Ris or Colaiste Iognaid embed Irishness and Catholicism as normal. Likewise, Catholic orientated place names include, Abbey Street, St. James’s Street and Patrick Street. Another important mode of developing and maintaining a hegemony is by means of forming allegiances, which is explored in the next section.

### **3.3.5 Allegiances**

The dominant group realise that in order to maintain power it is necessary to make allegiances and concessions to other groups to gain support and universalise bourgeois interests (Litowitz, 2000; Jackson 1985). Torres (1992) further explains that Governments cannot rule by force and must rely on ideological hegemony to legitimise their rule as ‘given’ or natural. This ideological support is considered necessary to reinforce a social discipline to keep the subordinate classes in their place. In the context of Irish education, Catholic patronage is supported by the State as evidenced by Article 42.2 of the Constitution of Ireland. Glendenning, (2012), described Irish education as a Church-State cooperative. While Gramsci’s writings on hegemony, describe a situation where a dominant group in this instance the Catholic Church dominates all others regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender or class. People willingly comply with the dominant “Weltanschauung” or “world view”, in schools, teachers and students may passively comply with the rules of the dominant group. Moreover in voluntary secondary schools compliance is further secured by a fear of exclusion if the schools ethos / habitus is not followed due to the implications of the State supported Employment Equality Act (1998-2011) (section37(1) and the Equal status Act (2000-2011)(section (7)(3)(C). Hence the allegiance between church and state support a Catholic hegemony and status quo in schools, while all its attendant inequalities, oppressions and disaffections are accepted and maintained as the norm (Litowitz, 2000 :Young 2001). In practice, a Catholic habitus or ethos is perpetuated, supported and instilled by Catholic centric practices for example, Catholic centric prayers and services, retreats and graduation ceremonies. Moreover, Catholic iconography, school

crests, celebrations, and school holidays lend further normalisation of a Catholic habitus. In reality, a strong cultural tradition of Catholicism supports a Catholic centric school habitus as normal and legitimate (Litwitz, 2000).

### **3.3.6 Concessions**

Alongside making allegiances, making concessions is also considered necessary to maintain a hegemony. Hall (1986) affirmed that within the realm of education, the state does not preserve the hegemony and privileging of the bourgeois class through domination or conspiracy. Rather, alliances and the symbiotic nature of hegemony is maintained by on-going negotiations with oppositional voices, whereby concessions are granted to secure subordination and compliance. Examples from an Irish education realm, include the acceptance of minority faith and minority world view students into Catholic schools. The State provision of funding for Educate Together and Minority Faith schools. Recently, the Catholic Church made concessions to the State by accepting changes to the Employment Equality act, which will end legal discrimination against LGBTQI teachers in Irish Voluntary Catholic schools. From a historical perspective, the Roman Catholic Church had concerns regarding the Vocational Education Act (1930). However, resulting from Church State negotiations and concessions a symbiotic way forward resulted. Another example of concessions is the RE syllabus which is a result of safe concessions made by the Catholic church with the NCCA. However, increasing, multiculturalism has resulted in growing tensions within Irish education, the following section explains how hegemonies may deal with multicultural challenges.

### **3.3.7 Multiculturalism and Concessions**

Jay (2003) uses Gramsci's theory of hegemony to explain how schools perpetuate a hegemony and status quo by preventing attempts at multi-cultural education to transform practice, this is achieved by allowing certain concessions but not those that could challenge the hegemony. As Gramsci (1971), reported it is important that the bourgeois class acknowledge the needs and challenges of the subordinate group, however this does not equate with provision of needs but rather a deflection of challenges (Gramsci 1971). Jay,(2003); Storey, (1998) explains challenges are addressed by leaders appearing to be supportive of "oppositional voices" and multiculturalism, while they negotiate and allow concessions which in reality protect

or enhance the hegemony (p.128). Hence proponents of multiculturalism are channeled into ‘safe harbours’, by granting certain concessions only (Jay, 2003 p.6). Negotiations and concessions keep “oppositional voices“ at bay while steering them away from radical action which would enact substantive change hence the status quo is maintained, (Storey, 1998, p.128 & Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Examples of concessions in Irish Post Primary schools include intercultural days, acknowledgement of religious festivals, multi- faith posters or art work displays and curriculum add on, however such celebratory tokenism and exoticism can promote hegemony as normal and further create the image of other (Gorski, 2008). Similarly, research from an Irish perspective on Intercultural Education, found a predominance of weaker models of Intercultural education, albeit with some elements of critical multiculturalism also evident, it was advanced that a re-conceptualisation of intercultural education is necessary, based on principles of democracy, critical consciousness and equity , in order to transform the system, (Kavanagh, 2013, p.ii). Furthermore, research in Irish schools found “teachers frequently misrepresent minority groups’ cultures and cultural identities and reinforce negative stereotypes” (Byran, 2008; Devine, 2009, 2011). In addition to difficulties regarding intercultural education, other hidden practices may be at play which also implicitly support hegemony, the next section will explore the concept of a hidden curriculum.

### **3.3.8 The Hidden Curriculum**

The hidden curriculum plays a role in supporting hegemonic practice. Margolis (2001) describes the hidden curriculum “as the conscious and unconscious socialisation of students through the norms, values, and belief systems embedded in the curriculum, the school, and classroom life, imparted to students through daily routines, curricular content, and social relationships” (p. 6). This aligns with the concept of an integrated religious curriculum as supported by Catholic schools. O’Donnell (2014) explains the implications of a State supported religious based patronage and the consequences for non-co-religionist students. “This means that if a child is a student in this school it may seek to form the faith of the child” (p.4). In essence the non-Catholic child is socialised into the dominant Catholic ideology, through the practice of an integrated or hidden curriculum. Mawhinney (2014), explains an integrated religious ethos in Voluntary Catholic schools ”raises grave concerns around the protection of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion in Irish schools” (p.1). Another mode of maintaining a

hegemony is described by Apple (1990), as teaching acquiescence, “a powerful hidden curriculum is advanced in schools, whereby students are taught consensus, or acceptance, or “happy cooperation” is good for society“, (p.93). Hence the need for conflict as a natural social force is not taught and schools maintain the status quo. This is akin to Martin Luther Kings’ letter from prison which also supported people prefer a negative peace to justice. Research by Lynch, Grummell and Devine (2012), reports “Irish students were trained to be intellectually acquiescent, especially in relation to social structures and institutions”. It is also noteworthy that girls in particular are socialised to be acquiescent, relational, and obedient, which then manifests itself with women being more open to religion than men (Zuckerman, 2014; Suziedalis & Potvin, 1981; Walter & Davie, 1998). However the researcher suggests a sort of dissonance is evidenced in Irish education whereby students on the one hand are taught to view the leaders of 1916 as revolutionary heroes’, fighting for freedom from oppression, on the other hand, deference to Catholic Institutions is also incalculated. Hence, rebellion against power is differentially legitimised. Gramsci (1973) recommends students’ need to be educated about power and privilege, the super structure and the politics that maintain power. In tandem with Gramsci, Kavanagh (2013) reports Irish students need to be provided, “with opportunities to explore the political nature of the world, most specifically the issues of power and privilege”, (p.322). It is reasonable to suggest that without this knowledge students are less likely to recognise inequalities. While Nieto (2000) suggests, the hidden curriculum needs to be addressed in order to allow transformative social justice for minorities. Blumenfeld (2009) further explains the possible implications for children who are non- Catholic, he suggests the dominant group in this case the Catholic church unconsciously uses dominant social values to justify and rationalise social oppression, without realising how they are privileged because of their own social identity. This leads onto another concept within hegemony theory.

### **3.3.9 Unconscious control / Misrecognition**

Unconscious control or misrecognition can be explained as an unthinking acceptance of inequalities as a norm (Navarro, 2006, Gramsci, 1971). Tooms, Lugg and Bogotch (2010) explain that those experiencing hegemony are mostly unaware of it, because messages of what is normal infiltrate their thoughts through iconography, language, habitus and cultural structures which are controlled by the dominant group. Likewise

Irwin (2010) uses the phrases of misrecognition, non-recognition or patronising recognition to describe how the non-Catholic child or parent may be treated in schools with a religious ethos. Moreover he reports it can cause harm. While Taylor (1994) suggests, misrecognition can be considered “a form of oppression, thus imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being” (p. 25). Hence, misrecognition is troubling as it may cause the othering of a child and negatively impact on their identity development. In tandem with the idea of misrecognition is Gramsci’s belief that we accept the inherent inequalities in societal structures as we feel we cannot change them. In relation to this research, non-co-religionist students may feel they cannot change the system as they feel they do not belong to the dominant group. O’Donnell (2014) reports “some people feel that their voice will not be welcomed or heard because they sense (or know) that they do not fit the ‘dominant norm’ (p.7). Gramsci further explains the situation for minorities by using the term fatalism which he explains as follows: "fatalism is nothing other than the clothing worn by real and active will when in a weak position" (Gramsci, 1995 p.337). Furthermore, Toure (2011) explains that those at the margins of a hegemony may find it challenging to find social alternatives or to understand why they are marginalised hence finding a solution for their unease is difficult, it is noteworthy and relevant to this research to acknowledge that children may find it particularly difficult to understand misrecognition or a sense of other. While Jackson (1985), reports a struggle “between approbation, apathy, resistance and resignation” (p.570). However, Habermas (2006 cited in Irwin 2010) reports difficulties may be overcome by communication and addressing power relations which he explains as a “network of relationships of reciprocal recognition’ (p.204). Habermas’ view aligns closely with both the communication and power relations elements of identity humility.

Relevant to this research as it is focused on young people and schooling, is the Gramscian understanding that religious hegemony tends to present one world view when a person is young. Religious ideals and values are taught to children, hence children are socialised into the culture’s way of seeing and believing, alternative ways of envisioning reality may be very hard to imagine, thus hegemony is maintained. Furthermore, if a hegemony is historically embedded and culturally cemented as normal, it may become so engrained in participants’ minds that its’ perpetuation may no longer be “consciously controlled”, (Gramsci, 1971). The unconscious control

described by Gramsci is also acknowledged in the theory of identity humility and cultural humility, whereby it is understood there is a need for reflexivity or critical self-reflection (Fisher Borne, Cain & Montana 2015). Hence, Principals, Boards of Management and teachers must reflect and acknowledge school practices which privilege Catholic students rather than unconsciously supporting attitudes and practices which discriminate and marginalise non-Catholic students (Dunn, 2002). Likewise Lane (2016), acknowledges the need to consider how the past may perpetuate inequalities at present and into the future unless they are both recognised and addressed;

There is a need for policymakers, and the providers of denominational education, to go beyond stereotypes and listen more carefully to the findings of recent consultations and surveys. Education is too important to allow old prejudices to colour the necessary dialogue about what is best for the teaching and learning of the next generation who will have to grow up in a world very different to the present one – a world more fragile, fractious and fraught – but where awareness of one’s identity and values will be more important than ever (Lane, 2016 p.1).

In relation to identity humility theory it is understood that without reflexivity as described by Lane (2016), hegemonic norms, tradition and culture remain the status quo and may inadvertently trump minorities’ rights. Moreover, Lane (2016), addresses the need for communication and the avoidance of stereotyping which is also at the core to of identity humility. Also the importance Lane attached to an awareness of one’s own identity is established by theorists of adolescent identity development as described later in this chapter.

### **3.3.10 Agency**

On a more positive note, Gramsci also believed that everyone was capable of working out their own worldview, despite hegemonies asserting a particular world view. Gramsci believed critical thinking allowed people be critical rather than accepting

values and ideas instilled in them when young. He suggested "To criticise one's own conception of the world means to make it a coherent unity and to raise it to the level reached by the most advanced thought in the world," (Gramsci, 1995 p.324). Hence the human dignity of individuals which necessitates freedom of thought, can be realised by critical thought. Likewise, the need for a searching in order to find a truth compatible with our hearts and minds and to deal with the confusion between what we feel to be right and what we are told is right is an important process. Gramsci called this dichotomy of thought as the "contradictory consciousness", (Lears, 1985 p.579). It aligns with the processes of both adolescent moral and identity development. The importance of communication, open dialogue, a sense of belonging and religious education in helping adolescents to achieve a secure identity is explored in the sections on adolescent identity development and RE.

### **3.3.11 Counter hegemonies**

A counter-hegemony is an attempt to challenge an existing hegemony and/or create a new hegemony. Oppositional voices propose new ideas. Gramsci (1971), explains a struggle over ideas and beliefs precedes a 'war of attack' to create a new hegemony. Heywood (1994) explains a 'counter-hegemonic' struggle, proposes alternative ideas while simultaneously challenging the "dominant ideas of what is normal and legitimate". It challenges misrecognition and proposes an ideological transformation (p.101). While Buroway (2001) suggests a counter hegemony or Good sense can occur in crisis situations when common sense is challenged. It is argued that Catholic hegemony in Ireland has been challenged due to repeated scandals within the Catholic Church coming to the attention of the subordinate class. Moreover the Church's stance on marriage equality, divorce, sexual morality and the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment may be no longer be functional in today's society. Moreover, an explicit counter-hegemony relevant to this research is the development of Educate Together schools as an ideological alternative to Catholic schooling. Furthermore the findings in the 2016 Census, that decreasing numbers of people are identifying as Catholic and increasing numbers are identifying as of no religion, is further evidence of counter hegemony. Selengut (2008) believes that religious hegemony is increasingly challenged by globalisation. This is evident in relation to Irish education as the United Nations human rights legislation (2014), The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Report (2008) alongside reports from the Council of Europe (2017) and the Irish Human

Rights Commission (2011) all challenge the status quo in Irish schools regarding religious freedom. Furthermore, it is suggested that increasing societal diversity creates tensions as different religious and cultural hegemonies seek power (Selengut, 2008), this aligns with Laclau (2001) who described multiculturalism as a counter-hegemony. Gramsci acknowledges counter hegemonies are always present to challenge a dominant hegemony.

In summation, critical thinking, Educate Together schools, census reports, pressure from International, European and Irish human rights agencies regarding provision for religious freedom in schools, in tandem with increasing diversity / multiculturalism and globalisation all challenge or act as counter-hegemonic to the dominance of a Catholic worldview in Irish education.

### **3.3.12 Fluidity in Roman Catholicism**

This section analyses the way in which the Roman Catholic Church may support hegemony or counter- hegemony or due to internal conflict, simultaneously attempt both. The inextricable link between matters of religion, class and politics is also explored. Furthermore, the theory of identity humility is employed in this section in a number of ways, firstly it addresses stereotyping of the Roman Catholic Church which may inadvertently occur by using a Gramscian analysis, secondly, the inherent human rights and social justice agenda evidenced by Roman Catholicism is highlighted. The usefulness of Gramscian concepts of misrecognition are substantiated by reference to changes within the Church. This section also highlights the elasticity and development of Roman Catholicism. The fluidity evidenced within the ideology of Roman Catholicism is very important to this research, without which the usefulness of identity humility as a theoretical perspective for this research would be questionable.

Historically, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) could be viewed as counter hegemonic to a more traditional, conservative and authoritarian church. Huntington (1991) suggests Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican council changed the Catholic Church into a powerful social institution, critically engaged with the modern world. While encyclical *Dignitatis Humanae* committed the church to religious liberty for all people. The decree *Gaudium et Spes* made clear the Church's intention to engage in dialogue with the World, while it also recognised democracy as the best political order (Hastings, 1991; Anderson, 2007). The communication, religious liberation and

democratic spirit of Vatican II is in tandem with core concepts within identity humility theory. Moreover the development of liberation theology in the 1970s evidenced the rise of a counter hegemony within the church. Liberation theology called on the ministry of the Church to become involved in the struggles of the poor against wealthy elites. It is noteworthy that prior to this the hierarchy in the Catholic Church were part of the elite or bourgeois class. However notable examples of the hierarchy in the Church aligning with the subordinate class struggle or counter hegemony include Archbishop Romero in El Salvador. Also Cardinal Silva in Chile and Archbishop Paulo Evaristo Arns in Brazil although both were initially supportive of the authoritarian elite regimes they changed position after personal witness of the victims of torture and abuse (Anderson, 2007 p.369). This change from a hegemonic position to a counter hegemonic position was galvanised by communication and witness with the subordinate class. This change is important and relevant to this thesis as it supports the importance of the communication element of identity humility. In similar vein it recognises the need to address misrecognition. Hence in the context of this research giving voice and listening to minority belief student's experiences challenges misrecognition. Stepan (2001), reports religious traditions are multi-vocal, elastic and developing. Nicaragua is poignant in explaining the hegemonic and counterhegemonic struggle within the Church between conservative authoritarianism and its links with the bourgeois or elite in society and liberation theology and its links with the subordinates or poor (Sawchak,1997). In Nicaragua the Hierarchy of the Church initially, and in the main, supported the authoritarian regime lead by Somoza. While the base of the church or the Parish priests in the main supported the Sandinistas in the 1970's struggle for democracy (Sawchak, 1997; Gismondi, 1986). In essence the power of communication and an avoidance of misrecognition by closely working with subordinate groups appears inextricably linked with support for social justice and human rights. In an Irish context, Archbishop Martin has been critical of those within the Catholic Church who have hampered the divestment of schools from Catholic to multi-denominational patronage (O'Brien, 2017; Byrnes, 2017). While critics suggest religious organisations change sides or alliances in order to preserve their dominant positions when the original hegemony is no longer tenable (Torres, 1992; Haynes, 1996). It is reasonable to suggest the tenability of Catholic Church hegemony in Irish education is currently challenged by increasing plurality, Church scandals and globalisation. The researcher posits human agency also plays a part in creating

hegemony, counter hegemony and internal conflict. Those supporting a hegemony do not exist in isolation and are themselves impacted on by socio-political shifts, hence evolving ideologies cause changes in thoughts of both the bourgeois and subordinate classes. In relation to this research this is evidenced as the majority within the Catholic Church have agreed there exists a need to divest school patronage to meet the needs of an evolving pluralist Ireland (O'Brien, 2017a; Byrne, 2017). Moreover the fluid nature of a hegemony is very important as it allows progression, likewise identity humility theory acknowledges the fluid nature of people's identities and socio-political ideologies.

### **3.3.13 Conclusion**

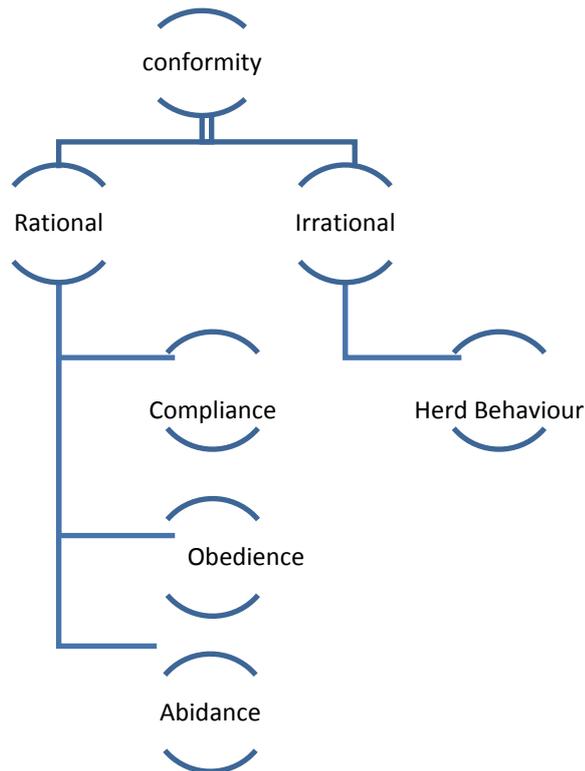
In summation, hegemony is understood to support and maintain a dominant groups' worldview and needs as universal. It achieves this power by controlling people's thoughts. The dominant groups' needs are privileged while subordinate group needs are ignored. Mechanisms which maintain a hegemony include normalisation of one worldview as common sense, unconscious control /misrecognition and forming allegiances. Counter hegemonies or oppositional voices are always present but are kept at bay by allowing safe concessions and deflecting issues into safe harbors. However communication, crisis, critical thinking, and human agency all challenge misrecognition and are capable of changing hegemonic ideologies. It is posited that in Irish Catholic Post Primary schools elements of hegemony theory are evident. For example allegiances between the Church and State in maintaining a Catholic school ethos. Moreover, research by Mawhinney (2014); O'Donnell (2014); Kavanagh (2013); Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather (2012); Glendenning (2012); Lynch, Grummell and Devine (2012) ; Devine (2011; 2009 ; 2005); Irwin (2010) ; Byran (2008) and Young (2000) support the reality of particular Catholic hegemonic practices in an Irish school context. The next section supports the theory of hegemony by explaining how and why conformity toward one worldview is practiced by individuals.

### **3.4 Theory of Conformity**

Conformity is explained as “the change of actions or attitudes caused by the pressure from some real or notional groups” (Myers, 2010 cited in Song, Ma, Wu & Li 2012 p.1365). Storey (1998) reports, “despite the existence of oppression and exploitation in

society, there is still a relatively high degree of consensus because subordinate classes appear “to support and subscribe to values, ideas, objectives, cultural and political meanings which bind them to and incorporate them into the prevailing power structure” (p. 124). Storey (1998) understanding aligns with Gramscis theory of hegemony whereby people accept and align with the dominant worldview. Furthermore, Song et al, (2012) classified conformity as follows:

**Figure 2: Classification of Conformity,**



According to Song et al, (2012), irrational or herd behaviour occurs when a person accepts without exploration the behaviours or attitudes of their group relying instead on their intuition and genetic instinct. The person is influenced by the herd behaviours of other individuals, groups, organisations, policies, rules, regulations, and their own internal experience or natural instinct. In relation to this research irrational or herd behaviour may be linked to what is described as identity foreclosure, where an individual accepts the identity they are given without exploration of alternatives. This also links with Hunsberger, Pratt and Pancer (2001), who found some young people do very little searching and accept their given identity. The researcher tentatively makes a linkage between irrational or herd behaviour and misrecognition or unconsciously

controlled hegemony, all of which support conformity and maintenance of the status quo. While, Song et al, (2012) suggests herd behaviour often results in negative effects. In order to overcome it, it is essential to stop relying on intuition and instead to rely on rational thinking. Rational conformity is categorised as either: compliance, obedience or abidance. Compliance conformity is understood to be an agreeable response to an expectation of a behavior made by others on an individual. The individual after due consideration complies even though they may not think the behavior is right (Guandong & Lei, 2007). An example is where a child complies with parents' wishes in order to show respect. It results in exhilaration of those requiring conformity to their will. An advantage is that it maintains good relationships between people. Rational conformity is understood to be based on obedience where an individual conforms in order to avoid punishment or to seek rewards after judging the situation and deciding conformity will result in better personal outcomes (Guandong, Zhitian, & Miao, 2008). This links with Bourdieu's, (1984) theory of cultural capital whereby those who follow doxa and habitus are awarded more social capital while others are not. Finally, abidance conformity occurs when an individual is faced with a new learning experience. Their uncertainty in knowing how to act causes them to conform to the behavior of an individual who appears to be confident and knowledgeable, (Friedman., Sears, & Smith, 1984; Guandong, 2004). Moreover, Song et al, (2012) suggest it partly explains the "existent foundation of religions" (p.1368). Further reading on religious conformity identifies different ways in which people who question their religious beliefs or who are not intrinsically motivated by their religion respond. This is relevant to this research as a number of students at interview were questioning their religious beliefs. Allport and Ross (1967), describe an extrinsic orientation, whereby people use religion for their own ends, to provide security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self-justification. The embraced creed is lightly held or else selectively shaped to fit more primary needs (p. 434), this aligns with rational conformity as the person sees benefits for conforming. Moreover, in an Irish context this tentatively links with the idea of cultural Catholicism. Another response suggested by Dennett (2006) is whereby people accept their situation and again decide to conform, "some people don't do anything; they don't stop going to church, and they don't even tell their loved ones. They just quietly get on with their lives, living as morally (or immorally) as they did before" (p. 204). Yet another response and an alternative to conforming is to identify as non-religious, a variety of

options are available: humanist, free thinker, agnostic, atheist. However by not conforming to the behaviors of the majority the individual risks negative consequences (Goodman, Mueller, 2009; Bourdieu, 2011; Gramsci, 1971). More research is needed to understand peoples' reasons for and responses to realising they no longer or maybe never really believed in religion.

### **3.5 Theories of Othering**

#### **3.5.1 Introduction**

A definition of 'Other' provided by Robinson and Diaz (2009), is "those groups that have been marginalised, silenced, denigrated or violated, and defined in opposition to, and seen as other than, the privileged and powerful groups that are identified as representing the idealised, mythical norm in society", (p.183). Bauman suggests that identities are set up as dichotomies, 'othering' give identities meaning and the belonging group power to suppress the other (cited in Zevallos 2011). Likewise, De Beauvoir (2003), argued "no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other against itself" (p 33). While Jensen (2011), and Spivak (1985), also identify power as an important element of 'othering', in essence the "other" is subordinate to the one in power. The above understanding of othering links with the theory of hegemony as one worldview becomes normalised and privileged while the other faces misrecognition. Theories also report a link between 'othering' and identity, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007) agree "the existence of others is crucial in defining what is "normal" and in locating one's own place in the world" (p.169). Zevallos (2011) further explains that social institutions such as the law, the media, education and religion play a part and have power through their support of what is accepted as "normal" and what is considered "Other". Zevallos's account has similarities with Gramsci cultural hegemony theory and Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, whereby those who support and comply with the hegemony, doxa and habitus are considered normal and awarded increased social capital compared to those who are considered other. Hence othering helps identify the norm and supports power relations. A consequence of "othering" may be that instead of diversity being accepted as a dynamic and valuable human force it may result in those with power and control been supported to cause harm to others, (Lorde, 1984; Kelly, 2000).

### **3.5.2 Othering and Irish Education**

In relation to this research it is explored whether minority faith and worldview students are positioned as other in schools with a Catholic ethos. Research by O'Donnell (2014), in Irish schools suggests some children are conditionally given places in schools but are also positioned or identified as "other";

The de facto situation for many children in Irish schools is that they are welcomed into schools, but only according to the logic of conditional hospitality which positions them as an 'other'; even if this 'other' is conceptualised positively as enriching the existent shared community, the logic remains that of the sovereign welcoming the 'other' in ( p.6).

Likewise research in Irish Post Primary schools found othering is an issue as the Irish curriculum names what is a normal Irish identity, which impacts on and supports the othering of ethnic minorities and non-co-religionist students (Bryan, 2008, 2009b). While Bryan and Bracken (2011) also report that intercultural activities were often tokenistic and reinforce minority ethnic students' sense of otherness. This is akin to making safe concessions as part of maintaining a hegemony. Moreover, Parker-Jenkins & Masterson (2013), report, an everyday lack of recognition from schools, particularly in relation to appropriateness of school uniforms in reflecting diversity within the school and also limited curriculum in addressing the identities of minorities. Again misrecognition supports the marginalisation, devaluing and othering of difference in Irish schools. Furthermore, Irwin (2010) reports the religious ethos in Irish schools is a form of tolerance or 'patronising recognition' of the non-Catholic child or parent. Irwin (2010) and Taylor (1994) further explains that 'patronising recognition', "can inflict harm" and negatively stereotype the other (Taylor 1994, p.25). Moreover, it is argued that systematic "othering" is evidenced by the Church, State and the Law supporting Catholicism as the normal habitus while explicitly "othering" non-Catholics in State funded schools as evidenced by the the Employment Equality Act (1998-2011) section 37(1) and the Equal status Act (2000-2011)(section (7)(3)(C). Likewise, O'Donnell (2014), suggests that,"some of us are positioned as different from dominant norms and values, not quite belonging to the institutions and structures of the State as

they currently function”. Having defined otherness and its relevance to this research, a more detailed examination of “othering” and its impact on identity development is explored in the next section.

### **3.5.3 Identity, Othering and Agency**

Callero (2003), explains the impact of “othering”, as he describes self is a construction based on one’s power relations, culture and history. Similarly, Bourdieu’s theory of social capital, understands an individual’s social identity is linked with rewards and punishments and notions of superiority and inferiority (Okolie 2003, cited in Zevallos 2011). Likewise and important to this research is an understanding that “othering” creates a climate or culture where one group is constructed as “normal” and the other as deviant or inferior (Zevallos, 2011). The other may be constructed as pathological or extreme in a way that is not normal and morally inferior (Spivak 1985; Jensen, 2011). In relation to this thesis a common stereotype of atheists is that they are immoral (Gervais, 2014 & Saad, 2009). Likewise negative stereotyping of Islam, as a violent religion is also evident (Keogh, 2014; Carr, 2016 & Rane & Ewart 2012). Moreover the media is currently subjecting Muslims to othering (Breen, Haynes, Devereux, 2006; Buckley, 2016).

Hence “othering” and stereotyping have the potential to negatively impact on the identity development of minorities in society. Spivak (1985) also explained that “othering” is multi-dimensional or as Collins (1989), described an interlocking system of oppression, the systems of oppression may include sexism, racism and class. Hence in relation to this research, students who are neither Irish, white or Catholic may be particularly vulnerable to “othering”.

On a more positive note Jensen (2011) critiques the theories of “othering” by introducing the concept of agency. Jensen links “othering” and agency with identity development and suggests agency supports a less dichotomous view of identity development while still acknowledging the power structures conditioning identity formation. He challenges the notion that “those at the centre have the power to describe, and the other is constructed as inferior” (p.65). His view is that the above concepts of “othering” may be valid but their effect on identity development are challenged by an individuals’ ability to show agency. In essence the other does not always accept the condition of other as appointed by the dominant group. Jensen

(2011), research study on identity formation among young ethnic minority men in Denmark, linked the concepts of othering, identity development and agency. He explains how “othering” is in part caused by stereotyping which impacts on identity development, however he suggests two responses, one is where individuals capitalise on some aspect of “othering” in this case “exoticist” fascination. In an Irish context, taking atheism as an example, the question arises as to whether it is possible to capitalise on an atheist identity. Identifying with atheism maybe linked to been alternative or free thinking which could be seen as attractive particularly for adolescents who are trying to define a unique identity, while Whitely (2010) reports a new trend in Western liberal democracies towards a “new atheism,” ( p.190). The literature also suggests a positive image of atheism as linked to intelligence, (Cribari-Neto, Souza, 2013). However according to Weber; Pargament; Kunik; Lomax; Stanley (2012), there is substantial evidence that nonbelievers suffer stress due to the negative perceptions by others. Hence in relation to this research it is unclear if an atheist identity could be capitalised on, particularly in Irish Post Primary schools. Hence, it is necessary to consider the second reaction to “othering”. Jensen (2011), Sandberg and Pedersen (2006), reports a second response is to claim normality, to construct oneself as an ordinary person and appeal for sympathy and understanding. From a Islamic perspective in order to avoid “othering” and religious stereotyping of Islam as a violent religion, 70,000 Muslim Clerics issuing Fatwa condemning ISIS, (Symopoulos,2015). The key point here is that the Clerics perceived there was a need to do so in order to counter attempts at “Othering” and stereotyping. Hence minorities show agency by actively rejecting and distancing themselves from treats to their identity. In essence, “claiming normality, insisting that one is not that different, can be a strategy for humanisation” (Jensen, 2011 p.73). Jensen (2011), in his research uncovered another interesting finding whereby young ethnic minority men in Denmark do not claim to be Danish as they believe this course is blocked and instead must claim a common humanity. Likewise, Fangen (2007), found Somalis were also blocked from having a Norwegian identity when living in Norway. Similarly, research on Irish Muslims’ experience, also found being accepted as Irish was blocked for some (Carr, 2016). However, it is unclear and no research could be found as to whether atheists consider claiming being Irish as blocked to them. Equally important is Jensen’s research finding which reports that the young ethnic minority men did not aspire to Danishness, but do claim normality, he interprets this as an attempt to carve out a third

space, enabling them to hold onto their own identities, not Danish but also not different from the Danish. Hence the dichotomous view of either Danish or other is challenged.

The researcher suggests the overlap, third space or common space is our shared or common humanity. Moreover, the researcher suggests those in power also have agency and may not support “othering” in order to define themselves. Indeed it challenges or at least circumvents Bauman’s theory of “othering” as absolute due to an individuals’ agency allowing a third space. Lived evidence of a third space, are marriages and friendships between religious and unreligious people and people of different ethnicity. Moreover, while Baumann suggested ‘othering’ meant woman was always defined in opposition to man. It is noteworthy that the closest human bonds are often between man and woman, mother and child. Hence, othering although it needs to be understood, it does not warrant a perception of negative outcomes (cited in Zevallos 2011). In summation, people have different religious, or world views but whether all in the dominant group define themselves in opposition to minority groups may be challenged by agency. Also when “othering” occurs whether it is accepted, capitalised on or rejected as part of an individuals’ identity may also be determined by human agency. Hence the experience of having a minority religious or world view within a predominantly Catholic Post Primary school system warrants further research.

#### **3.5.4 Challenges to Othering**

Human agency may challenge the practise and acceptance of “othering”. In an Irish context and relevant to this research is the agency shown by current lobby groups including Equate and Education Equality in advocating for equality of education provision. It is noteworthy that rather than campaigning for a secular education system, their main aim at present is for equal access to Catholic schools. This indicates an acceptance of Catholic patronage and resists attempts to create a Catholic versus non Catholic or “Othering” scenario. Furthermore, the majority of Catholic schools accept non-co-religionist students. While atheist Ireland supports a secular education system, they do not suggest atheist schools as necessary or support segregation on religious grounds. Hence it could be argued that in Irish education there is evidence of an avoidance of explicit segregation or “othering” of Catholic versus non-Catholic students. However as detailed in chapter three, laws which support segregation on religious grounds support “othering” when explicitly or implicitly employed. The next

section explores in greater depth the concept of agency identified by Jensen in this section.

### **3.6 Theory of Agency**

Gramsci's theory of hegemony supports the importance of human agency in addressing inequalities inherent in hegemonic practises, moreover Jensen explains the importance of agency in identity development. Furthermore agency theory is employed in analysis of this research data in explaining the many different and sometimes contradictory student experiences. In order to understand the concept of human agency, it is necessary to explore different schools of thought evident in the literature. A critical realist approach describes agency as an individual's capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power. The emphasis is on the individual's ability to exert change and downplays the impact of other social factors (Bandura, 1982, Zeuner, 1999, Merriam Webster, 2017). According to Burkitt (2016), "this upholds the Western moral and political view of agents as autonomous, independent, and reflexive individuals" (p.322). However the literature also suggests a different understanding of agency whereby scholars argue against a romantic notion of an individual having an agentic disposition and suggest human agency is fluid and not autonomous and is always impacted on by social forces, which may be both enabling and constraining and are situated in a time and space, (Coe, Jordhus-Lier, 2011; Burkitt, 2016; Herndl, Licona, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The second understanding of agency is more in tandem with the theoretical perspective of identity humility. Moreover, Pham (2013), suggests "one's action is rarely one's own and rarely for one's own sake only, for it is pulled, pushed, harmonised, agitated, coaxed, pleaded ... by multiple bonds", (p. 37). Moreover, individuals or workers are described as operating within complex environments of opportunity and constraint, some are in a position where they are afforded 'wriggle room' within power relations while for others agency will be constrained by structural forces, (Coe, Jordhus-Lier, 2011p.229). Hence this mode of delegating power results in one worldview been maintained as agents who adhere to the dominant worldview can safely be allowed wriggle room. Conversely those who do not adhere to the dominant worldview are afforded less progression and a reduction or constraint in their ability to effect meaningful change or agency. Herndl and Licona (2007), further describes the idea of agency as being constrained and suggest agency or the enabling of a person to effect change is made possible only at

certain times. Opportune times are due to the complex and contradictory relationship between agency and authority, at times ambiguity allows a certain amount of slippage and change can happen. Hence it is argued that authority can be both a constraining and enabling force at different times in different situations. Moreover Herndl and Licona describe agency as “the conjunction of a set of social and subjective relations that constitute the possibilities of action” and are not an attribute of an individual (p.1). Furthermore a link is evident with Gramsci’s theory of hegemony whereby the “Weltanschauung” or “worldview”, is passively accepted and rules are complied with to support the dominant group and trumps an agentic orientation supporting counter hegemonies, however slippage at times allows counter hegemonies which are always present to exert change. Slippage within the Catholic Church could be understood as repeated internal scandals which allow counter hegemonies opportunities to voice their discontent. Further reading suggests agency does not always have to be dichotomous consisting of constraint and opportunity or counter hegemonies. Pham (2013) argues against the dichotomous view of agency and suggests reflexive individuals can show great flexibility and nuanced personal ways to steer through all interactions. Similarly, research by Zion-Waldoks, (2015), rejects the notion of resistance by Jewish/Orthodox feminist as either liberal “free will” or religious “submission” and instead suggests individuals within organisations can show agency and change an organisation by following core “doxa” but at the same time revisioning current interpretations. He explains individuals, “follow divine will into resistance, echoing prophetic duties of care, critique, and re-vision” (p.93). Similar to Pham (2013) he supports the idea of nuance, flexibility and elasticity within relationships which can support change. In essence both Pham and Zion-Waldoks suggest change can be achieved by working within a system rather than by developing a counter force, in essence change or revisioning in organisations may be achieved by subtle and nuanced manoeuvres. The researcher cautiously suggests the Catholic Church is currently reassessing its global position and endeavouring as Archbishop Diarmuid Martin stated “We desire to work together to build a different, more humble Church, but also a renewed Church, confident of the contribution of the teaching of Jesus Christ for the Ireland of tomorrow” (Martin, 2012). Likewise, some suggest scholars like Hamza Yusuf are also trying to revise Islam (B.C, 2015 Jan 7). Similarly, and also very relevant to this research, is Herr’s (2010), understanding of cultural agency which he insists liberal theorists need to understand in order to respect non-liberal cultural values. His research

was based on minority women's defence of non-liberal minority cultures that encompass sexist customs and rules, for example the wearing of the hijab or niqab. Herr (2010), disagrees that this is explained by constrained agency and suggests limits to the cross-cultural use of agency as autonomy. Moreover Herr (2010), advocates for a need to understand non liberal cultures' ideas of agency as equally valuable as a liberal understanding. He suggests, agency within non-liberal cultures maybe achieved by enabling members of religious cultures to embrace the tenets of their religion which he articulates as follows: "For members of many non-liberal cultures in the world, the essence of human agency is to wholeheartedly embrace the moral truth that has been transmitted to them from a higher external authority and to live in accordance with it against all odds" (p.239). In light of Herrs' understanding of agency, it is suggested that Irish schools which support students' in wearing the hijab or niqab may be supporting student's agency rather than supporting liberal Western views which see the hijab as anti-feminist or indeed anti-women. Identity humility expects this level of openness and depth of understanding towards all in a community, it challenges everyone to listen and communicate in order to find workable strategies which are not stereotyped by Western liberal views. In Ireland it could be argued that the Catholic Church is currently being stereotyped and seen as a counter force to liberal pluralism, particularly in relation to their management role of schools. Archbishop Martin understands the challenges from outside but also from within as evidenced by the following statement;

The debate between faith and culture and social values is not something esoteric for the experts. It is vital for the healthy growth of a pluralist society. It constitutes an essential contribution to the search for a common language which can communicate with and captivate all the components of a pluralist society. I am not advocating a return to a theocracy. I am challenging believers to find a language from our own rich faith tradition which can be understood and welcomed in a pluralist world, (Martin, 2017).

In summation, it is contradictory to suggest a persons' agency must accept autonomy and liberal values as essential. In relation to this research identity humility expects this level of openness and understanding of individuals. A non- dichotomous perspective of

agency within relationships between the State, school Patrons, school management, leaders, teachers, parents and students is facilitated by good communication in order to find workable strategies to navigate a pathway for all within a schools religious ethos. In an Irish school system, the patronage model affords locally managed schools the autonomy to make decisions and create their own unique ethoi and may enable greater flexibility and elasticity in relationships than a more rigid homogenous State determined ethos. The ability individuals have to be flexible and nuanced in how they negotiate relationships and find workable strategies in order to find a path through structures and forces is evidenced by interfaith marriages, unions and friendships between different religious and nonreligious people. However, the challenges to finding workable pathways cannot be underestimated as Emirbayer and Miche (1998), point out that people may be vulnerable and sensitive when interacting with others, moreover the researcher suggests those in a minority position may carry with them a history of been stereotyped and have a poorer sense of belonging making it difficult for them to engage in negotiations. While those in positions of established power may want to maintain their privileged position and find it unnecessary or challenging to negotiate changes to facilitate minorities. Pham, (2013) is aware of the challenges of creating a non-dichotomous dialogue to support human agency. He maintains all involved in relationships, with varying degrees of power need to conduct themselves within the bonds, which requires a “highly nuanced and elastic range of dexterity and mobility in order to steer the course of interactions” (p. 35). Likewise identity humble practice requires flexible, elastic and at times nuanced approaches to navigate a pathway for all needs. Moreover, in critiquing human agency against identity humility further similarities are evident. The theory of identity humility supports a need for teachers to show agency in relation to their sense of commitment to reflexivity, however it also accounts for the constraints on individual agency in acknowledging that institutional and individual accountability, have to work in concert with one another in order to incite long-term change (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015). The following section explores the literature on teacher agency.

### **3.6.1 Teacher agency**

Conley (1998) suggests teacher agency has been negatively affected by increasing homogenisation of curriculum, testing and bureaucratic strategies. However, she suggests the classroom is an uncertain social space and teacher professionalism should

be respected by affording them greater agency. Likewise, Long, Graven, Sayed and Lampen (2017) suggest using national testing as a tool to monitor teacher performance reduces teachers ability to provide a quality education, they suggest a system which supports teacher agency would enable teachers to be more responsive to the variety of student's needs.

However in an Irish context research suggests teachers are afforded agency particularly in relation to the teaching of religion. “ within Ireland the approach to diversity in professional practice has predominantly been left to the discretion of the individual teacher who may or may not have had training on diversity matters, and may vary in there level of personal commitment” (Parker-Jenkins & Masterson, 2013 p.479). Furthermore, the religion syllabi at Post Primary level introduced in 2000 and 2003 gave schools the flexibility to decide whether or not to teach it as an exam subject. In 2016, 2.6 % of leaving certificate students and 44% of Junior certificate students sat the State religion exam, (State Exams Commission 2017; O'Brien, O'Caollai 2016), this points towards a majority of school personnel decided to retain a more agency friendly approach to religion teaching. Higgins (2011) makes the point that teacher agency is necessary in order for teachers to remain focused on the purpose of education and to defend good education. Likewise, Long et al (2017), suggest agency is essential to enable teachers to support “independent and autonomous thinkers”, which is the purpose of education as advanced by Biesta (2009, p.9). In other words if teachers are to be the guardians of education they need to be afforded the agency to do so. However Long et al (2017), also acknowledge that “agency is conditioned by past experiences and lived realities of the teachers”, (p.5). Similarly, Archer (2000), believes an individual's “culture” impacts on the social self and personal agency. Culture as described by Archer (2000), is comprised of the “ideological, societal or institutional views which are implicit in rooted traditions and ways of being”. (pp. 254–255). In relation to this research the uniformity of Irish Teachers as 98% white Irish (Keane & Heinz, 2015) may result in them being less inclined to understand, support and relate to minority students (Irvine, 2010 & Santoro,2009). While Villegas and Irvine, (2010) and Long et al. (2017), maintain that teachers need to engage with self-cultivating an “inner strength and an outer vision” to enable them to practise agency and “to act in the complex educational and social environments they inhabit “(p.13). This aligns with reflexivity, a core element of identity humility. Coffman (2015), agrees but also places

a responsibility on policy makers to support the development of teachers throughout their careers. With regard to initial teacher education in Ireland, the development of the master's in education and in particular the new research element which helps develop critical thinking and allows teachers explore and develop personal areas of interest rather than dictated content, supports agency in teachers. Higgins (2011) believes that education is intrinsically about self-cultivation on the part of the learner as well as the teacher. He believes the importance of self-cultivation is critical, because 'the teacher's work is at the very site where human cultures preserve themselves and challenge themselves to grow' (ibid., p. 245). Teachers at the coalface need the inner strength and knowledge to address new needs created by increased diversity. In essence teachers are needed to act as agents of change. Likewise, Pantic 2015; Florian, 2009; Zeichner, 2009, all agree teachers are increasingly expected to be developed as 'agents of change' especially in relation to agendas of social justice and human rights ( Pantic, p.759). In an Irish context this is evident in the code of conduct developed by the Teaching Council in 2012, which begins by setting out the ethical foundation for the teaching profession. There is an expectation that teachers uphold values of Respect, Care, Integrity and Trust. Teachers are expected to "uphold human dignity and promote equality, moreover teachers as professionals must demonstrate "respect for spiritual and cultural values, diversity, social justice, freedom, democracy and the environment" (Teaching Council, 2012). This links well with the human rights agenda of identity humility. Pantic's (2015) research on teacher agency for social justice found that although teachers are seen as agents of change in education, it is less clear on the kind of change teachers are expected or enabled to promote. Likewise the teaching council guidelines expect teachers to act as agents of social justice or social transformation but lack practical detail and direction, for example whether Muslim students should be allowed to wear a hijab or niqab in school is unclear. Moreover, Irwin (2009), suggests an overload of content and time constraints, combined with externalist market pressures particularly at second level, challenges the 'individuality' of the teacher.

Pantic's research suggests that four factors need consideration in order to unpack and understand teacher agency. The factors are a sense of purpose, competence, autonomy and reflexivity. The relevance of the above to this research is to understand how Irish Post Primary teacher's agency could support religious diversity in schools. Firstly, teachers' sense of purpose, motivation or commitment is important, in essence Pantic's

research reports teachers must believe in the importance of an issue in order to act as agents for change. In relation to this research, teachers must believe in equality for minority belief students, if they are to promote inclusive practises within their class, school and society. A question arises regarding the uniformity of the Irish teaching profession and hence its knowledge and motivation to address the needs of minorities.

Secondly, competence or teachers' knowledgeability, awareness and rationalisation also impact on a teacher's ability to act as change agents. Research has identified some common practices of teachers and schools that actively promote social justice, the factors include engaging with inclusive pedagogies (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian, 2009, and sharing responsibility for student outcomes. It is also important that teachers are involved with other professionals, communities and families in planning for inclusion (Ainscow, 2005; Edwards, 2007). Hence it is critical that teachers are supported by systems which allow this level of engagement and planning with others. Teachers cannot do it in isolation. This corresponds very closely with the concept of communication and power relations core to identity humility theory, whereby it is understood that all elements need to work in unison in order to incite long-term change.

Thirdly, autonomy or a teacher's practice of agency is described as dependent on the school they work in, educational policy and broader societal structures and culture. The point is also made that teachers may act differently in different settings and at different times and those who make changes are maybe the most attuned to knowing when the time is opportune for change, this links closely with Herndl, Licon (2007) research as described above. Moreover teachers' personal traits such as their levels of confidence, control and resilience all impact on the teacher as an agent of change for social justice, and human rights (Gu and Day, 2013; St Clair-Thompson et al., 2014). It is understood that individuals are less likely to act if they feel their actions will not be successful or supported, hence Principals are seen as important as leaders of collective change (Bush, 2011). Teacher autonomy is also influenced by their opportunities to be involved in development of school policies, networking and indeed broader educational policy and socio-cultural contexts, (Pantić et al.2011; MacBeath, 2000; Menter, 2008). In an Irish context initiatives by the State such as the forum on Patronage and Pluralism (2012), which called for inputs and engagement nationally could be viewed as an initiative encouraging agency. Moreover calls by the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) for submissions or completion of an online survey regarding the

development of a course on Education about Religion, Beliefs and Ethics for Primary schools also encourages engagement. Likewise teachers are enabled under the new junior cycle program to develop their own teaching modules. All three initiatives sought to engage others rather than to develop policies in isolation. Conversely, teacher agency may be constrained in relation to supporting minority belief students in denominational schools. According to Irwin (2009)

However good the individual teachers may be, the structural constraints of Denominational education have a significant impact on the possibilities available for teachers, students and parents with regard to education. In isolating this aspect of ethos, I am not claiming that it defines completely what is possible. But I am claiming that, without significant change at this level, it is hard to uphold the idea that Irish Primary education is authentically democratic (p.16).

Likewise teachers are constrained by the Employment Equality Acts (1998-2011) Section 37, as they must adhere to the schools religious ethos rather than their own. Fourthly, reflexivity, is explained by Pantic (2015) as a teacher's ability and willingness to monitor one's own actions but also the structures, cultures and power imbalances in their school and social contexts. Moreover, it demands critique and reflection on not only one's actions but also one's assumptions and an ability to explore alternatives. This coincides with the concept of identity humility which requires that in our interactions with others, we are critically self-aware and monitor our own assumptions, prejudices and tendencies to apply stereotypes. It also requires we acknowledge how our views of liberal pluralism may undermine respect for individual agency of those with alternate views. Teacher reflexivity also encompasses teachers' ability to articulate practical professional knowledge and justify their actions (Pantic, 2015). Biesta, Priestly, Robinson (2015), suggests another constraint on teacher agency is a lack of discourse regarding the broader purpose of education. Discourse which centres on the here and now, subject matter and education policy rather than teacher beliefs about the broad purpose of education has a negative impact on teachers' agency, hence Biesta, Priestly, Robinson (2015) and Fullan's (1993) believe that change in an

education context necessitates a change in culture as well as restructuring. Questions arise as to Irish Post Primary teachers' beliefs and discussion regarding the purpose of education. The academic and exam orientation of the Irish Post Primary system combined with school league tables based solely on academic achievement suggests, Post Primary education is currently viewed as a progression stage rather than intrinsically important in its own right. Research on the operative ethos of boys' single sex voluntary schools in Ireland report an emphasis on academic and sporting achievement (O'Higgins Norman, 2008; O'Keefe, 1998 and Boldt, 2000). Likewise Lynch and Lodge (1999) also report a high level of academic pressure in girls' single sex schools. While, Irwin (2010) argues that "the Irish educational system is still a long way from being a pedagogical system of 'freedom and democracy' (p.450).

### **3.6.2 Conclusion**

In summation and for the purposes of this research, agency is understood as a persons' ability to exert change, which is impacted on by personal traits such as levels of confidence, control, resilience and knowledge. A myriad of external factors also impact on agency, and are situated in a time and space which may be constraining, enabling or non-dichotomous. In line with the theoretical perspective of identity humility, agency for social justice and human rights requires reflexivity and elasticity on the part of all stakeholders. Good communication between all parties is needed in order to find workable strategies to navigate a non- dichotomous path to uphold the human dignity of all within a school community.

## **3.7 Adolescent Identity Development**

### **3.7.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores theories and research on adolescent identity development and stereotyping. The rationale for developing this understanding is fourfold. Firstly, it acknowledges the importance of identity development to the research participants, as all were between 15-19yrs. Secondly, it accepts the uniqueness of every student's religion or worldview as an important element of a students' identity, which is impacted on by peers, teachers, school experience, history and culture (Blewitt & Broderick, 1999; Chaves 2017). Thirdly, research evidences that a secure identity is linked with wellbeing and human flourishing (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg & Verma, 2002; Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Schwartz, Mason, Pantin, Szapocznik,

2009 and Noy-Sharav, 2005). Fourthly, research by Carr (2016) reports some Muslim students experienced identity crisis resulting from challenges they experienced in Irish schools and society. Initially the concept of adolescent identity development is described through the work of theorists Erickson and Marcia, next, moral development as described by Kohlberg and Gilligan is critiqued. Furthermore, a critique of the theories and new thinking results in a review of student agency and coherence of an individual's life story. Next research on Muslim and atheist student's identities and stereotypes' are examined. Finally the implications of the findings are addressed followed by a conclusion.

For the purposes of this research a person's worldview is described as encompassing the views and feelings of everything which can occupy and can be important to an individual in relation to human life and is understood to be in a state of flux, (Leeferink and Klaassen, 2000; and Miedema 2003).

### **3.7.2 Theories of adolescent identity development**

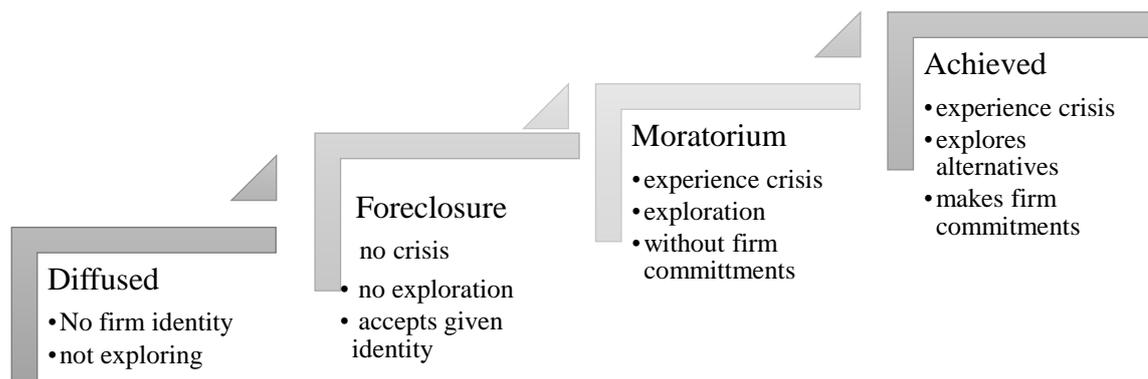
According to Chaves (2017) "Identity is not an ontological reality, but a constructed and malleable lens through which people see themselves, the world and their relation to the world"(p.235). Adolescent identity development is characterised by an intense personal search for finding one's purpose in life (Whitebourne, Sneed, & Sayer, 2009). During adolescence or from 12-18yrs, the need to discover oneself coincides with the development of formal operational thought or the ability to critically think (Erikson, 1968), (Coleman, 2010). The combination of both, means a kaleidoscope of possibilities exist, which is reflected in the uniqueness of each individual's worldview.

#### **○ Erickson and Marcia theories of adolescent identity development**

An explanation of identity development theories is important to this research as education and school experience play an important role in helping students progress and become secure in their unique identities. Moreover, religion and beliefs are understood to be an important element of identity (OIDHR, 2007; Blewitt & Broderick, 1999). Erickson's theory of identity development describes eight stages of development, where each step builds on the successful resolution of the prior step (Erikson, 1950). The stage most pertinent to this research study is the adolescent stage (12-18yrs) which Erikson (1968), explains as a dynamic or acute struggle between identity synthesis and identity confusion. The struggle occurs at this stage as an

individual's development now shifts from what is done to the person to what the person now does. The person is now charged with defining their own identity as distinct from their parents. They must negotiate social interactions and try and find their place, while also developing a sense of morality and right from wrong (Erikson, 1994). Marcia's research (1966), builds on Erikson's original work and further describes the process and outcomes of adolescent development. He proposed four progressive developmental stages as outlined.

**Figure 3: Marcia's Identity development Process**



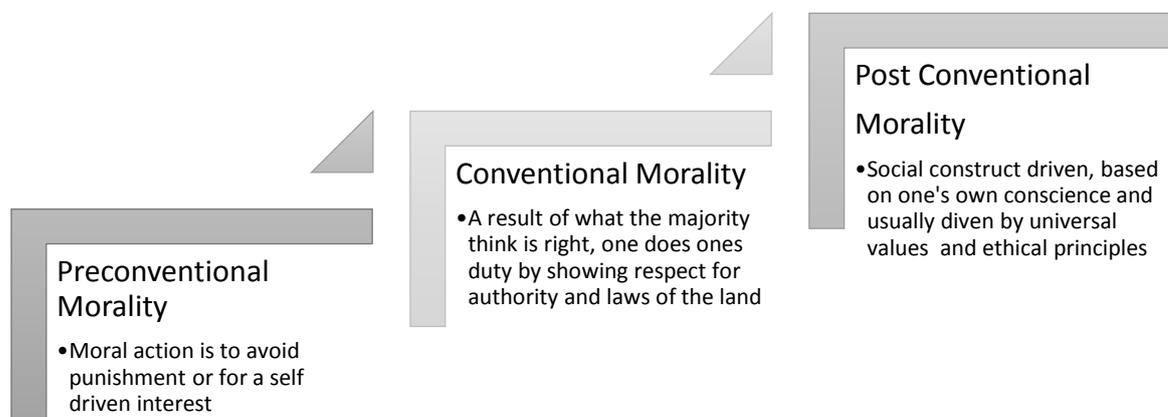
The first phase is titled diffused, a person at this stage of identity development has no firm identity and is not exploring or searching for an identity, the second phase is titled foreclosure at this stage the person accepts and commits to their given identity without questioning or exploration of any alternatives. A penultimate stage is titled moratorium, an individual experiences a crisis of identity and explores alternatives but has yet to make firm commitments. The final stage is titled achieved and is considered the most mature stage, a person has gone through a crisis, explored alternatives and decided on firm commitments. An individual commits to an identity in areas such as politics, occupation, religion, intimate relationships, friendships and gender role (Marcia 1966).

Research by Waterman (1988), indicates the moratorium stage is most intense during adolescence while increased achievement coincides with college years. As the moratorium stage coincides with Post Primary education, it necessitates educators support development of achieved identity by affording opportunities for exploration of multiple identities and moral alternatives. Identity development and moral development are intrinsically linked which necessitates consideration of theories on moral development.

○ Moral development

Piaget (1932), Kohlberg (1984), and Gilligan (1977) provide theories on moral development. Both Piaget and Kohlberg agreed it develops in a series of stages. Piaget identified four stages. Kohlberg extended Piaget’s work to adolescence and adulthood. He grouped six stages into three levels (Kohlberg, 1984).

**Figure 4. Kohlberg’s theory of moral development.**



Kohlberg’s theory describes the lowest level of moral development as Preconventional, whereby a person’s moral action is to avoid punishment or for a self- driven interest. The next stage he describes as conventional morality, whereby an individual’s action is a result of what the majority thinks is right, one does ones duty by showing respect for authority and laws of the land. The most advanced stage is Post conventional morality which is social construct driven, and is based on one’s own conscience and usually

driven by universal ethical principles (Rest, 1974). Research by Colby et al (1983) also supports the progressive nature of morality, although it is noteworthy that Rest (1974) found one in fourteen people actually regress. However, Kohlberg's theory is criticised by Gilligan (1977), as androcentric, as all research participants were male, Gilligan argues, men's morality is based on abstract principles of law and justice, while women's is based on principles of compassion and care and both approaches are equally valid. The fact that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is also androcentric suggests its morality may also be weighted towards ethics of law and justice rather than ethics of care. Reflecting on decreasing genderisation of roles in society suggests, Gilligan's distinctions between genders may be challenged, while Kohlberg's theory may be less representative of current reality. Furthermore, Kohlberg's theory could also be described as uncomprehensive as it does not address the many factors which impact on moral progression and action. Relevant to this research is a study by Bee (1994), who found, moral behaviour or action is not solely based on a person's stage of moral reasoning but also by a myriad of factors such as whether a situation demands participation, the cost or benefit of participation, tradition, peer pressure and self-interest. This is in line with the theory of identity humility which also accounts for socially constructed challenges to moral action. For example a person's moral action against discrimination within a system may have a higher cost if the discrimination is traditionally and culturally supported. According to Dunn (2002), "among a dominant culture's deeply ingrained values are those that perpetuate separation and discrimination", (p. 107). In relation to this research, discrimination in Voluntary secondary schools against non-co-religionist students and teachers is legalised which further impedes or constraints those whose moral code demands they challenge discriminatory school practices.

A critique of both Marcia's and Kohlberg's theories suggest linkages between stages. It could be argued that identity achievement goes hand in hand with Post conventional morality, whereby a person has achieved a sense of self which is strong enough to allow questioning of alternative positions, which is necessary for the enactment of Post conventional morality. In relation to mental health and belief, research by Galen, Klot (2011) of religious and the non-religious found regardless of a person's world view, the important link with better mental health outcomes was the confidence with which the world view was held, rather than anything inherent in the world view itself. For

example those who were confidently religious or atheist have better mental health relative to those unsure about their religion or agnosticism. This links in well with theories of identity achievement, insofar as making firm, confident commitments following exploration results in better life outcomes.

The idea of development or progression is evident in the above theories, the next section explores how that progression is developed in today's world.

### **3.7.3 Exploration, agency and coherence**

Lannegrand-Willems (2015), suggests western societies are going through great turbulence and uncertainty due to rapidly changing social, cultural and economic situations. These uncertainties make it increasingly difficult for young people to define their place in the World (Cote and Bynner, 2008). It is noteworthy that unlike previous generations, many adolescents now have unlimited information at their fingertips, via the internet. They appear to use it to search for information to help them make all sorts of decisions including those regarding their religious identity (Lundby 2011). Willis and Strunk (2017), suggest an impact of communicative technologies on students belief patterns, maybe that into the future, students of RE may choose to be flaneurs. A flaneur is a person who “strolls about aimlessly, observing religious beliefs and practises of others”, maybe studying and coming to understand them without making a commitment to any, preferring freedom and complexity instead (p.201). The combination of societal change and accessibility of information necessitates young people devote more time to explore a myriad of possibilities before making firm commitments. Arnett (2015), agrees it now takes longer to transition and calls the period from 18-25 years “emerging adulthood” (p.9). Research by Luyckx, Duriez, Klimstra, Van Petegem, and Beyers (2011) ; Cote, (1993); Cote & Levine, (2002) all suggest the exploratory stage of identity development is very important and those who actively seek out answers to life's questions are more likely to achieve a sustainable individual identity. Accordingly, “an agentic orientation characterised by openness, self-direction, and flexibility, is essential to developing an identity that can withstand the pressures, decisions, and changes of adulthood in Western societies” (Cote, 1993; Cote & Levine, 2002 cited in Schwartz et al. 2013. p349.).

Moreover, Cote (2000) further explains agency or the ability to self-direct gives an adolescent a distinct advantage over his peers, while those who struggle with self-direction or procrastinate in making decisions are more likely to find this time

distressing and frustrating. Furthermore, Luyckx, Duriez, Klimstra, Van Petegem, and Beyers (2013), report better outcomes for proactive individuals over time. While Schwartz, Beyers, et al, (2011) suggest the reason for better outcomes results from taking ownership of their identity development which makes them more practiced and capable of responding to and dealing with life's changing circumstances. Franken (2017); Miedema and Grimmit, (2000) and Van der Kooij, de Ruyter, Mtedema, (2013), agree there is a need for RE which supports students to form their own World view following open discussion of many beliefs. Moreover the Toledo Guiding Principles also support the teaching of many religious beliefs in a balanced way (OIDHR, 2007). The following research by Hunsberger et al (2001) is important as they found that in order for students to navigate toward a secure identity, they need to explore alternatives before making religious commitments. His research was based on findings from 1,069 participants, where he explored how young people deal with religious issues. He looked at the different approaches taken by students. Some young people engage in an exhaustive search for answers to their religious questions, doubts and concerns and explore both belief confirming (bc) sources and belief threatening (bt) sources. Other young people apparently do very little searching, whether they are religiously committed or not. He claimed that the ways in which young people struggle with, and resolve, religious issues, are linked to broader personal identity development. In summation, Hunsberger et al, found identity achievement was linked to seeking out both belief-confirming consultation (BCC) and belief-threatening consultation (BTC) for religious doubts. This research is consistent with and supported by Berzonsky and Kuk's (2005) and Berzonsky and Sullivan's (1992) who also found those who were open to hearing both sides of an issue were more likely to acquire mature or achieved identity development than those who entertained belief confirming information only. Franken (2017) suggests there is a need for schools to provide an open, integrative and State-organised religious education program, which could support student agency more successfully than a prescriptive or insider interpretation of any singular religion or Worldview. However, Barrett (2000) also links in a sense of belonging and an emotional attachment to a cultural or religious group. He suggests all have an impact on an individuals' identity formation, hence for Catholic student's emphasis on Catholicism maybe helpful for their identity development, helping them to find a sense of belonging and coherence in their life story.

### 3.7.3.1 A State of Flux

To further understand identity development it is necessary to consider the idea that peoples belief systems are in a state of flux. The state of flux results in individuals constructing their own identity rather than something which is passed down unchanged from one generation to the next (Ammerman, 2003; Hervieu-Léger; 2000 ; Barrett, 2000; Loseke, 2007). Niemi (2006) eloquently describes identity formation as “a moving mosaic or a running river that twists through diverse nations and their cultures” (p. 9). In an Irish context researchers agree young Catholics have a less traditional way of practicing while maintaining a strong cultural attachment to Catholicism (Inglis 2007 and Demerath 2000). Anderson (2010) describes young Irish Catholics as follows “ their ways of being religious and spiritual appeared less institutionalised than older cohorts, but see Catholicism as part of their identity, culture and heritage” (p.15). Interesting research in denominational schools in the U.K. found co-religionist students found it challenging to negotiate their home values with their school values. In particular students were critical of their teacher’s values and views which clashed with their own, or their family’s religious views. This may resonate in an Irish school context with growing numbers of Irish people remaining affiliated to Catholicism while not adhering as strictly to Catholic practises or teaching as in the past. Moreover Phelan, Yu, and Davidson (1994), multiple worlds theory explain “students struggle to navigate between ‘norms, values, beliefs, expectations and actions’ of family and peer-worlds, and those of the classroom” (p.418). While, Gerdien et al. (2007), suggests the linkage between a particular religion and moral teaching is challenged by increasing religious diversity and rising secularisation of society. Research by Moulin (2016) on Jewish students in English Post Primary schools also found Jewish students struggled with particular issues related to Jewish identity and suggests, challenges are exacerbated when the school culture differs from the home culture. McAdams and Olson (2010) and Erickson, (1950; 1968), describe the coherence or functionality element of a person’s life story, as a person’s ability to make sense of it all. Coherence requires agreement between the many commitments and roles a person may have. They suggest cohesion between all roles and commitments is correlated with the functionality or workability of a person’s life story. In contrast, if there is confusion between roles adolescents may find ways to reconcile difference or struggle with identity or role confusion. Research reports minority religious students in particular have to develop ‘multiple cultural competence’ resulting from conflicting socialisation

between school and homes (Østberg, 2000; Jacobson, 1997; Zine, 2001; Peek, 2005; Hassan, 2010). In relation to this research, an adolescent who has a Muslim or atheist home identity may struggle to reconcile this with a Catholic school identity. It is reasonable to suggest the greater the disparities between home, school and peer identities the greater the challenge to find coherence. In relation to this study, it is unclear how minority faith and worldview student's identity is shaped in an Irish Catholic school environment.

### 3.7.3.2 The "Possible Self"

Another important understanding relates to the challenges faced by some individuals, not in their personal exploration and commitment to a set of identities but in the freedom to implement or practise a chosen identity. Oyserman, Bubee and Terry (2006) suggests the "possible self" may be impossible or challenged by the social and cultural environment. Some contexts may implicitly or explicitly insist on subjugation of the individual self to protect or preserve the wants, needs, identity and priorities of the group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis 1995). For example an adolescent from a Catholic home attending a Catholic school may decide they are atheist but may realise expressing their atheist identity may be subjugated by both parents and school teachers. Furthermore, a lack of openness to alternative identities in Catholic schools is reported by Glen (2016), whose research found 72% of LGBTI students believed they couldn't be themselves in school and 34% reported homophobic comments by teachers and school staff. In addition, research by Bryan (2008), (2012), suggests Irish Education guidelines on intercultural education privilege the habitus of dominant groups while delegitimising the habitus of non-dominant groups.

In conclusion research supports the need for schools to provide opportunities for students to explore different religions, spiritual beliefs and world views in order to support both Catholic and non-Catholic students identity development and help bridge the gap between students different worlds.

### 3.7.4 Minority Identity, stereotyping and education

This section explores current literature on the identity and stereotyping of both atheist and Muslim students. The rationale for a focus on these groups is twofold. Firstly, it is due to their greater prevalence than most other minority groups in the Irish population. No religion (468,400) or 9.8% and Muslims (63,400) or 1.3%. A decision was made not

to explore Church of Ireland students' identity as although statistics report greater numbers (126,400) or 2.7% than those of Muslim faith, their case is different. Church of Ireland denominational schools are available and the Government also provides additional funding to enable students to attend these schools, on the contrary there are no Muslim and only nine Educate Together Post Primary schools (Census of Ireland 2016), (Dempsey, 2003). Secondly, it is not within the scope of this thesis to develop an understanding of current research on all faith groups' identity as there are over 4,000 different religions.

#### 3.7.4.1 Minority worldview / Atheist Identity and education

In relation to the identity of minority worldview or atheist beliefs, research again suggests beliefs are not monolithic, in truth it is difficult to define atheism as it encompasses, agnostic, humanist, free thinkers, secular, naturalist, new atheists and non-believers. Atheism unlike religions has no well-defined doctrine or belief system, no places to gather, no community structure or support network. However, Watson (2008) suggests there are linkages and commonalities between atheists and it is possible to form groupings and suggests, "David Hume, Karl Marx, Bertrand Russell and Jean Paul Sartre, represent different atheistic responses leading to a variety of forms of atheistic belief 'systems' or world views, for instance, the Enlightenment, Rationalism, Communism, Existentialism and Humanism" (pp.51-52). Nussbaum (1999) in his research work found atheism is not just a rejection of religion but rather a life philosophy or worldview which provides moral direction. Moral direction may be based on the principals of human rights and human dignity. Furthermore, scholars including Baggini, (2003), Comte-Sponville, (2007), Paulos, (2008), Stenger, (2007), challenge the atheist stereotype of immorality and all assert that atheists can live with meaning and direction, not for the purpose of a creator, but for themselves, humanity, and the earth. In essence we all share a common humanity. In relation to education, Watson (2008), Goodman and Mueller (2009) concur that in order to address the spiritual and moral development of all students it is necessary to identify commonalities and include atheistic beliefs and values as a part of the school curriculum. White (2004) concurs and adds it is important not to link morality solely with religion. It is also important to consider research by Davie (1994), Hervieu-leger (2000) and Hella (2006) who report a separation of believing from belonging. Hellas' (2006) school based research found some students were using the term Catholic in order to identify with the

majority but that it was an “empty concept for them” (p147). Moreover, Schwartz (2016) explains identity development is becoming increasingly individualised. Likewise, a number of researchers report the rise of individualism and eclecticism around spirituality among young people (Wright, 2004), (Crawford and Rossiter 1996), ( Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), ( De Souza, Cartwright, McGlip 2004) (Tacey, 2003). In relation to atheism and well-being research supports “atheism as a healthy expression of a natural personality”, rather than as “unnatural and unhealthy”, (Morgan, 2013 p.9). An international study across seven countries with over 8,000 participants “did not support the notion that religious and spiritual life views enhance psychological well-being” (Leurent, Nazareth, Bellón-Saameño, Geerlings, Maarros, Saldivia and King 2013, p. 2109). In contrast a large scale research study by Galen, Krause, Ellison, Kudler, Flannelly (2007), indicated that “religious doubt emerging from the recognition of suffering and evil in the world has a deleterious impact on mental health” (p16). This is reminiscent of the RTE interview with atheist and manic depressive Stephen Fry who eloquently described horrors in our world and hence his disbelief in a good God (Byrne, 2015). The relevance to this thesis is apparent as young people live in an increasingly visual age where human suffering and catastrophes are not only read and spoken about but visually experienced via television, twitter, facebook, podcasts etc. thus igniting more senses which could lead to increased questioning and exploration in order to make sense of our world and most importantly ones position in it. In an Irish context, it is unclear how students who are either atheist, of minority faith or religiously affiliated but not believing, have their needs addressed having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school. Opt Out provision clearly fails to address the moral or spiritual development of minorities. Furthermore, research by Faas, Darmody, Sokolowska (2016) and Mawhinney, Niens, Richardson and Chiba (2012), found that Opting out may exasperate feelings of difference and isolation. Evidence of the ineffectiveness of the opt out provision is provided by the fact that the United Nations Human Rights watchdog has repeatedly (2007), (2011), (2015), called on the Irish Government to address the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion for minorities in Irish schools. While our nearest neighbour, the United Kingdom (U.K.), has had more time to grapple with the needs of a diverse society. Hence, schools in the U.K. have responded to increasing diversity of world views, by the National Framework for Religious Education suggesting a study of atheism as a “faith” be included in religious education curriculum (Watson 2008).

Furthermore, the office for standards in education (OFSTED), in its definitions of spirituality in education is inclusive of atheist beliefs (Hull, 1994). The need for a more pluralist approach in order to address the spiritual and moral needs of all students is encapsulated in the words of Aristotle, “educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all”.

In summation, the population of non- religious or atheists is increasing, similar to other beliefs, their beliefs are varied and fluid requiring exploration. Hence a need arises to include atheism in education curriculum on religion, spirituality and morality.

#### **3.7.4.2 Muslim Identity and education**

Currently in Ireland, Islam is a minority religion. Research suggests a minority group status may place greater emphasis on religious identity than other facets of identity. According to Mirdal, (2000) “religious and ethnic identity especially play an important role for persons belonging to minority groups, often to the point that they predominate above all other aspects of identity”, (p.200). However, it is important not to stereotype Muslims as the fluid and flux nature of Muslim identity is also pertinent in research. Ismail, (2004) and Cesari and McLoughlin (2005) all agreed that in Western societies Muslims’ religious identity is not monolithic. Furthermore, Leonard (2005) in his research on young American Muslims found what he described as “the shaping of creative new identities and coalitions”. Again this is mirrored by Duderija (2007), who notes strikingly new forms of religious-based identity among members of Muslim youth, most especially among western born/raised generation(s). Cesari and McLoughlin, (2005), suggests there are tensions in the West between two extremes of Islam –one reformist and open to change, the other, radical and closed on itself. In relation to Irish Muslim students, A Dublin based Iman Shayk Umar Al-Qadri, requested, the government to support the teaching of Islam in Irish schools in order to avoid youth becoming radicalised, due to uneducated people teaching Islam (Frymann, Rosh, 2016). Mirroring this request, Selim (2014) also said there was a need for school based teaching of Islam. Moreover, Jackson, (2006); Chaudhury and Miller, (2008) have queried in what way the presence of a majority religious ethos and religious education (RE) in schools may hinder the development of secure religious identities for minority belief pupils and marginalise or alienate them from the school community and, ultimately, wider society. While Gash (2016) contends religious conflict may have

more to do with identity security and belonging rather than religious differences and explains we all have an innate survival instinct to recognise difference and a tendency to reject differences which challenge the coherence of our life story. From the perspective of social cohesion, Bash (2001), warns of the dangers of separatist schooling which reinforces the ethnocentrism of some minority communities. Astor and Grier (2015), argues in order to achieve 'deep equality' it is necessary to create spaces for social relationships and social bonds to flourish between majority and minority citizens, schools can and do provide this space. These findings question the appropriateness of section 37 of the 1998 Employment Equality Act and section 7.3(c) of the Equal Status Act (2000-2011) as they support segregation and discrimination of minority belief students in State funded schools. Furthermore, the state appears to renege on its responsibility to provide appropriate religious education to both Muslim and atheist students, leaving decisions to school patrons and boards of management to manage their schools in accordance with their ethos (Enright 2011). O'Sullivan (2005) explains the States policy documents may be rich in 'interculturalism' ideals but the practical implementation is left to individual schools. This opt out by the state was poignant in the hijab controversy, the State refused to give schools guidelines, thus leaving school boards to make decisions (Rougier, 2013). The consequence of this decision is that, some schools allow Muslim students to wear the hijab, while others do not. Therefore a school Board of Management may individually decide, whether they will or will not respect and embrace Muslim and other minority rights to religious dress, identity and practices (Devine 2011). This research endeavor was focused on ascertaining the reality of the situation on the ground for the participants.

#### **3.7.4.3 Stereotyping and Identity development**

The link with stereotyping and identity development is explained by Mead (1997), who proposed identity or a sense of self is developed through relationships, attachments and encounters with other people. Likewise, Crossley (2000) suggest our identity relies on feedback we get from others. While research by Crocker and Major, (1989), report self-esteem is affected by prejudice and discrimination from outside the cultural group, (p. 624). It is reasonable to suggest that negative stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination tends to devalue the person and makes the path towards secure identity achievement

more challenging. The theoretical perspective of identity humility which underpins this research maintains an individual focus is essential to avoid stereotyping.

#### **3.7.4.4 Atheist Stereotyping**

Nash (2003), reports, “atheophobia, like all other phobias, thrives in a state of ignorance” (p. 7). Goodman and Mueller (2009), whose research focused on non-believers in U.S. colleges reports “non-believers in education are invisible, marginalised and stigmatised” (p.55). Likewise a study by Harper, (2007), reports nonreligious people are likely to be considered a maligned group to belong too. Again Goodman and Mueller (2009) explains atheism may be characterised as a “dark force that rejects the values of goodness, ethics, morality, and purpose” (p.56). According to Psalm 14 of the Bible, people who don’t believe in God are filthy, corrupt fools, entirely incapable of doing any good (cited in Zuckermann, 2009). Furthermore, research by Downey (2004), found that nonreligious people who live within predominantly religious societies are vulnerable to discrimination. In an Irish context, religious discrimination in State funded schools is legalised by section 37 of the Employment Equality Acts (1998-2015) and section 7.3(c) of the Equal Status Act (2000-2015). According to Noddings (2008) “Christians, Jews and Muslims learn to “tolerate” one another, but unbelievers remain beyond the pale” (p.370). This reality has resulted in those who do not commit to a religious doctrine identifying as humanist or free thinker rather than atheists in an attempt to avoid the stigma associated with the term atheism. While religious conformity theory explains, some who decide they do not believe in their prescribed religion, tell nobody and instead go about as normal inclusive of attending church but without believing. Hence it is understandable that research by Weber, Pargament and kunik (2012) found non-religious people find negative perceptions of their worldview distressing.

#### **3.7.4.5 Muslim Stereotypes**

Stereotyping of Islamic culture and Muslims is common in Western Europe and the United States. Events like 9/11 have fuelled a portrayal of Islam as a violent religion, (Bouma, 2011). Morey and Yapin (2011), described some of the Muslim stereotypes as follows: “the bearded fanatic, the veiled, oppressed female, or the shadowy terrorist plotting our destruction” (p.i). From an Irish perspective research by Carr (2016), reports “Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism as established realities in Ireland” (p.5).

Carr (2016), makes the point that discriminatory school admission policies based on a person religion has implications for the social development and sense of belonging afforded to Irish Muslims. Moreover, in his research, Carr (2016), found “Muslim students felt excluded and indeed abused through discriminatory practices visited upon them by teachers, and classmates” (p.30). His research mirrored findings from research in Irish Primary schools conducted by Devine, Kenny and Macneela (2008), where Muslim students reported verbal abuse from classmates eg ‘is it true your Dad is a terrorist?’, and staff eg. “take off that stupid thing [hijab] on your head” (p.380). Furthermore, Carr (2016) reports a failure on the part of staff to address anti-Muslim racism in the classroom context. In common with this research, Carr (2016), reports concerns regarding younger generations of Irish Muslims:

Born and raised here, Muslim students reported experiences of identity crisis in a number of ways. Feelings of exclusion as iterated by some of these participants were compounded by feelings of confusion in terms of identity. Participants referred on more than one occasion to the term identity crisis (p.8).

Exclusion, challenging multiple roles and negative stereotyping may impact negatively on Muslim students’ identity development. The crisis is a consequence of a number of factors, firstly, Muslim, students and parents reported not being believed or allowed to be Irish, for example:

“Fellow students will ...ask you ‘where you’re from?’ and you go Irish and they’ll go ‘where are you really from?’ [Sadia](p.57).

Moreover, “most people wouldn’t believe me that I’m Irish....‘no I’m Irish’, I’m like yeah, I was born in the Rotunda (National Maternity hospital, Dublin) (laughs); and like yeah it’s most of the places I go, I’d have to convince them that I’m Irish...” [Zaynab (p.59).

Similarly, “those who convert/revert to Islam are perceived as traitors to Ireland and its assumed inherent relationship to Catholicness” (p.59).

Secondly, exclusionary and discriminatory education policies further promote the idea of not belonging or the ‘otherness of a Muslim identity’. Thirdly, negative stereotyping impacts on self-esteem and further challenges a secure identity development. Fourthly,

some students may struggle to find cohesion between multiple identity, eg Irish, Arab, home and school identities. One student articulated his difficulty as follows:

“Then obviously you can’t really be seen as Arab either or you not only ‘cos you’re not Arab enough to be Arab”. (p.58). Carr (2016) (2014) also reports Muslim women who wear the hijab were particularly vulnerable to exclusionary practices, even when a school policy explicitly allowed the wearing of the hijab, implicit barriers were reported, for example, a teacher comments ; ‘when you take off that stupid thing [hijab] off your head you can hear me now, ok’...(p.32). Moreover, research in the Irish context reports Muslim women are more than twice as likely to experience anti-Muslim hostility when compared to Muslim men and are targeted when wearing the hijab, niqab and other items of female clothing, (Carr, 2016, Zempi, Chakraborti, 2014). In tandem with research on self-stereotyping, identity crisis, confusion and frustration, Karim, a Muslim mother has fears regarding social cohesion. Karim shared her fears for the radicalization of young Irish Muslims as follows: “If the nation don’t let them feel that they are part of the country, and they are Irish, they will start acting against [it]. It’s not going to be good for anybody” (Carr, 2016. p.60). These experiences of Muslim students in Irish education is in direct contrast with the recommendations of the Health Service Executive, The Department of Education and the Department of Health recommendations to schools which states; “Protective factors in the school environment that help to build resilience in young people include: providing a positive school climate and ensuring a sense of belonging and connectedness to school” (HSE, DES, DH, 2013). No research study was found on the experiences of atheist students in Irish education.

#### **3.7.4.6 Identity choices in reaction to stereotyping and prejudice**

Research by Moulin (2015), proposes three groups of identity choices adopted by adolescents in schools where their own beliefs, religious observances or religious principles are not supported and they experience stereotyping, prejudice and criticism of their beliefs or affiliations from their peers and teachers. It is noteworthy that participating students attended schools with a religious and non-religious character. The three identity choices are named as religious identity seeking, religious identity declaration and religious identity masking. A description of each choice follows;

Religious identity seeking

Moulin (2015); Chaudhury and Miller (2008), explain internal religious identity seeking as students, who are already socialised into a religion, look within their religious tradition to find answers to school based religious challenges. The modes used by adolescents to help them included prayer and faith. Another crucial source of support for maintaining a religious identity construction articulated by students were adults who they viewed as religious role-models inclusive of co-religious teachers (Good & Willoughby, 2007; Rich & Schachter, 2012). Role-models helped students to deepen and defend their faith. Some students also reported challenges to their religious beliefs as opportunities to build up rewards in the afterlife (Moulin, 2015).

#### Religious identity declaration

Religious identity declaration is where students declare their religious affiliations publically and endeavour to educate others in order to oppose stereotyping and perceived prejudice and discrimination (Peek, 2005; Moulin 2015). However, it was noteworthy that they avoid evangelisation, which could be considered as respectful of the equal value of others beliefs. Moreover students reported that having initially tried to hide their beliefs that they found a “sense of Peace” once they declared their beliefs, while acknowledging this took courage and “guts”. Some students employed humour to counteract tensions, for example one Muslim student, named his Urdu class as his “terrorist class” (Moulin, 2015 p.498).

#### Religious identity masking

The choice made by some students was not to reveal their religious affiliations at school by avoiding religious practices and symbolic markers, Faircloth (2012) described this choice as wearing a mask. In Moulin (2015) research students reported that this choice sometimes followed negative experiences of identity declaration. Particularly it was considered the appropriate path when students felt it was too difficult to defend their beliefs in light of curricular misrepresentations or due to intrafaith conflict and tensions. In addition to Moulin’s three identity choices other theorists including Latrofa, Vaes and Cadinu (2012), suggest a fourth identity choice related to religious identity seeking which they describe as self-stereotyping.

#### Self-stereotyping

The concept of self-stereotyping evolves from theories that an awareness that one belongs to a devalued group, likely brings its members to increase the need to identify

with that group (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Similarly, Brown, Vivian, Heuston (1990) found adolescence tend to identify with those who are similarly stereotyped. Likewise, Ysseldyk, Matheson, Ainsman (2010), in their research found non-religious students found a sense of belongingness with other students with similar worldviews. This is particularly relevant in relation to adolescents, who have an intense need to belong (Levine, 2000). Latrofa, Vaes and Cadinu (2012), developed the understanding of self –stereotyping whereby low-status group members protected themselves when their group identity was threatened through increased self-stereotyping. They explain self-stereotyping is a defence-like reaction to the internalising of a threat against a persons in group. A consequence is that the most vulnerable minority group members may internalise negative stereotypes and risk becoming radicalised thus threatening social cohesion. Shaykh Dr Umar Al-Qadri, chairman of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council, feels ERB is necessary in schools in order to teach tolerance and promote social cohesion, he fears isolating Muslim students may lead to the radicalisation of some young Muslims (Frymann, Rouch, 2016). Hence more research is needed to understand students' differential abilities to internalise or externalise threats. A greater understanding could help break the cycle whereby those with poorer self-esteem are most vulnerable to internalising negativity. Research is also warranted on how lone minority belief students in rural Irish schools, who may have no other student in their class or even school who share their world view find a sense of belonging or connectedness if their belief is stereotyped.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

Religion and worldview is an important part of a person's identity. A main task of adolescence is endeavouring to establish a secure identity. Research suggests exploration of both belief confirming and belief threatening sources helps to build adolescents identity and moral development. In contrast negative stereotyping, prejudice and discriminatory practise challenge student's self-esteem, identity security and sense of belonging, a worst case scenario is the adoption of negative stereotypes and a vulnerability to radicalisation. Schools have a role to play in supporting students toward the development of a secure identity by acknowledging the stage of development of their students and providing both opportunities and spaces to explore multiple religious and worldview identities. Identity humility theory supports the need

for an individual focus and an avoidance of stereotyping coupled with upholding student's individual freedoms. While research by Brandt (1994) points at the need to accept difference and for educators, "to take a strong stand and defend equality and justice for all groups, no matter how stigmatized they are within society" (Brandt, 1994 p. 31). While Carr (2016), recommends, legislative change in the context of school enrolment policies and staff recruitment. Furthermore he advocates for the protection of rights of all children and staff to manifest their faith identity. The researcher suggests there is a case for positive discrimination to redress the imbalance in the numbers of teachers from minorities entering teacher training. In addition identity humility theory supports the need for communication which Nash (2003) agrees is essential to tackle stereotyping.

This type of dialogue "requires direct, give-and-take participation with all types of religious otherness, including non-religious otherness. It insists that we allow the 'other' to get under our skins, to engage with us, to disturb us, and even, if the circumstances warrant, to change us, (p. 19).

Furthermore, Noddings (2008), suggests the need for communication between believers and non-believers is essential for social cohesion.

Having identified and explained the theoretical perspective and theoretical framework underpinning this research. The next chapter outlines how the theories were employed within this thesis. Furthermore chapter four describes the research methodology.

## **Chapter 4: Conceptual Framework and Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

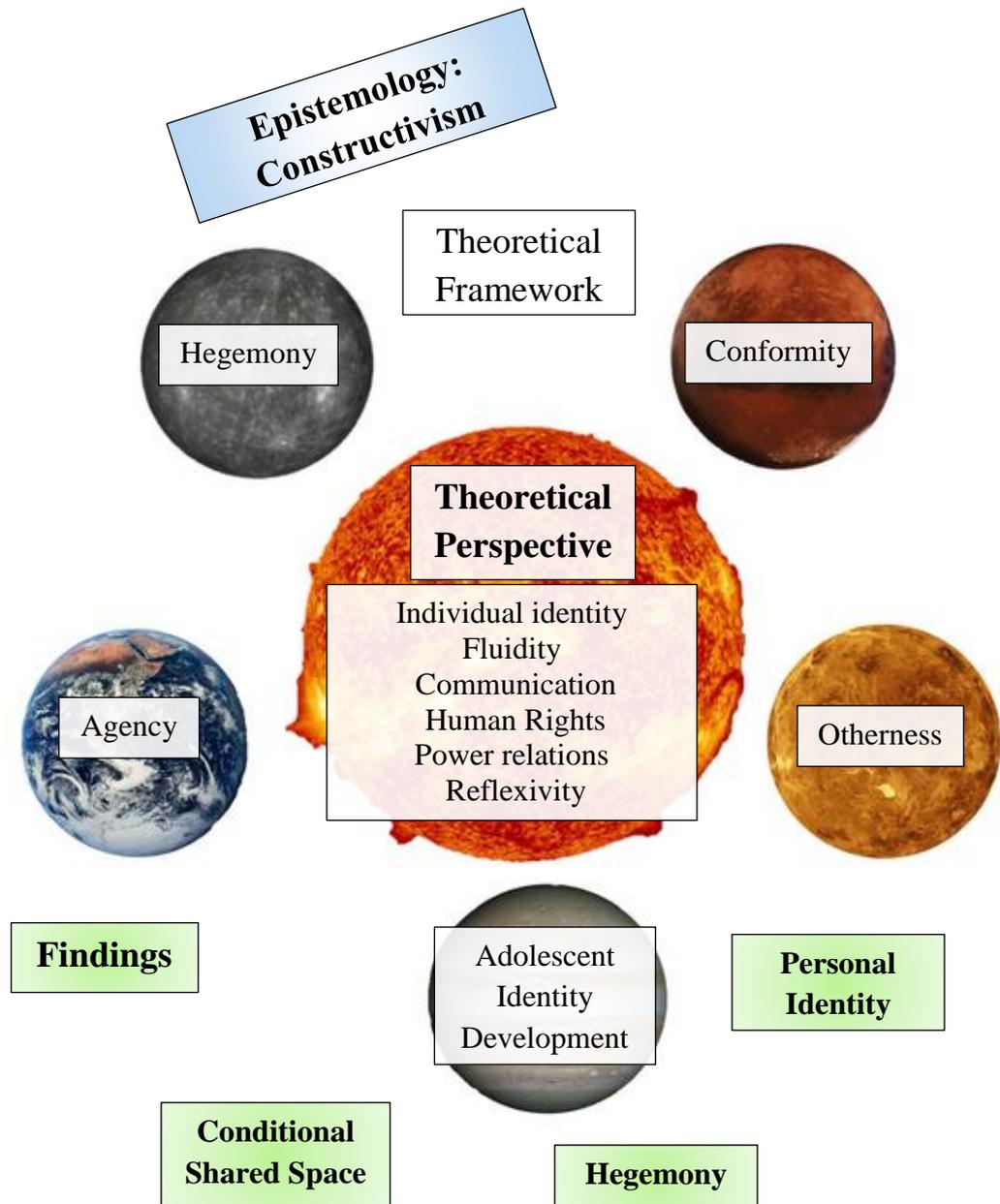
Chapter four provides an outline, description and explanation for the conceptual framework for this research study. According to Maxwell (2005), it comprises "the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that supports and informs your research" (p.33). The conceptual framework for this study is comprised of four components: epistemology, theoretical perspective, theoretical framework and methodology. The methodology is identified as qualitative comprised of semi-structured interviews. The positionality of this method is described and justification for

its use is detailed alongside a description of its implementation. An explanation is provided of constructivism and how it aligns with both identity humility and the use of semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, an explanation is provided of how the theories relate to the theoretical perspective of identity humility and also how the theories are employed to analyse the data, hence facilitating the reader in evaluating the research, (Grant and Osanloo, 2014; Mertens, 1998). The ethical and political considerations of the research are explained. The research validity, reliability, reflexivity, triangulation, limitations and challenges are addressed.

## **4.2 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework is diagrammatically presented to help clarify its use. The analogy of a solar system is used to further clarify and visualise the framework. At the core of the framework is the theoretical perspective of identity humility (Sun), inside which the core elements of identity humility reside namely: Individual identity, Fluidity, Communication, Human Rights, Power relations and Reflexivity. It is contended that these core elements need to work in unison in order for identity humility to progress or using the analogy, to enable the sun to shine. In orbit around the core of identity humility, are the theories (planets), namely, hegemony, conformity, adolescent identity development, otherness and agency. Finally an outer boundary defines the space (galaxy), in which the students' experiences are positioned; these experiences are encapsulated into themes namely personal identity, conditional shared space and hegemony. The students' experiences are held in place by gravity and encapsulated in a space within which identity humility and the theories also reside and assist the analyses of the student's experience. Many linkages, or the force of gravity, draws the literature, the theories and the data together around identity humility. The links or how the literature and theories were used to analysis the data will be explicitly explained in this chapter. Moreover, positioning the findings within the framework aligns with constructivism by identifying the myriad of factors involved in making meaning within this research. To build further on the galaxy analogy the key theorists could be visualised as stars. The epistemology for this research is constructivism which exists within the atmosphere, and so impacts on all elements of the research study.

**Figure 5: Conceptual Framework**



### 4.3 Epistemology: Constructivism

Reflecting an interpretivist paradigm, the epistemology or world view underpinning this research is constructivism as described by Crotty (1998),

Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon.

In this view of things, subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning (p.9).

Likewise Lincoln and Guba (2003) agree there are multiple realities due to the diversity of the individuals who construct them. Realities are created by how individuals think about and understand the world around them rather than by changing the world. An advantage of constructivism is that it avoids over simplification by supporting the idea of multiple realities, hence addressing the complexity of the real world (Jonassen, 1994). Gash (2016) further explains the limitations of our knowledge “we cannot assume that our knowledge is more than a human model of experience” (p.181). Reality remains mysterious. Our realities, with small “rs”, remain personal and constrained by our experiences of events and people”. Moreover Gash (2015) supports the need for negative feedback to challenge our constructed realities as necessary to find a common or shared space. Furthermore Gash (2015), explains if we take responsibility for our constructions of reality while acknowledging the limitations, we can better address conflict. In essence when we accept we all construct our own realities then we can consider how these differences came about, rather than seeing differences as a threat. In relation to this research the findings represent eighteen different understandings of the realities of attending a school with a Catholic ethos. Hence the findings could be described as a collaborative construction of knowledge through discussion. Vygotsky’s writings about constructivism in education are useful in this context, as he explains, the learner, or in this case, the researcher, must constantly interpret, critique and re-evaluate previous knowledge in order to comprehend a topic. In other words the literature review inclusive of the key theories and the background knowledge on historical, legislative and current RE provisions are similar to what Vygotsky’s describes as scaffolding which enables further understandings (University College Dublin resource, 2017). The key theorists in this example could be considered the “more knowledgeable others” with which the researcher has to engage in order to empower her own understanding of the collected data (Gredler, 1991). Furthermore, Creswell (2007) explains that subjective meanings are impacted by a myriad of factors including “interactions with others, cultural and historical norms” (p.21). Therefore chapter two explored the historical, constitutional and legislative factors which may impact on minority belief student’s school experience. Furthermore, an understanding

of a Catholic school ethos and RE was also developed in order to enhance the researcher's understanding. Hence the context in which the participants live and construct their individual realities were examined. Moreover the understanding that the researcher's own background shaped her interpretations is addressed in the section on reflexivity. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009), warns "the researchers are themselves prisoners of their own society and its taken-for-granted concepts, thus helping to reproduce the status quo" (p.161).

#### **4.3.1 Constructivism and Identity Humility**

As a theoretical perspective, identity humility aligns with a constructivist epistemology as neither determine absolutes, rather both share an understanding that knowledge and truth are complex, socially constructed and dependent on a myriad of factors including time and place. Golafshani, (2003) reports "multiple or possibly diverse constructions of reality" within individuals minds (p.604), whilst Hipps (1993), suggests constructivism accepts that reality is changing and that both time and place are important. Likewise identity humility acknowledges fluidity as important in understanding human experiences. The focus is on multiple accounts of students' experiences of a Roman Catholic school ethos. The aim is to "engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features" (Johnson, 1995, p. 4). Both identity humility and constructivism facilitate this aim. Likewise, the chosen method of semi-structured interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is consistent with constructivism and identity humility, as this approach to learning is other orientated and "enables the researcher to develop subjective meanings based on the diversity of participants' views of their situations" (Creswell, 2013. p.20).

#### **4.3.2 Constructivism and semi-structured interviews**

A social constructivist worldview is coherent with the use of semi-structured interviews, which enabled the researcher to gather "the complexity of views rather than narrow the meaning into a few categories or ideas" (Creswell, 2007.p.20). A narrower meaning would be supported by using structured interviews or a quantitative methodology such as questionnaires or surveys. Moreover, Creswell (2007) suggests within social constructivism, "the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation (p.20), hence the researcher provides many direct

quotations from the research participants in the findings and analysis chapters. An aim of constructivism is to try to uncover meaning from data, in order to do this the researcher used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Furthermore, McKinley (2015), reports that a constructivist approach needs to focus on critical analysis and academic conventions. This involves citing evidence, supporting claims with the literature and addressing counter claims. Citing others' work is important in developing critical thinking and in the construction of the "authorial self" (p.184). Hence the researcher supports her analysis of the students' accounts with reference to current literature.

#### **4.4 Theoretical Perspective – Identity humility**

This section explains how identity humility theory was employed in this thesis, it also explains how the elements within identity humility theory were integral to this research endeavor. Initially, identity humility theory establishes the researchers' theoretical perspective and provides a contextual analysis of factors outside the data. Next it is used as a theory to analyse specific data and explain the experiences of minority faith and minority worldview students. Furthermore it is used as a framework to link other theories and develop the analysis of the experiences of minority faith and minority worldview students. It is also recommended as a framework which could be used to assist schools in balancing the constitutional right of the Catholic majority to choose a Catholic religious education with the rights of non-Catholics minorities to attend local schools and feel they equally belong. The next section explains how the core elements of identity humility are integral to this thesis.

The core elements of individual identity and communication were realised in this research as the chosen methodology of semi-structured interviews respected and afforded students the time and space to explain how they experienced a Catholic school ethos. Moreover the importance of communication through dialogical and interpretive RE was realised under the theme of conditional shared space. The relevance of the communication element of humility is further embedded in this research in the recommendations and conclusion section. An understanding of fluidity was also essential, as there have been socio-political shifts within the lifetime of this research. For example the formation of groups such as Education Equality and Equate and most recently the proposed removal of faith formation or practical RE from Community

National schools. Similarly, addressing the fluidity inherent in peoples' beliefs and adolescent development is integral to understanding students' experiences. The human rights element of identity humility is explicitly linked in this thesis with constitutional and legislative provision and within theories of hegemony, othering and agency. Human rights are acknowledged within the analysis of all three themes. Regarding power relations, power claims relevant to this research are addressed in detail in the historical, constitutional and legislative and religious education sections. Furthermore, power imbalances are inherent in Gramsci's theory of hegemony, as explained by the concepts of a dominant worldview, "fatalism" and counter-hegemonies. Power imbalances are also linked with theories of conformity, othering and agency. Hence an understanding of power relations is used in the analysis of all three themes. Finally the core element of reflexivity is evident in the theme conditional shared space, particularly in relation to teacher agency. Moreover the researcher endeavored throughout this research to be reflexive in order to minimise stereotyping and bias.

#### **4.5 Theoretical Framework**

This section explains how the theories underpinning this research were employed. According to Grant and Osanloo (2014), "a contractor could not possibly know what kind of house to build without instructions mapped out ahead of time. Similarly, one cannot guide a reader through thinking about a dissertation study without a clear explication of the study's theoretical framework" (p.2). Moreover, the rational, relevance and implications of the theories are clarified. In line with Mertens (1998), the researcher acknowledges that the theoretical framework "has implications for every decision made in the research process" (p. 3), for example the research questions emerged from the literature review and the theories are used in the analysis to understand the students' multiple voices. Moreover, the recommendations are advanced in light of both the research data and theories.

##### **4.5.1 Hegemony**

This research endeavors through the lens of Gramsci's theory of hegemony to analyse minority belief students' experience. Seeking to understand or even reveal the power relations that may have been rendered invisible by hegemony, habitus, lack of consciousness and misrecognition. Navarro (2006) suggests, self-critical knowledge that discloses the 'sources of power' and reveals 'the reasons that explain social

asymmetries and hierarchies' can itself become 'a powerful tool to enhance social emancipation' (pp. 15-16). In this research, hegemony theory is used to explain the wider context in which the experiences of minority belief students evolve. Hegemony theory is also used to analyse the research data, most particular within the theme of hegemony, where it is employed to explain how a Catholic identity is supported and accepted as normal or the dominant worldview, while a non -catholic identity is devalued and challenged by Catholic centric practises which at times may be unconsciously supported due to historical habitudes. Similarly, within the theme of a conditional shared space, the conditional nature of the sharing, which favours a Catholic world view over a non-Catholic world view is explored. The concept of counter hegemony is used to understand those students and teachers who attempt and or succeed in not conforming to Catholic centric practises. Alliances are understood to be necessary to maintain a hegemony, the sections on the historical, legislative and constitutional provisions for Post Primary education clearly address the Church State alliance, while forging an understanding of resultant social inequalities.

#### **4.5.2 Conformity**

Theories of conformity explain how and why people conform to a given hegemony, these understandings are employed in the chapter on a conditional shared space to explain how minority students negotiate and attempt to conform to Catholic centric practises, for example by attending retreats, Catholic prayers and services meditation and graduation ceremonies.

#### **4.5.3 Othering**

Bauman's theory of othering is used to explain how Catholics within the school system are set up as the normal group in opposition to those of other religions or world view. Moreover it addresses the particular difficulties experienced by atheist students as atheism maybe regarded as oppositional to Catholicism and subjugated. The implications of othering and stereotyping on the identity development of minority belief students is analysed in the theme personal identity.

#### **4.5.4 Agency**

The concept of agency helps to explain the myriad of personal experiences advanced by participants. Disparate accounts may be understood as impacted on by the participants'

agency to accept or reject dominant discourses and values. In particular agency theory is used to interpret students account of RE particularly of Leaving Cycle RE which goes beyond curricular boundaries. Teachers are understood as agentic practitioners with a constrained capacity to exert change or maintain the status quo. Student accounts uncover the efforts of some teachers who act as agents of change in trying to bridge the gap between curricular guidelines and student's needs and interests. Agency theory is also used to explain the factors which affect the personal identity development of students.

#### **4.5.5 Adolescent Identity Development**

Theories of identity and moral development are employed to explain the impact of current practise on students' identity development. Moreover the need for acknowledgement and acceptance of all identities is explained. While in the recommendation section the theory is used to support the development of opportunities for students to explore different beliefs systems.

#### **4.6 Methodology**

This section outlines the methodology of this research study. The aim of this research was to understand the lived experiences of minority faith and minority world view students attending Post Primary schools with a Catholic ethos. Five research questions emerged from the literature review. The chosen methodology is qualitative rather than quantitative as the focus is on understanding students' experiences rather than quantifying them. Qualitative research is defined by Strauss and Corbin, (1990), as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (p. 17). Similarly, Golafshani, (2003), reports that real life experiences are not bounded by statistics or easily quantifiable. While qualitative research findings come from real-world settings where the "phenomenon of interest unfold naturally" (Patton, 2001, p. 39). Quantitative research is objective and may facilitate prediction and generalisation of findings, while qualitative research is subjective and finds understanding and insights which may be helpful in similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997). While Pathak, Jena and Kalra (2013), report qualitative research provides the researcher with an understanding of "people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviours and interactions" (p.192). Hence for the

purpose of this research where understanding students' experience was the focus, a qualitative rather than a quantitative methodology was considered more suitable.

#### **4.6.1 Research Method – Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured student interviews were the chosen method to help the researcher understand at a deeper level the experiences of minority belief students of a Catholic school ethos (Stokes and Bergin, 2006 and Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Initially, the researcher considered the use of questionnaires. However questionnaires do not afford respondents the opportunity to express their feelings on a topic (MacLeod, 2014). While, Ribbins (2007) as cited in Briggs and Coleman (2007) suggests interviews allow an exploration of peoples' views which cannot be achieved in the same way by any other method. Likewise (Geertz, 1973), believes in-depth interviews can uncover insights into peoples' experiences. Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2007) suggests semi-structured interview provides participants with an opportunity to describe their interpretations of the topic. As the researcher was seeking to hear the opinions, insights and first-hand experiences of students, semi-structured interviews were appropriate as they afforded each participant the opportunity to relate his/her experiences and unique interpretations. The researcher chose semi-structured rather than structured interviews as she was aware that her own preconditioning might limit data collection had questions been structured. In essence according to Confucius "we do not know what we do not know". Moreover identity humility also posits the need to listen to other views in order to avoid stereotyping. The inherent flexibility of semi-structured rather than structured interviews allows new insights on issues that may hitherto have evaded the researcher. Furthermore the researcher was aware she was exploring new territory and knew semi-structured and open-ended questions in tandem with giving the interviewee opportunities to digress and speak about unforeseen issues and topics would provide richer data than structured questions. The following quote explains the researcher's understanding of semi-structured interviews: "a schedule is prepared but it is sufficiently open-ended to enable the contents to be reordered, digressions and expansions made, new avenues to be included, and further probing to be undertaken" (Cohen et al. 2007 p.146). Gergen (1999), suggests it is important that a researcher is aware of their own assumptions, beliefs and expectations about the interviewees and that he endeavours to suspend them in order to understand another person's view. Gergen's understanding is in line with the theoretical perspective of

identity humility which underpins this research study, hence the researcher was aware of the need to be open to a diversity of student opinion, interpretation and experience and to reflect on her own assumptions about interviewees. The researcher spent time prior to each interview studying each religion or belief system in order to improve her understanding and knowledge. Interview questions were prepared but acted as a guide only. It was considered very important to avoid leading questions but to use prior knowledge only to engage the student in meaningful discussion and to explore and clarify issues. Open-ended questions were used and students were encouraged to take the lead, their responses were then used as a springboard, to probe deeper. The interviewer sought to hear and respect the individuality and voice of each student. At the design phase many decisions were made. The decision to interview students rather than Principals, teachers or parents was to allow and respect students' ability to interpret and explain their individual school experiences. An observational research study was also considered but rejected as it was felt that teachers would behave differently if being observed and the feelings of non-Catholic students would be too difficult to assess. Furthermore, individual interviews were chosen over group interviews as a better means to explore sensitive issues. According to Stokes and Bergin (2006) "The value of using interviews as a research method is that they can get to the heart of the issue, they provide depth and detail and can overcome subtleties in attitudes, and are superior in terms of originality and value to group interviews"(p.34). While according to Writing (2015) a disadvantage of group interviews is that the individual may be influenced by other group members, some may be particularly reluctant to share opinions which are contrary to the beliefs and views of other group members. A group interview may have been challenging as the full spectrum of religiosity would have to be accommodated. Moreover, the researcher felt the diversity of the non-Catholic group was more easily acknowledged and respected by individual rather than group interview.

#### **4.6.2 Student voice**

In relation to student voice and human rights, the United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child (1992), (UNCRC), is relevant as it "positions children as worthy of dignity, status and voice" (Simmons, Graham and Thomas, 2015 p.131). In particular Article 12 of the charter required that:

States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Therefore this research methodology aligns with the UNCRC position as it gives voice to children on matters of religious education affecting them. It is noteworthy that the majority of students interviewed were in senior cycle and hence their views have substantive weight. Research by Cook-Sather (2006); Simmons, Graham and Thomas (2015) also support the need for the inclusion of student's voices to influence educational progress. While research by Tucker (2011), (2013) found listening to students voices helped to increase understanding and deepen debate on issues affecting them. Likewise, France (2004), reports that students have important things to say. Furthermore research from Australian Universities, reports an increasing acknowledgement of the importance of and need to embed student voice in processes which aim to improve the student experience of teaching and learning. However in an Irish Post Primary school context, Fleming (2015) reports the development of student councils, as the main construct for student voice which he describes as "largely tokenistic and functionally redundant" (p.237). Moreover his research also found the externally mandated school evaluation model was centred on improving school performativity and lacks any "significant motivation towards student voice" (p.238). Fleming (2015) suggests barriers to student voice include a view that it may undermine the authority of adults (Kilbourne, 1998). Moreover, cultural norms and hegemonies further support the maintenance of the status quo and the silencing of oppositional voices (Bragg, 2001; Ellsworth, 1989). The daily experience of students in Irish schools suggests that the voices of school management and teachers are privileged above those of students and parents (Devine, 2001, 2009; Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Hence a strength of this research is provision of a space for student voice, uncommon in an Irish education context.

#### **4.6.3 Ethical Considerations**

As a research student of DCU, ethical permission was a prerequisite. It was applied for and granted by the DCU research ethics committee on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2013 (Appendix A). As this research involved interviewing children, rigorous ethical standards were adhered to at all stages of the research process. Denzin and Lincoln (2003), report respect for participants necessitates carefully and honestly explaining to participants

what the research is about. In relation to this research all students were provided with a plain language statement which described the research, moreover, the researcher was available to answer any questions or address any concerns prior to the interviews. Contact information for the research supervisor and DCU ethics office were also provided. (Appendix B). Consent forms signed by both the participating student and their parent or guardian were a prerequisite as advised by DCU ethics guidelines (Appendix C). It was understood by the researcher that interviewing children presented particular concerns regarding consent, Morrow and Richards (1996), discuss childrens' differential competencies and how very young children or vulnerable groups are less likely to be able to understand the implications of being involved in research and suggest interviews may not be the correct method in some cases. However, the youngest participant in this research was 15 years and most were between 17-18yrs, all were competent in reading and understanding the research process and purpose. Moreover, prior to commencing the interview, each participant was again advised of their voluntary status and also of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were further advised of the confidentiality of the data gathered. Further assurance of anonymity was guaranteed by stating, that neither schools nor pupils would be identified by name and that all transcripts and recordings of interviews would be stored on a password protected computer and destroyed after a period not exceeding 5 years. Another important consideration when children are involved in research is to address the potentially vulnerable position of children resulting from their views being afforded less respect than adults (Morrow and Richards, 1996). Similarly, Rubin and Rubin's (2011) description of interviews as a relationship whereby both the researcher and interviewee influence each other, raises an important point for ethical consideration. The researcher as an adult was aware of the need to minimise any power differential when interviewing the students. The researcher was open and thankful to the interviewee from the onset of the interview and endeavoured to create a relaxed and supportive atmosphere and rigorously avoided any patronising.

The place where the interview is conducted is also an important consideration. The interviews were conducted in the interviewees' respective schools which could be considered problematic, due to the nature of this research and as Morrow and Richards (1996) suggest students' "may not feel in a position to dissent because most tasks in a school are compulsory" (p.109). However, the researcher insisted no student be singled

out for participation by the co-operating teachers, rather all students were invited to participate and only those who volunteered were interviewed. It is noteworthy that one interview was conducted in a student's place of worship, at the request of the participant's parent. Rubin and Rubin (2011), note the researcher has deep ethical responsibilities in developing the interview relationship. Hence, the researcher before starting each interview ensured the interviewee understood the confidential nature of the interview in order to allay any potential concerns. James and Busher (2007), report a researcher has responsibility to ensure the "trust, dignity, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity" of the participant are upheld (p.101). Pring (2000) also writes about the need to respect the dignity and confidentiality of the participants. Cohen, Kahn and Steeves (2000) advise care is taken when conducting educational research especially when using in-depth interviews and particularly when children are involved, as sensitive issues may arise. The researcher was conscious of her responsibility and was cautious in questioning and probing sensitive issues. The temptation to probe deeper on sensitive issues was rejected in order to avoid any participant distress and may have impacted on the depth of understanding achieved. Although the researcher was very careful not to cause any harm or stress to the participants, provisions were in place, should the need for counselling or additional support arise. However this was not necessary.

Another important element of ethical research is ensuring unbiased gathering, analysis and interpretation of data. The researcher believes, the strength of this study lies in the provision of a voice for a hitherto silent minority within the Irish Post Primary education system. Hence it was a research priority to ensure an honest interpretation of the data ensured the students' voice is heard. All interviews were recorded using a mobile phone and digitally uploaded and then transcribed to ensure accurate representation of the interview. Issues of confidentiality were addressed by using pseudonyms for the participants for example S1. Punch & Punch (1986), suggest researchers need to act responsibly and to use common sense. The researcher was experienced in working with students and is registered with the Teaching Council.

#### **4.6.4 Participant Selection**

The focus of this research was to gain an understanding of the experiences of minority belief and minority world view Post Primary students. Hence purposive sampling was used (Ezzy, 2002). According to Ritchie (2003) it involves selecting participants

according to criteria determined by the research purpose. In this case the selection criteria were minority belief and attendance at a Post Primary school with a Catholic ethos. It is understood that purposive sampling would not produce results that are representative of the whole school population. Initially it was envisaged a larger sample size would have been used, however due to the considerable difficulties experienced in finding students willing to be interviewed the sample size was eighteen. Eight students of minority faith and ten students of minority worldview who were attending a Post Primary school with a Catholic ethos were interviewed. The researcher believes saturation was reached after twelve students were interviewed, as no new codes were created during data analysis.

#### **4.6.5 Finding Participants**

One of the participant selection criteria was attendance at a school with a Catholic ethos, hence the researcher initially concentrated on contacting Post Primary schools to find participants. The schooldays website (<http://www.schooldays.ie/>) was used to access contact details for schools. In the first instance schools were chosen which were within a reasonable distance to the researchers home, (within a 50km radius), this is called convenience purposive sampling. Tongco (2007) describes this method as most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain, while practicalities of limited time and resources also make it a workable strategy. In order to minimise biases, the county where the researcher is a teacher was avoided, thus minimising insider knowledge and selection bias as the researcher would have most contact with teachers from this county, due to shared in-service training and trade union involvement. The researcher had no previous contact with any of the schools contacted. However due to a lack of engagement by schools the search had to be widened to include more schools. Unfortunately, after two months of sustained effort, whereby all Post Primary schools with a Catholic ethos in two counties were contacted initially by email and then repeatedly by phone or by school visits until a decision was made, only five participants were found. Difficulties in finding schools willing to participate included schools refusal, not replying to emails and phone calls. Two schools initially agreed to engage but then reconsidered. One withdrew support on the day the plain language statements and consent forms were delivered. The other school gave out forms but none were collected and the Principal became uncontactable. The researcher made the decision that a different approach was necessary as time constraints were a

cause of concern. The new approach to find willing student participants involved the researcher contacting, initially by email and then by phone, approximately fifty minority faith groups, based on national census returns and google searches. The Humanist Association of Ireland, Atheist Ireland, Educate Together and Integration organisations in Cork and Dublin were also contacted. Both the Jewish and Bahai' communities used their face book page to encourage Post Primary students willing to be interviewed to contact the researcher. Five Bahai' members made contact, unfortunately all Bahai' members had completed their Post Primary education. One Jewish student made contact but an interviewee did not materialise. A breakthrough came when the Church of Ireland education officer enlisted the support of the CEO of Ceist (Catholic Education an Irish Schools Trust) and a further eleven non-Catholic students were found and interviewed. The Buddhist community also found a student who was willing to be interviewed. An Integration centre introduced the researcher to a member of a Muslim Women's Group and one Muslim student was interviewed. The Humanist Association, Atheist Ireland and Educate Together groups, although supportive, found no students willing to be interviewed. It is noteworthy that during the endeavours to find participants the researcher had rich and educational conversations with a number of minority faith and minority world view people.

#### **4.6.6 Participant Profile**

The aims in the selection of students for interview included the inclusion of as wide a variety of different religious and non-religious beliefs as possible, while maintaining a gender balance. Nine students identified as non-religious, eight held minority faith beliefs while one student preferred not to be labelled. The range of students is fair but a gender balance was not achieved at the interview stage. Fourteen females were interviewed and only four males, this was due to the difficulties experienced in finding students. The gender imbalance may have affected the qualitative findings as research suggests girls are more conforming and religious than boys ((Miller and Veneklasen, 2002; de Vaus, and McAllister, 1987; Suziedalis and Potvin, 1981; Walter and Davie, 1998; Zuckerman 2014). Geographically students interviewed were from Munster, Connacht and Leinster. The following table describes the participants according to their religion or world view, gender, school year and type of school they attended. It also includes the pseudonym given to each participant and the duration of the interview. The students' religion or world views are, as described by students themselves at interview.

**Table 1. Interview Participant descriptors**

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Religion / world view</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>School Year</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>Interview duration (mins)</b>
<b>S1</b>	Atheist	Male	6 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic boys	49.19
<b>S2</b>	Atheist	Male	6 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic boys	101.00
<b>S3</b>	Atheist	Male	6 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic boys	52.17
<b>S4</b>	Baptist	Female	6 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic girls	15.45
<b>S5</b>	Muslim	Female	6 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic girls	37.56
<b>S6</b>	Muslim	Female	6 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic girls	40.31
<b>S7</b>	Atheist	Female	6 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic girls	42.01
<b>S8</b>	Atheist	Female	6 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic girls	31.43
<b>S9</b>	no label	Female	6 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic girls	25.16
<b>S10</b>	Atheist	Female	6 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic girls	34.06
<b>S11</b>	Non –religious	Female	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Catholic girls	36.51
<b>S12</b>	Muslim	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Catholic girls	42.09
<b>S13</b>	Agnostic	Female	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Catholic girls	23.30
<b>S14</b>	Muslim	Male	5 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic boys	28.47
<b>S15</b>	Christian	Female	6 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic girls	24.38
<b>S16</b>	Hindu	Male	5 <sup>th</sup>	Catholic boys	52.06
<b>S17</b>	Buddhist	Female	6 <sup>th</sup>	Community mixed	42.23

<b>S18</b>	Agnostic	Male	3 <sup>rd</sup>	ETBI mixed	69.55
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#### **4.6.7 Data analysis**

All interviews were recorded using a mobile phone, transcripts were uploaded to Nvivo 10 computer software and Interpretative Phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the analytical strategy used. IPA gives experience precedence (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). It is about understanding people’s everyday experience, in order to understand the phenomenon in question (McLeod, 2011). It is used for research questions which aim to understand what a given experience was like (Phenomenology) and how someone made sense of it (interpretation). It is focused on the subjective meanings people attribute to their experiences. It is a double hermeneutic, whereby there are two interpretations, the researcher making sense of the interviewee making sense of their experiences (Smith, 1996). It was considered appropriate for this research as it supported the researcher’s aim to understand the experiences of minority faith and minority world view students. Stockes and Bergin (2006) suggests the quality of the data gathered from semi-structured interviews, relies on the researcher’s understanding and capacity to ask probing questions. In order to be capable of good interpretation immersion in the field. The researcher as a post Primary teacher has been immersed in the culture of Catholic Post Primary schooling over a fourteen year period. Also the research supervisors had carried out extensive school based research and were experienced in religious education. These experiences support the researcher’s credibility in building rich understandings of the school based experiences of students. Moreover, the experiences supported the researcher to understand more than an ‘outsider’ the hidden meaning and nuances which shape school experience. Similarly Donnelly (2004) suggests “the subjectivity which is often considered to be a disadvantage in qualitative research can also be advantageous” (p.268).

##### **4.6.7.1 The IPA process**

The recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were then read and re-read and initial ideas about the interpreted meanings explored. Next each transcript was coded sentence by sentence for meaning. Initial codes were systematically gathered together across all data. The variety and range of perspectives represented in the qualitative data meant initial coding was extensive and time consuming. The next step necessitated deep immersion in the data to generate groups of

codes into tertiary themes. Examples of tertiary themes at this stage included identity exploration, personal beliefs, stereotyping, attitudes to Muslims, and attitudes to atheists. Next related tertiary themes were grouped together into secondary themes. The computer software facilitated the grouping together of all relevant data under each secondary theme. For example, stereotyping, included all codes relating to stereotyping of atheists, Muslims and minority faith students. On-going analysis and searches for deeper meanings were explored and more abstract concepts or themes developed and refined the secondary themes into primary themes, for example personal identity. The finalised themes were then related back to the literature and pertinent student quotes were chosen to support the writing of the findings and analysis chapters.

#### **4.6.7.2 Nvivo 10 computer software**

The researcher used Nvivo 10 software to support the data analysis. Advantages of Nvivo include its ability to produce a coding trail which clearly shows how the data was interpreted. It links the finalised themes back to the interview transcripts, hence supporting confirmability and dependability (Guba, Lincoln, 1989). Another advantage is the analytical ability of the software to isolate themes and check any queries. Moreover, using Nvivo software allows clear mapping and traceability of all stages of the data analysis process. Furthermore, the complicated mapping process in all its detail is visible and all data is easily retrieved (Meehan, 2015).

#### **4.6.8 Reflexivity in Research**

Reflexivity is the exercise by which the researcher understands how they are positioned in relation to the knowledge they are generating. Caetano (2015) defines personal reflexivity as “people’s ability to reflect upon themselves taking into consideration their social circumstances” (p.228). According to Finlay (2002), “For all the difficulties inherent in the task, to avoid reflexive analysis altogether is likely to compromise the research” (p.227). It is understood that the researcher is undeniably part of the social world that they are researching and hence needs to inform the reader of their positionality in the interests of research integrity. Some scholars view this as problematic and describe a tension between protecting research from value bias and the role of research in aiding political or social change. While traditional researchers support the need for 'value neutrality' and are against committed research, it is understood this is impossible to achieve in social research (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006 p.144). A challenge of committed research is described as doing “sociology from

above” which is explained as a “failure to engage with the real-world demands of how the values that researchers espouse might be realised in practice” (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006 p.149). This challenge is particularly pertinent in this research as the rights of the majority to a state funded Catholic education are often pitted against how to address the rights of minorities to alternative education provision. Some see the Catholic Church position as denying the rights of non-Catholics to religious freedom while others defend the Church’s right to provide Catholic education for parents who support it. However an ethically reflexive perspective expects researchers endeavour to understand the practical issues, social constraints and climate which may impact on others ability to makes changes in the social contexts being researched (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2005 p.150). The researcher as an experienced Post Primary teacher understood the real world difficulties of addressing the needs of all students in a traditionally Catholic, financial constrained and majority Catholic school environment. Rather than adopting high minded options from either side, the researchers approach was more pragmatic and ethically reflexive as she sought to understand all positions. Another challenge of reflexivity is acknowledging that although the researcher’s value commitments can help sustain and drive their research endeavours, it is also crucial not to allow the same values guide the research to report what they hope it should. In relation to this challenge, Hammersley contends it is necessary for researchers only to involve themselves in the production of knowledge and not in how knowledge should be used. However, Cribb and Gerrwitz (2006), do not support this separation but advise the researcher must be cognisant of the challenge to avoid any distortion of findings due to the researcher’s value commitments. Hence academic rigour is required at all stages of the research process. In relation to this research rigour was applied to ensure an understanding of pertinent issues was achieved at the literature review stage. During data collection all interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Analysis was carried out by applying IPA and data was coded and analysed using Nvivo 10 which allowed a data trail and improved transparency and highlighted any researcher assumptions. Research integrity and humility is essential for fair collection, analysis and reporting of knowledge. The research supervisors were rigorous in challenging the researcher’s value judgements and assumptions. This aligns with Habermas (1970), who describes the concept of communicative competence, which means that the products of educational research need to be validated through dialogue. “The dialogue explicitly interrogates every statement for its truthfulness, its justification and its

sincerity“ (Siraj-Blatchford,1997 p.245). Reflexivity also maintains there is a need to address and understand how the life experience of the researcher can impact on their work. Hoffman (1975) and Morrison (2007), report positively on the influence of researchers life experiences on their work. While Siraj-Blatchford (1997) suggest “To deny the fact that our life experiences influence our work profoundly is to reject the notion of scholarship itself. To embrace experience and to rise above it, is to actively engage with society, to self-consciously engage in 'praxis” (p.244). In relation to this research it is important to be explicit regarding the positionality of the researcher. The researcher’s life experiences as a white Irish, socialised Roman Catholic but now a flaneur, who had worked and lived, in cultures different to her own, initially in England and America and then in Uganda may have impacted on her opinions and values. It is also noteworthy that the researcher having a constructivist epistemology believed that “reality is changing” (Higgs, 1993), and valued “the multiple realities that people have in their minds” (Golafshani, 2003, p.604). Hence her world experiences combined with her epistemological belief, served to deepen her understanding, while not blinkering her view of minority faith and minority world view students’ experiences.

#### **4.6.9 Reliability**

Scott and Morrison (2005), explain if a measure, when repeated, provides similar results then it is considered a reliable measure. Similarly, Joppe (2002), suggest reliability relates to a measure which maintains consistent results when replicated over time and can be used to predict results regarding the population studied. However, Hoepfl (1997) and Lomax (1994) both report it is difficult to claim qualitative data is reliable as inherent difficulties arise. For example, in this research the use of semi-structured interviews causes some difficulty regarding reliability. As the process is not standard, the collaborative conversation between the researcher and the students was not uniform but facilitated digressions and allowed participants to express opinions, feelings and ideas about their own experiences. The uniqueness of each interview challenges the concept of reliability. Eisener (1991), suggests a good qualitative study can help us “understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (p. 58). Both Eisener (1991) and Stenbacka (2001) posit a better measure than reliability for qualitative research is “generating understanding” (p. 551). While Lincoln and Guba prefer to replace the word reliable with the word “dependability” (p.300). In acknowledging the views of these scholars the researcher aimed to gather quality,

dependable, data that added to the understanding of the experiences of minority belief students. Hence, in order to ensure that the qualitative interviews conducted for this study did not ‘fall short of the rigorous standards of probity that are required’ (Busher and James, 2007. p.106; Davies and Dodd, 2002), the researcher took the following steps: an interview schedule was prepared and open-ended questions which related to her research questions and reviewed literature were used in each interview. All participants were students in Post Primary schools with a Catholic ethos. Furthermore it is important to acknowledge that while the research findings do not reflect that of the whole population, the steps taken succeeded in deepening the understanding regarding the selected population interviewed.

#### **4.6.10 Validity**

Joppe (2000, p.1) defines validity as follows; “Validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are”. According to Seale (1999, p.266) and Rolfe (2006) the idea of “trustworthiness” is a more appropriate term in qualitative research. The researcher believed that in order to achieve the concepts of validity or trustworthiness, it was imperative that the correct research instrument was used to answer the research questions. The researcher is confident that the semi-structured interviews were an appropriate method. Research rigour was a priority hence all student interviews were digitally recorded to facilitate accuracy of transcription. Moreover, all interviews were systematically coded to identify patterns and themes. Finally any conclusions drawn were supported by evidence of a data trail. Furthermore, the researcher ensured leading questions were avoided during her interviews as Di Ciccio-Bloom and Crabtree, (2006, p.317), suggest leading questions can “result in misleading answers” and would have compromised the validity and trustworthiness of the study in question. While Davies and Dodd (2002), point to the need for reflexivity to support research validity or trustworthiness, the researcher was open and honest regarding her position in the research and reflected deeply on her reflexivity throughout the research journey.

#### **4.6.11 Triangulation**

The study used a single research method, however triangulation was supported in a number of ways. Firstly, the research emerged from a constructivist epistemology which valued the multiple perspectives presented by the interviewees. Secondly,

theoretical triangulation was achieved by using identity humility theory alongside theories of hegemony, conformity, othering, agency and adolescent identity development. Furthermore, the historical and legislative context presented another dimension or perspective relevant to the study. Thirdly, in relation to the experiences of Muslim students in Irish schools, the research findings closely align with research by Carr (2016) and could be considered investigator triangulation. Finally and although it is not explicitly addressed in the study, the researcher as a practising and experienced Post Primary teacher was constantly observing the experiences of minority faith and worldview students in her school, hence the additional observational element supports triangulation of data sources. (Glassmann, 2014).

#### **4.6.12 Research Challenges**

There were political considerations that needed to be taken into account while conducting this research. In particular, Voluntary Secondary schools are legally entitled to give admission preference to students sharing the schools religious ethos and can also dismiss a student or teacher who undermines the schools religious ethos. The laws which underpin these rights are the Employment Equality Act (1998-2011) and the Equal status Act (2000-2011). At school level the impact of the Employment Equality act whereby schools can prevent an employee or prospective employee from undermining their religious ethos has resulted in what Dunne (1991) refers to as “exile, silence or cunning” among teachers, whereby they “may end up lying about their religious perspective or practice, so as to obtain or maintain their teaching post” (Irwin, 2010 p.456). The researcher believes this culture of silence impacted on schools’ willingness to engage in this research study. A careful approach to schools was necessary, in order to gain support and engagement with this research. The need to emphasise the confidential nature of the research was seen as key to school and student engagement. Problems which arose included difficulty in getting schools to participate, for example one large State funded girl’s Catholic school replied to the researchers request to conduct research in their school as follows; “All our students are Catholic from Catholic families, you would be better trying a school with a more mixed intake”. This is an example of misrecognition as described by Gramsci which occurs within hegemony, when one world view is supported as legitimate. Many schools simply refused to engage, while others did not respond to emails or phone contact. A common email response was; “No Thanks”. Other responses were curter for example this

response with the underlined capitals relay the unwillingness of most schools contacted to engage with this research: “I will NOT facilitate your request to carry out research in this school”.

#### **4.6.13 Research Limitations**

This is a small scale research study and the findings are not generalisable. The difficulty the researcher had in finding research participants may impact on the research findings. The schools which were open to allowing this research may be more open to religious pluralism. Furthermore it is important to note that students volunteered or self-selected to participate in this research. Hence the participants may represent a cohort who are confident to share their views, while the voices of students who declined to participate remain silent. While in consideration of a constructivist epistemology and an understanding of fallibilism the findings are limited by human understanding. However insights are provided which warrant consideration and further research.

#### **4.6.14 Conclusion**

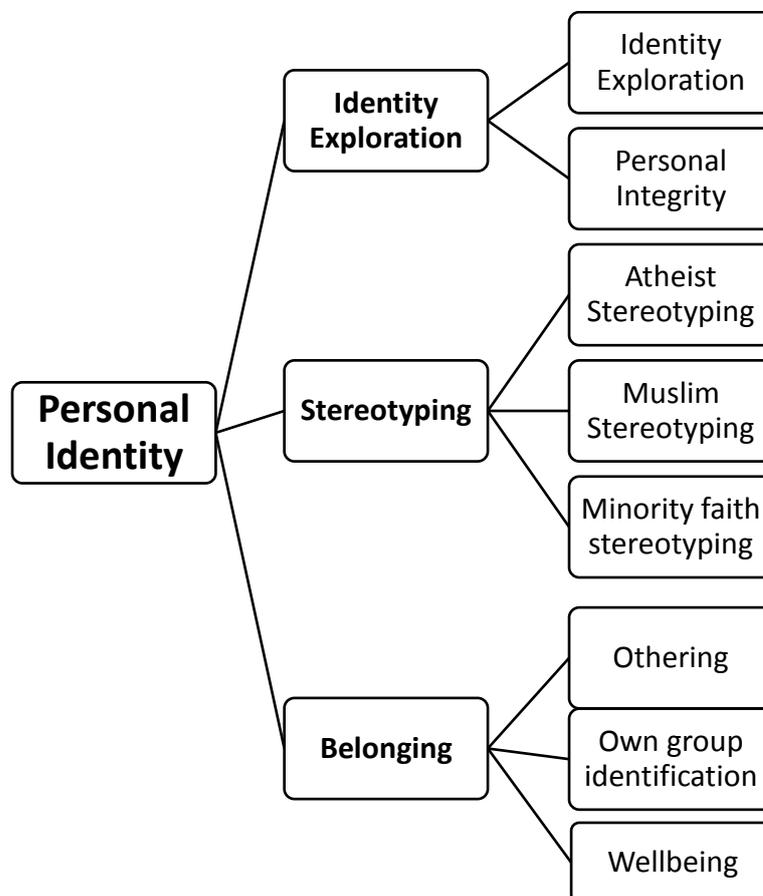
In this chapter the conceptual framework has been explained. Next a qualitative methodological approach was identified and the reasons for adopting the research method of undertaking semi-structured interviews was justified. The rationale for these choices are explained and critiqued. Details are provided on the selection of participants and the participants’ profiles. A detailed account of how the data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) assisted by Nvivo 10 computer software was provided. The study’s reflexivity and challenges were addressed. Furthermore the study’s reliability, validity and ethical considerations and limitations were explored.

## **Chapter Five: Findings and Analysis: Theme one – Personal Identity**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the primary theme “Personal Identity” which evolved from a process of thematic analyses of the students’ interview transcripts. Three secondary themes support this theme and include identity exploration, stereotyping and belonging. Identity exploration is comprised of tertiary themes, namely identity exploration and personal integrity. Stereotyping is supported by themes; atheist stereotyping, Muslim stereotyping and minority faith stereotyping. Belonging is supported by themes; othering, own group identity, and well-being. The theoretical perspective of identity humility alongside theories of identity development, agency and othering are employed to analysis the findings. A conclusion draws together the key points identified from each theme. The following figure outlines the thematic map for the primary theme Personal Identity.

**Figure 6. Personal Identity Thematic Map**



## **5.2 Personal Identity**

The literature review describes adolescent identity and moral developed. Crossley (2000) and Mead (1997) report our identities are developed through our relationships and encounters with others. Hence, this chapter reports and analyses the findings focused on the impact of attending a Catholic school on minority belief students

emerging identities. As all students interviewed were adolescents evidence of the exploration stage of identity development was prevalent as articulated in the following section.

### **5.2.1 Identity Exploration**

The exploration phase of identity development is the time when a person is most actively seeking answers to the question: Who am I? Exploration is most intense during a person's teenage years, which is very relevant to this study, as all students interviewed were teenagers (Whitbourne, Sneed and Sayer, 2009). In tandem with a need to discover oneself, is the development of formal operational thought or the ability to critically think (Coleman, 2010). The union of critical thinking and a need for exploration creates a kaleidoscope of possibilities.

At interview students spoke about the time they spent questioning and searching for an identity:

*“At that stage I was questioning everything, absolutely everything....  
I was just questioning my own beliefs. (S2)*

The findings support Erikson's research that adolescence is characterised by a dynamic between identity synthesis and identity confusion (Erikson 1968). Students articulated their personal search, confusion and at times, even described an identity crisis, Marcia (1966) acknowledges this struggle as a necessary part of adolescent's journey to identity achievement. Students described the struggles along their journey as follows:

*“I wasn't totally sure what I wanted to believe in. I wasn't Christian. I didn't know where I was”. (S3)*

*“Well actually, I heard about your study and I went on line and had a look at lots of things, there are all sorts of websites, humanists, secularists. I'm not really sure now”. (S11)*

*“I searched and found the word agnostic, for people like me and if I say atheist it sounds a bit final, atheism. My mother always told me not to say that, I don't believe in a set religion. The base of religions, I believe in to be good, to be a good person. Love thy neighbor. There are things in Christianity, in the bible, I believe Jesus existed. I admire him but I don't believe he is some God, there are*

*certain things, I don't believe at all, to do crazy things for your religion I don't believe in that at all "(S13).*

Student thirteen spoke about her mothers' advise not to use the descriptor atheist, which may be explained by negative connotations associated with atheism, for example a lack of morals (Gervais, 2014; Rane & Ewart, 2012). Moreover, the students' choice of agnosticism, while clearly stating that she did not believe in a set religion, indicates what Pham (2013) describes as the impact or harmonising of ones actions due to our bonds with others. Student thirteen took her mothers' advice and used a more acceptable identifier. The identity confusion articulated by student's two, three and eleven maybe exacerbated by conflicting; societal, school, family and personal beliefs. Moreover rapidly changing social, cultural and economic situations in Western Europe add further challenges (Lannegrand-Willems, 2015). Hence, Cote & Bynner (2008), suggest the transition from adolescence to adulthood takes longer and is more challenging and difficult than in the past. More choice, more change, more information and less defined societal structures makes it more challenging for adolescents to make decisions and increases the need for adolescence to spend more time considering their options. Another, recent, yet important factor impacting on students' identity development is their use of the internet, which provides vast amounts of information. In this study student eleven spoke about using the internet to explore and name her own identity. Lundby, (2011) concurs, that adolescents' use the internet to make decisions about their religious identity. While Bloom and Bagno-Moldavsky (2015) explain social networking services, for example Facebook expose individuals to unprecedented levels of conflicting and diverse views. Adolescents use of the internet to learn about possible identities is interesting but necessitates caring adults ensure accurate, fair and balanced information is provided, in order to counteract misleading or inaccurate internet sources. An understanding of the challenges faced by adolescents, necessitates the provision both at home and in school of ample time and space for them to discuss and explore their emerging identities with caring adults and peers. From an identity humility perspective the need to respect the uniqueness of individuals' identities and to ensure their human right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is protected is crucial. The next section addresses some recent societal issues which impacted the participant students' identity choices.

### 5.2.2 Personal Integrity

Ireland has experienced turbulence in recent times and societal attitudes to the Catholic Church and religion have changed (Maher, 2009), this makes it increasingly challenging for adolescents to define their place within a fluid culture. A number of students who now described themselves as atheist or agnostic named some of the challenges they found insurmountable in maintaining a prescribed Catholic faith. Challenges included the Catholic churches' handling of clerical child sex abuse, Catholic doctrine on sexual orientation, divorce and abortion.

*“I almost resented Christianity because I felt like they breached other peoples' human rights, if you're homosexual, things like that. Especially in Ireland, with all the stuff that has happened, I felt uncomfortable with religion and how the Catholic Church is”. (S2)*

*“I think it was probably the sexual abuse of children, I know there were only a couple, not all Priests but most of them knew about it. It was the cover up and their opinion on being gay. I don't think there should be a separation between gay people and straight people because it's not like your set on one person. Its more about personality than what gender they are”. (S10)*

The students are practicing reflexivity and are conscious of inequalities and the human rights of others. Kohlberg's theory of moral development suggests post conventional morality is driven by ones' own conscience and usually based on universal values such as human rights (Kohlberg 1984). The students' could not marry Catholic doctrine on sexual orientation with their beliefs about human rights. Nor could they accept the Catholic Church's handling of sexual abuse cases. Moreover, the students' who could no longer believe in God spoke about the confusion they felt. In particular they spoke about a deep searching for a personal integrity and for resolution of conflicting ideals:

*“When I was first thinking about it, should I go to mass or not? Should I go to prayer services, or not? Personally, I didn't want to be disrespectful, if I went there and didn't pray or believe, would that be disrespectful to the Catholic religion”? (S11)*

*“Just the services in general the prayers and stuff, you feel kind of wrong , it would be impolite not to pray, there’s this awkwardness pretending you’re praying and you’re not, it can be awkward , difficult ‘cos your kinda lying to people”.*(S7)

The process of Catholic socialisation as evidenced by students accounts of attendance at Catholic services and prayers, did not result in these students’ maintaining the Catholic faith of their parents. This aligns with Ammerman (2003); Hervieu-Leger, (2000), Barrett (2000) and: Loseke, (2007), who found during a state of flux individuals construct their own identities rather than accepting unchanged parents identity. However, the construction of an individualised moral identity maybe difficult and is considered the ultimate stage of moral development. Students appeared to struggle in their endeavors to marry personal beliefs and identity with Catholic beliefs, culture and their own socialisation:

*“I was really scared. At times I felt really bad. I thought if everyone else is Catholic, I should be Catholic too, these thoughts I’m having about it not being real, are idiotic and I shouldn’t believe it. I felt really horrible for quite a long time”.* (S7)

*“I stopped wearing the hijab coming to the school which just makes me feel so horrible, like this is my religion, I should be wearing the hijab, but I can’t. I know everyone is going to be looking at me, why are you wearing that thing on your head, it’s just you know”.* (S6)

*“I was agnostic for a while and I would love to believe in God and heaven especially. It’s nice how other people can so strongly believe and I just couldn’t be like that”.* (S10)

Students six and sevens’ accounts in acknowledging their conflicting views is explained by McAdams and Olson (2010), Erickson (1950, 1968) as the coherence or functionality of a persons’ life story, whereby it is understood a challenge exists in trying to make sense of all parts of ones’ life. It is understood to be particularly challenging to find coherence if an individual differs from the mainstream. The result can be identity confusion unless the person develops an ability to find workable strategies to reconcile differences. Although the struggle maybe difficult, Gramsci

contended that critical thinking could allow people to work out their own worldview, despite a hegemony exerting a particular worldview. Student six describing her identity crisis as horrible, is particularly concerning, as a black American Muslim, she looked visually different to the dominant white school population, her attempt to minimise her visual difference by not wearing the hijab for fear of negative comments suggests a lack of identity humility within the school community. Student six did not feel her unique identity was valued, she felt “other” because of her religion and changed her dress in order to align with the dominant worldview or Catholic school hegemony and a need to belong (Hall, 2014; Levine, 2000). Regarding student six’s strong feelings in relation to wearing the hijab, Mirdal, (2000), explains that “religious and ethnic identity especially play an important role for persons belonging to minority groups, often to the point that they predominate above all other aspects of identity”(p.39). It is reasonable to suggest student six felt her personal integrity or expression of self was hindered by not wearing the hijab. In similar vein, students’ expressed particular difficulties arose in endeavor’s to marry their personal beliefs with their parents and relations beliefs as follows:

*“My dad used to be really angry, when I didn’t want to go to Church”. (S10)*

*“It would break my grannies heart completely, if she heard I was an atheist, she would not be able to cope with hearing something like that. I wouldn’t want her to hear something like that”. (S1)*

Student ten and student one, both faced difficulties due to their counter hegemony beliefs or minority worldview. Student ten recounts parental anger, as she tried to exert agency, while Herndl licona (2007) suggests, agency is only possible at certain times and maybe constrained at other times. Student one had a different strategy and decided to remain silent regarding his atheism, which Robinson and Diaz (2009) refer to as the silencing of the other. Moreover student ten’s belief that he could break his grandmothers heart by telling her he held atheist beliefs, very poignantly explains a deep rooted construction of atheism as “other, deviant or inferior” (Zevallos, 2011). While Weber, Paragament, Kunik and Relig (2012), report nonbelievers find negative perceptions of their beliefs distressing. Despite the considerable difficulties articulated, acceptance of the status quo or prescribed identities seems incongruous with some of the students emerging identities. Identity humility maybe particularly difficult for

parents and relatives, who may experience a sense of failure or rejection, if their children do not accept their prescribed and handed down beliefs. However, a number of authors have now documented the rise of individualism and eclecticism around spirituality among young people (Crawford and Rossiter 1996; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; De Souza, Cartwright and McGlip 2004 and Tacey, 2003). The literature also advocates that in order to develop a sustainable individual identity, adolescents must actively seek out answers to life's questions. The importance of this searching or exploratory stage is impressed in the research of Luyckx, Duriez, Klimstra, Van Petegem, and Beyers (2011). Moreover research also found adolescents who were proactive in their search for a personalised identity had better outcomes in the long term (While Schwartz, Beyers, et al 2011; Cote, 2002). Additionally, research by Hunsberger et al (2001), concurs with the need to support an agentic orientation, by affording adolescents with opportunities to entertain and discuss both belief confirming and belief threatening sources. Hence, an interpretative or dialogical pedagogy in teaching RE could support student's needs rather than a divine pedagogy. It is reasonable to suggest that both Catholic and non-Catholic student's identity development would benefit from discussion and inclusion of a variety of worldviews and religion. Astor and Griera (2015), argues in order to achieve equality, it is necessary to create spaces which encourage majority and minority people to interact and form social bonds. Although encouraging and supporting an agentic exploration is prescribed by the above researchers, it remains challenging for some parents and teachers, who prefer to pass on a particular faith or one world view. In Catholic Post-Primary schools the passing on of a Catholic faith is a primary aim of a Catholic education (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2015). It is also important to acknowledge that parents and denominational schools have legal rights to manifest a particular faith ethos. However, Jackson, (2006); Chaudhury and Miller, (2008) are concerned that schools with a particular faith ethos and religious education (RE) may hinder the development of secure religious identities for minority belief pupils and marginalise or alienate them from the school community and potentially, wider society. This concern is very relevant in Ireland as a majority of schools have a Catholic ethos and students may have no workable alternative but to attend a Catholic school. In recognition of these challenges and potential conflicts, identity humility theory places communication as a bastion. Dialogue is considered essential in order to navigate a plurality of beliefs, needs and rights. The importance of getting it right for students is crucial as informed

by the link between human flourishing, good mental health and identity achievement (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Côté, 2002 & Schwartz, Mason, Pantin & Szapocznik, 2009).

In summation, the interviews suggest many challenges and much confusion in the exploration stage of identity development, particularly for students who endeavor to forge an individual identity rather than accepting their prescribed religious identity. The literature supports the need for schools to teach for all beliefs, including minority world view or atheist beliefs, to provide accurate information and inclusive spaces enabling questioning and discussion in order to support all students towards identity achievement (Jackson, 2006; Hunsberger et al, 2001; White, 2004 and ODIHR, 2007).

### **5.3 Stereotyping**

Stereotyping was identified as a subordinate theme of “Personal Identity”. During student interviews it was evident that students were concerned by the stereotyping of their Muslim, Atheist, Christian, Buddhist or Protestant beliefs. Stereotyping may be understood as generalising about particular groups of people and labelling them, thus creating false expectations that individual members of the group will conform to certain (often negative) traits or characteristics that have been attributed to the wider group or community (Delvin, 2006). According to Staszak (2008), “stereotyping the other serves to comfort the self in its feeling of superiority”, (p.1). While Bauman argues that identities are set up as dichotomies, ‘othering’ gives identities meaning and the belong to group power to suppress the other (cited in Zevallos, 2011). While Volf, (2010), explains ‘Otherness’ as being different in some way. Furthermore, the link with Gramsci’s theory of hegemony where some need to be subjugated may be realised by negative stereotyping.

#### **5.3.1 Stereotyping of Atheists**

Atheists and those who chose not to identify with a religious faith, believed their beliefs were stereotyped as follows:

*“No morals. Atheists have no morals, because they don’t believe in God but that doesn’t make sense, there still is a right and wrong but that’s what I hear, you have no morals if you don’t believe in God”.*

*(S11)*

*“..... do you hate God? Atheists you know, angry little people inside, it’s ridiculous”. (S2)*

*“I’ve found that most people just find atheists stuck up, that’s the stereotype, I hope not me”. (S8)*

*“Like since I have no religion, people assume I’m against all religions that I Like hate them but that is not true, like I said before I respect people more, I wish I could believe in a religion, I just can’t”. (S9)*

The literature review confirmed the students descriptions of negative stereotypes associated with non-religious people. Negative stereotyping tends to devalue the person and makes the path towards secure identity achievement more challenging. The atheist and agnostic students interviewed were acutely aware of the negativity surrounding their personal beliefs. No student felt the stereotype was a reflection of who they were or what they believed. Most atheist students pointed out that they were not anti-religious and felt strongly that Catholicism should be respected, some expressed regret that they could no longer believe. This finding is understandable as most of the atheist students interviewed came from Catholic homes or had loved ones who were Catholic. Students were very aware that Catholicism was the status quo in Ireland and therefore needed to be respected. Most students did not expect their atheist beliefs to be acknowledged in a Catholic school. Goodman, Mueller (2009), whose research focused on non-believers in U.S. colleges reports “non-believers in education are invisible, marginalised and stigmatised” (p.59). A study by Harper, (2007), also reports nonreligious people “as a potentially maligned social category to belong to” (p.551). In addition, research by Downey (2004), found that nonreligious people who live within predominantly religious societies are vulnerable to discrimination. In an Irish context religious discrimination in State funded schools is legalised by section 37 of the Employment Equality Acts (1998-2015) and section 7.3(c) of the Equal Status Act (2000-2015). Parker-Jenkins and Masterson (2013) found Irish schools which are “traditionally characterised as Catholic, white and Gaelic, find it difficult to recognise and acknowledge new expressions of race, culture and religion” (p.477). According to Noddings (2008), “Christians, Jews and Muslims learn to “tolerate” one another, but unbelievers remain beyond the pale” (p.370). Bloom and Bagno-Moldavsky (2015),

conducted research on tolerance to diversity in Israel and report tolerance is mediated by the perceived threat to the group. It is reasonable to suggest that an atheist worldview could be perceived as more threatening to Catholicism than another religious view, which would explain less tolerance of atheism. This was evident in how schools supported students 'opting out' of religion classes and services. At interview it became evident that minority faith students were more likely to be supported to opt out than minority worldview students. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven. However, some students did not accept the negative identity ascribed to them by the dominant group. An atheist student described his atheist beliefs as follows:

*"Atheism, it is my belief, is a form of social progression; in a sense that anyone can be open to their opinions rather than having a specific doctrine" (S1).*

Jensen (2011), explains as he makes the link between agency, 'othering' and identity development. Student one was confident that his atheist identity was not a negative but a progressive worldview, Jensen explains an individual has the capacity to be agentic and forge their own identity, while rejecting ascribed identities. Moreover, student ones' self-identification as an atheist although he said he was baptised a Catholic and attended a Catholic school is an example of both agency and counter hegemony. Gramsci reports counter hegemonies are always present and challenge the concept of a singular worldview. The following student also said he was baptised a Catholic but described himself as an atheist, however he felt it was a tiny part of his character.

*"Being atheist is a tiny part of the character" (S2).*

The student went on to explain.

*"Atheism means I have lots of other beliefs and probably some that are common to say people who say they are Catholic" (S2).*

Student two's description of atheism as a tiny part of his character maybe explained by him holding a range of beliefs, some of which he acknowledged as common with Catholics. It is interesting that he used the term "people who say they are Catholic" this may infer that he finds it difficult to believe everyone who claims they are Catholic fit with how he perceives Catholicism, he maybe questioning the practice of cultural Catholicism as described by Inglis, (2007) and Demerath, (2000). Similarly, other

students who described themselves as holding atheist or agnostic beliefs also explained their worldview was an amalgam of many.

*“I haven’t really decided yet, I was thinking about different religions, different teachings, and different laws. It’s interesting to look at all of them and take a bit from the best”. (S3)*

*“In ways, just trying to always follow your own rules, not just do as others say. I like to, not necessarily take things from other religions but like some quotes from the bible or Quran, that make sense, I’ll never be able to just fall into a religion, I couldn’t do that”. (S13)*

Student two, three and 13’s accounts are similar, as they suggest their worldview is an amalgam of different religious beliefs. This concurs with, Dutch research which reported, 23% of the population adhere to ‘multiple religious belonging’ (MRB). In essence they look to all religions to help them to fulfil their need for meaning, (Berghuijs, 2017). This links with Hunsberger et al (2001), Berzonsky and Kuk’s (2005) and Berzonsky and Sullivan’s (1992) research which reports openness to learning from other beliefs supports mature identity development. Moreover, it further challenges religious stereotyping and the researcher acknowledges the groupings in this study are problematic. Moreover, the researcher suggests it is possible, a person who is best described as a liberal or cultural Catholic may share more beliefs and values with an agnostic or atheist than with a fundamentalist Catholic.

A non-religious student further explained her world view as follows:

*“The label thing stresses me out a bit. I actually get angry when people say, oh you’re an atheist. My beliefs never stop changing, depending on what happens, it’s like an everyday thing, I learn something new every day” (S.9).*

Student nine’s opinion is important and further emphasises the point that labels may be misleading. Moreover labels advance stereotyping. Furthermore, the students’ openness to new learning and changing her beliefs is noteworthy and supported by the concept of reflexivity which is an important element of identity humility. While Chaves (2017) concurs “Identity is not an ontological reality, but a constructed and malleable lens through which people see themselves, the world and their relation to the world”(p.235).

Moreover, McCabe (2013) explains increasing globalisation, results in students been aware and influenced by a variety of views, opinions and experiences. New learning is more possible now than ever before, as the internet, radio and television constantly bring the world's issues, views and opinions into our phones, homes and imaginations. Young people seem to increasingly learn from these sources, resulting in their views being less uniform and colloquial than in the past. The above students' beliefs been described as an amalgam of beliefs also links with the idea of a flaneur. Willis and Strunk (2017) suggest, students' use of communicative technologies, may result in increasing numbers of students of RE identifying as flaneurs in the future. It is also noteworthy that the most favourable stereotype associated with atheism is individualism, (Harper, 2007). The implications of these findings support the need for educators to acknowledge and explore ways to best support the increasing plurality of students' identities.

### **5.3.2 Stereotyping of Muslims**

The Muslim students interviewed described how they felt their beliefs were stereotyped as follows:

*“You always hear about the whole bomb remarks, every time you come to school, are you going to bomb this place today,.....When they put that 9 /11 on TV in school, they were talking so bad about Muslims” (S6).*

*“They associate Islam with terror and that kind of stuff; the media can be very unfair” (S5).*

Students were again supported by the literature particularly in relation to their comments on the stereotyping of Islam. Morey (2011), described Muslim stereotypes as portraying men, as violent fanatics and women as oppressed. Student fives' comment regarding, unfair media portrayals of Islam is justified. The literature review uncovered the significant role media plays in promoting the stereotyping of Islam, one study found that two thirds of newspaper articles published in the U.K. about Muslims between 2000 - 2008 were negative and stereotypical and presented Muslims as a problem (Moore, Mason , Lewis 2008). Two non-religious students were also aware of the role the media plays in stereotyping Muslims.

*“I think there are very few people in Ireland who could present Islam fairly, because of the news and what people are nearly conditioned to think. It’s a terrible thing to say but there nearly is a stigma, he’s wearing a turban, someone keep an eye on him. Things are terrible like that” (S2).*

*“There is Islamophobia in the press; it’s there, because I hear a lot of people talking about Muslims in a negative light. They are getting such a bad press and people think such things about them and I know Muslims who wear head scarfs and things and they are just normal people. I think people have the wrong stereotypes about Muslims” (S13).*

It is noteworthy that at interview student two almost joked about peoples’ possible reactions to encountering a Muslim wearing a turban, however the impact of this type of reaction on Muslim students’ identities is potentially very hurtful. Crocker & Majors’, (1989), research found “self-esteem is affected by prejudice and discrimination from outside the cultural group” (p. 624). It is noteworthy that student 13’s defence of Muslims is supported by her own personal knowledge and acquaintance with Muslims, this concurs with research by Donnelly,(2004) which also found when people get to know others they are less likely to hold prejudiced views. These findings also add to and concur with research by Carr (2016), who also found Muslim students’ in Dublin were vulnerable to the impacts of negative stereotyping. Carr (2016), recommends legislative change in the context of school enrolment policies and staff recruitment, in order to address institutional negativity and discrimination. Furthermore he advocates for the protection of rights of all children and staff to manifest their faith identity. Carrs’ recommendations are supported by identity humility theory which supports the need to address power relations and for reflexivity at State institutional and individual level. Without changes at all levels, individuals remain vulnerable to the negative impacts of stereotyping.

### **5.3.3 Minority Faith Stereotyping**

Minority faith students also articulated how they felt their beliefs were stereotyped.

*“Students see Buddhism as a gimmick, a joke of a religion. Young people find Buddhism funny; they think I’m a hippy” (S 17).*

*“Like if you say you are a Christian, people think you’re oh a crazy stereotypical, homophobic but it’s not really like that. I’m not like that but people automatically judge you” (S15).*

*“In first yr., I thought there was a boundary with Catholic students and people who weren’t Catholic and I remember one girl commented about what was going on in Northern Ireland, that it was the Protestants fault and something and I’m Protestant and I’m thinking what! So it was hard at first and then it got easier”. (S10).*

The above student quotations are similar to the atheist students’ who also felt their beliefs were unfairly and negatively stereotyped. The theoretical framework of identity humility specifically addresses stereotyping and the need for an individual focus in order to respect the uniqueness and human dignity of every person. It is important that communication between people should avoid bringing pre-conceived stereotypes to any discussion. Identity humility theory, acknowledges and supports a plurality of beliefs. While identity development theories support the need to afford students, parents and teachers’ time to discuss the complexity and fluidity of beliefs and to find ways to support the development of all students beliefs. However, Hopkin, (2014) and Van Tongeren, (2014) warn, humility regarding religious convictions or toward individuals who are religiously different may be especially difficult to develop or practice. A serious concern raised by these findings and the prevalence of negative stereotyping of atheists, Muslims and minority faith and belief students is the research by Latrofa, Vaes and Cadinu (2012), who found those with low in group status and low self- esteem are vulnerable to increased self- stereotyping caused by threats to their identity. While Abbas (2012) suggests there is a symbiotic relationship between Islamophobia and radicalisation. However Abbas (2012) suggests a way to break that link is to provide opportunities for Muslims to voice their opinions and give their perspective on what it means to be a Muslim in a multicultural society. This resonates with Martin Luther king’s insistence that Black people had to be involved in deciding how they could integrate, otherwise it was still a “White agenda”. Black people needed to be given the opportunity to voice and define their terms of liberation. Cone agreed and was adamant

that if white people decided the terms, the result would be the assimilation rather than the integration of Black people, which was totally unacceptable (p.94). It appears obvious that the dominant group in society should not be allowed to define terms of integration for minorities, that only minorities have the knowledge to do so. In relation to this research it appears necessary that the state should insist schools regardless of their patronage should support minorities in deciding what is workable for them in relation to integrating with the school community. The communication element of identity humility theory would support this requirement; moreover the handing of power to minorities to negotiate terms of integration would also address power relations. It is envisaged the State would need to take responsibility to ensure minorities voices are heard and respected by the majority. This repositioning of power could be viewed as counter hegemonic, as it challenges State support for a single worldview.

In conclusion, students are aware and impacted on by the stereotypes associated with their beliefs. The literature suggests this may negatively affect their identity development most particularly for students who internalise the negative stereotypes due to lowered self-esteem and ingroup status. While students with higher self-esteem and confidence are more likely to show agency in developing secure individual identities. The labelling of individuals religious or worldview is problematic, as it appears identities may be an amalgam of different beliefs and impossible to define. Hence identity humility advocates for communication whereby teachers take the time to understand students as individuals. Teacher training is needed in this area as although the researcher has worked as a Post Primary teacher for over fourteen years, she admits to a lack of religious literacy at the start of this research and believes her own ignorance and lack of knowledge of different religions and worldviews, excepting Catholicism and agnosticism made her incapable of understanding the needs of all students in her care. Teachers need to be both open to learning and trained in how to create inclusive dialogues about religion, spirituality, belief, and nonbelief and in so doing challenge stereotyping. It is noteworthy that colleges of initial teacher education have started to address this need. However, continuing professional development is also necessary. Furthermore, a dialogical or interpretative approach to RE would support all students in the exploration stage of identity development and help them progress to achieving a secure identity. While a failure to model respect and acknowledge students unique

identities, tends to exacerbate negative stereotyping and makes the road to identity achievement more precarious. At State and managerial levels responsibility to listen to and respect the voices of minorities in relation their integration into the education system is crucial.

## **5.4 Belonging**

Hall (2014), suggests a sense of belonging is a human need and can be understood as feeling accepted as a member or part of a community. A positive sense of belonging can increase motivation and wellbeing. While those who do not feel a sense of belonging experience a sense of loneliness which may undermine self-control and wellbeing, leading to pain and conflict. Likewise Pittman and Richmond (2012) found “students' reports of belonging at school and college was significant in predicting current academic (e.g., grades, academic competence) and psychological adjustment (i.e., self-worth, internalising and externalising problem behaviours), even after controlling for other important demographic and relationship factors” (p.270). While research by Gummadam, Pittman and Loffe (2016), report ethnic minority students sense of school belonging, “was found to be negatively associated with depressive symptoms, and positively associated with perceived self-worth, scholastic competence, and social acceptance” (p.289). Hence a clear association is made between students' sense of belonging and their wellbeing. It is also important to understand why some students do not feel they belong in school. Hall (2014) suggests some can seek belonging through excluding others. This aligns with Baumann understanding of ‘other’. In essence those that are perceived as different from the normal or dominant worldview tend to be seen as other or not belonging. While Levine (2000) makes the point that adolescents have a particularly strong need for a sense of belonging.

### **5.4.1 Othering**

During interviews students articulated a sense of othering or a lack of a sense of belonging as described in the following quotes:

*“It’s a Christian view on everything, it’s them and us, sort of thing, sometimes I feel I belong “(S.13).*

*“Opting out of religion class creates isolation.” (S12).*

Student thirteen felt the Catholic school ethos created a sense of otherness, and she only felt she belonged sometimes. Student twelve's account is supported by the literature whereby research by Mawhinney, Niens, Chiba and Richardson (2010) found opting out of RE lead to feelings of isolation among teenagers, moreover her research found a fear of isolating their children, meant parents were reluctant to opt their children out of RE.

Student one spoke about his concerns if he had his own children, although he was an atheist, his family background was Catholic and he had celebrated his Confirmation. He felt a non-Catholic identity might impact on a child's sense of belonging, if they did not participate in religious ceremonies:

*“if all their class mates are making theirs and they will be there alone and they will be there on their own, now I know there are people like that, of other religions today but I don't want that sort of exclusion to be an issue”*  
(S.1).

The students' beliefs that a child needs to partake in religious ceremonies to avoid exclusion, coincides with parents unwillingness to opt children out of RE. Likewise research by EQUATE (2017) found that 24% of people surveyed reported, they would not have baptised their child, if they didn't need it to gain entry into a Catholic school. These findings impact on personal integrity and human dignity. The system appears to undermine people's freedom and results in some people going against their principles so their child can fit in and belong (Mawhinney, 2009). The findings also support the concept of hegemonic control by the Catholic Church in relation to the provision of education. From an identity humility perspective the othering of children rather than the acceptance of their unique identities would need to be addressed. Power relations, inclusive of Catholic hegemony would also need to be challenged in order to support the human rights of all children, regardless of their worldview or religious identity.

An atheist student attending a school in a city saw potential issues for minorities in rural areas:

*“I think this school is quite an open accepting school, in more remote places in Ireland, if you weren't Catholic and you didn't fit in with that Irish way you might be pushed to the side a bit”* (S10).

It is noteworthy, that in an Irish school context, there are large differences in the percentages of religious and non-religious in different areas. According to the 2016 Census results; three counties had more than 33 percent of the population identifying as non-Catholic, namely Dublin City, Dun Laoghaire and Galway City. While Tipperary had the lowest percentage with only 12.9% identifying as non- Catholic.

Hence, student ten is correct, as research also supports the fact that proximity does not support prejudice (Donnelly, 2004). The researcher is reminded that minority faith or worldview students may have no other student in their class or even school who share their world view, in this small scale study the Hindu, Buddhist and Christian students volunteered the fact that they were the only students in their school of their faith. Hence more research is warranted in order to explore how these students develop their sense of belonging. The Hindu student spoke about a lack of a Hindu community or temple in his town and spoke longingly about having a community to share festivals with:

*“In Galway they do proper festivals and temples, recently we had Diwali. In Galway it was celebrated with fireworks and everything and it was celebrated very happily. My family we set lamps with oil. We set the whole house a light, all that we did it at home,” (S.16).*

Research by Gummadam, Pittman and Loffe (2016), among ethnic minority students reported the “lowest levels of self-worth when students were neither connected to their college nor connected to their ethnic group” (p.289). Another observation during the student interviews was the prevalence of a non-Irish ethnicity for some students. The combination of being religiously and ethnically different to the dominant culture may further exasperate a student’s sense of belonging, ease of making friendships and well-being.

#### **5.4.2 Own Group identification**

Research by Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey (1999); Schmitt & Branscombe, (2002), suggests that stigmatised groups have an increased need to identify with their own group. A key finding in the literature was the idea of self- stereotyping. Research focused on stigmatised groups reports that if one is aware that one belongs to a devalued ingroup some will show an increased need to identify with their ingroup, while others may decide to distance themselves from the devalued group, (Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey, 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Hence a person who feels

isolated from the mainstream habitus may seek and find a sense of belonging with their own worldview group. A number of students at interview spoke about their best friends sharing their religious beliefs:

*“I’m like a black person and I want to get married to a black. It’s not like the white girls. We don’t have the same things in common. In school we are really close, I talk to them all the time but outside of school they go their ways and I go my ways, like my friend Buddi, she’s Muslim and I still go out with her outside of school and stuff,” (S15).*

*“Muslim girls don’t show other non-Muslim girls respect. They don’t associate with us. They stay together”, (S.17).*

*“My friends are also Christian”, (S15)*

*“It’s easier, like my friends from church; it’s easier to be hanging around with them, when I’m home from school. We all kinda believe the same things and if I say something that, like it wouldn’t be weird to be talking about things like that”, (S4)*

Similarly, it became evident at interview that non-religious students tended to form friendships. Ysseldyk et al. (2010), in their research also found non-religious students found a sense of belongingness with other students with similar worldviews.

*“My friend Aoife she atheist as well, so we would be similar”, (S11)*

*“My group of friends most of them are atheist maybe three or four are Catholic or believe in something” (S2).*

*“I have about one stable friend at the moment, and she was brought up as Catholic and I was brought up Protestant but now we are both atheist” (S.10)*

*“All my friends are atheist” (S8).*

Furthermore research by Newman (2007), found adolescents who viewed peer group membership as very important to them and had a positive sense of peer group

belonging had significantly fewer behaviour problems than those who viewed peer group membership as very important but did not have a positive sense of peer group belonging. Hence, it appears students sharing similar beliefs find it easier to be together. Sharing common beliefs may be easier and may in part explain why some schools give preference to co-religionist teachers and students in employment and admission. However, increasing pluralism in Irish society creates a need to learn how best to live together and education is considered key to promoting social cohesion (OIDHR, 2007).

### **5.4.3 Well being**

Minority belief and and minority worldview students spoke specifically about how their well being was affected as follows: An atheist student articulated her feelings as follows:

*“Just the services in general the prayers and stuff you feel kind of wrong,” (S7).*

While a Muslim students articulated their feelings as follows:

*“You just feel so horrible, so disheartened, you think of all the other people who are coming to the school with religion, the same religion, same culture it’s not the same fate for them” (S4).*

*“I’d rather have grown up in Saudi Arabia, just where it’s normal for them. It’s easier to be a Muslim there” (S6).*

It is noteworthy, that a student who had moved from America to Ireland spoke about the difference she saw between the two systems and made the valid point that the often very small numbers of minorities make it more difficult to challenge the majority. The researcher is again reminded of the fact that the Hindu, Buddhist and Christian students said they were the only students of their faith in their school.

*“America is more diverse, so they kinda of know, so if there is something bad being said about someone else, I’d sort of know ten Muslims in my class and we could say you have to stop that now. That’s not what my religion is all about but here it’s only me its*

*way more.....It can be very isolating, Its very isolating,  
“(S.6).*

Counselling in Post Primary schools is provided for by guidance counsellors, school Chaplains, Catholic clergy and class teachers. School Principals can also request support from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). However, atheist and agnostic student’s articulated the following:

*“I think they need to find some kind of counselling thing that isn’t based on religion. I remember when I younger, I was really questioning everything and I was really scared I was going to die because I don’t believe this thing. I was really scared mm, I went to the person in the Primary school who was in the counselling thing and they based the whole thing on the Catholic thing, like God will forgive you, God will do this, God will do that, I felt a lot worse and it just make me feel a lot worse. At times I felt really bad, like I’m going to change cos I don’t believe these things and everyone around me was so passionate about it and I was, this isn’t really logical. I felt really horrible for quite a long time”, (S7).*

*“I think with me this might seem mean, but with me if they were counselling me in a Catholic sense, I would be annoyed. I wouldn’t want to hear about that a lot. So it’s a concern. I don’t really want to hear about it”, (S10).*

Relevant research carried out by the Health Service Executive (HSE), in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science in 2013, found that schools have an important role to play in building resilience in students, moreover they address the need for schools to be proactive in creating a sense of belonging, “Protective factors in the school environment that help to build resilience in young people include: providing a positive school climate and ensuring a sense of belonging and connectedness to school” (HSE, DES 2013). However, research by Carr (2016), reports Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism as established realities in Ireland. Carr, (2016), makes the point that the exclusion of pupils because of their faith or non-faith identity has real implications not only in terms of academic performance and ability to access schools of choice but also, and arguably more importantly, on the social development of young Irish Muslims

notions of inclusivity in Irish society. In common with this research, Carr (2016), reports concerns regarding younger generations of Irish Muslims:

*“Born and raised here, Muslim students reported experiences of identity crisis in a number of ways. Feelings of exclusion as iterated by some of these participants were compounded by feelings of confusion in terms of identity. Participants referred on more than one occasion to the term identity crisis”* (p.57).

Furthermore, Carr (2015), reports anti-Muslim hostility in education and society leaves “targeted individuals with feelings of fear; shock; anger; frustration and depression”, (p.83). Crocker & Majors’, (1989), research found “self-esteem is affected by prejudice and discrimination from outside the cultural group”, (p.624). Furthermore, research by Brandt (1994) noted that to be successful, students must be able to have a sense of identity to function in both their home ethnic community and in the mainstream. He points at the need to accept difference and for educators “to take a strong stand and defend equality and justice for all groups, no matter how stigmatized they are within society” (Brandt, 1994 p.31). Arnett (2015), links increases in adolescent problem behaviors and suicide in traditional cultures with globalisation and resulting identity confusion and sense of marginalisation due to a difficulty in reconciling diverse cultural values. Similarly, Arnett (2003), also suggests it is psychologically challenging for adolescents to develop a positive multicultural identity. It is noteworthy, that Ireland has the fourth highest rate of youth suicide in Europe and it is among the top five causes of mortality in the 15 to 19 year age group in Ireland (HSE, 2014). Carr (2016), recommends, legislative change in the context of school enrolment policies and staff recruitment. Furthermore he advocates for the protection of rights of all children and staff to manifest their faith identity. Likewise, identity humility includes an expectation that school personnel address systemic inequalities. Moreover, identity humility specifically addresses stereotyping; avoidance of stereotyping is one of the key areas differentiating it from cultural competence frameworks. A core element of identity humility is an individual focus rather than a cultural focus, thus endeavoring to respect the beliefs, uniqueness, individuality and human dignity of every student. Addressing religious difference requires good communication. Time is needed to afford students and parents time to discuss how their

beliefs may impact on their education. O'Higgins Norman & Sullivan, (2017), report young people who are perceived as different are often bullied. Moreover they suggest schools have an important role to play in providing opportunities for students to discuss difference. Likewise, both communication and reflexivity are key elements of identity humility. Furthermore, as detailed in chapter three on adolescent identity development, there exists a need to provide young people with opportunities to explore and learn from differences. This is considered important in helping young people, to develop a secure identity and better life outcomes.

### **5.5.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion by linking the four subordinate themes and remembering the interviewees the findings suggest: students quest for an individualised identity maybe paved with confusion, cultural uncertainty and societal challenge. Those already struggling with low in group status or poor self-esteem may internalise stereotypes and are more vulnerable to radicalisation and negative impacts on their wellbeing. Teachers as guardians of education need to address students emerging identities by facilitating both belief confirming and belief threatening discussions. From an identity humility perspective, good communication is crucial to develop an understanding of difference. Furthermore, Noddings (2008), believes communication between believers and non-believers is necessary to promote a more cohesive society. Moreover the Toledo Guiding Principles also support educating students of all beliefs together rather than segregation (OIDHR, 2007). Hence the findings question the appropriateness of section 37 of the 1998 Employment Equality Act and section 7.3(c) of the Equal Status Act (2000-2011). Moreover, from a legal perspective, Section 9 of the Education act 1998, confirms schools obligation to promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students. However, the findings suggest non-Catholic students' identities may be challenged rather than supported in the participating schools.

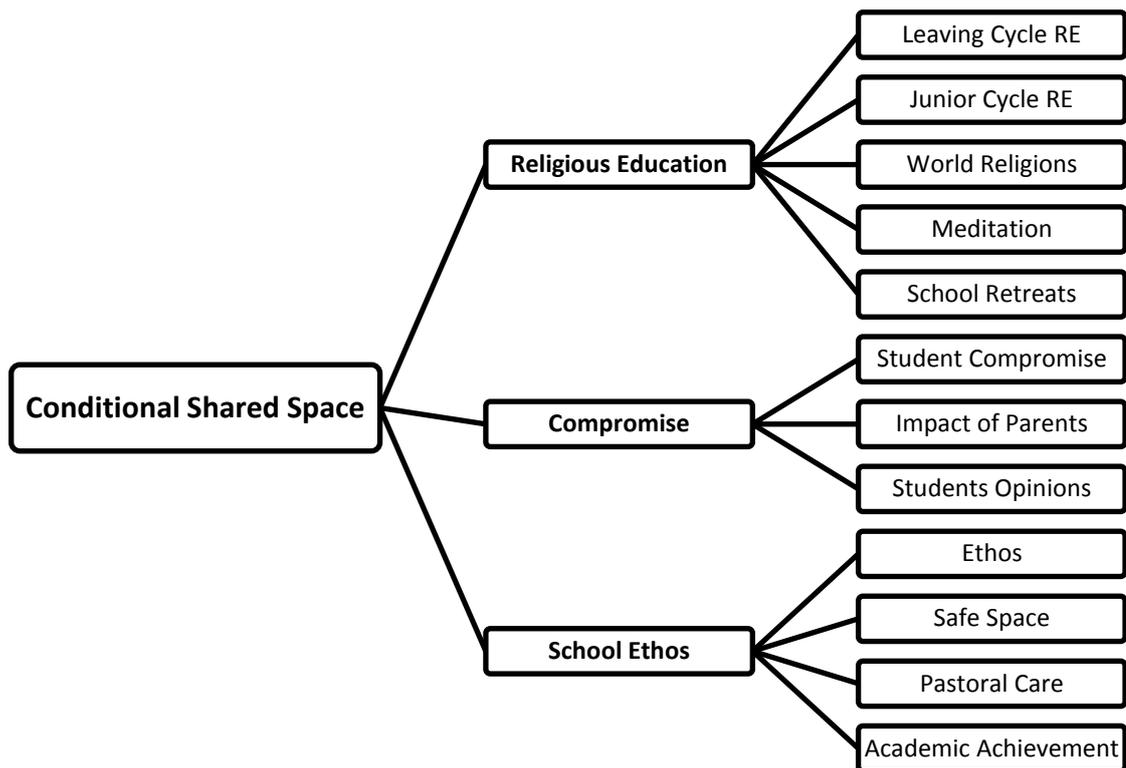
## **Chapter 6: Findings and Analysis – Theme Two– Conditional Shared Space**

### **6.1 Introduction**

An emergent primary theme from the students' interviews was a conditional shared space. Three secondary themes support this theme and include, Religious Education, Compromise and Ethos. Religious Education comprised of tertiary themes namely Leaving and Junior Cycle Religious Education, world religions, meditation and retreats. Compromise is supported by themes including Student Compromise, Impact of Parents and Students Opinions on Religion and Schooling. While Ethos, includes Ethos, Safe space, Pastoral care and Academic achievement. Findings are presented and analysed through the lens of identity humility. The theories employed to support analysis include agency, hegemony, conformity, identity development, power and privilege and othering. A conclusion draws together and summarises the key findings.

The following figure outlines the thematic map for the primary theme named, Conditional Shared Space.

**Figure 7. Conditional Shared Space Thematic map**



## 6.2 Rationale for Conditional Shared Space

The theme Conditional Shared Space emerged from the coding of the students' interviews. All the students interviewed attended schools with a Catholic ethos and hence shared this space with the entire school community on a day to day basis. The conditionality of the shared space is identified in the sub theme Compromise which reports students' acceptance of the Catholic ethos in their schools as the dominant worldview or as Gramsci described "Weltanschauung", students also reported awareness of their minority status. Furthermore, while most participants expressed positivity regarding retreats, meditation and learning together about world religions, the conditionality of the shared experience was also evident. Research by Bryan (2009) and O'Donnell (2014) report students who do not share a Catholic Irish identity are positioned as 'other' in Irish education and the welcome they receive is conditional on them conforming to "existing educational provision and ethoi" (O'Donnell, 2014 p.2).

## 6.3 Religious Education

The secondary theme RE provides an analysis of the tertiary themes namely Leaving Cycle RE, Junior Cycle RE, world religions, meditation and school retreats. Theories of identity development, othering, conformity and agency are employed to analyse the

findings. In particular agency theories are used to explain the preference students expressed for Leaving Cycle RE as compared to Junior Cycle RE and also teachers provision of RE. From an identity humility perspective the individuality of students due to varied family backgrounds is illuminated. The need for communication in order to understand this diversity is posited. Power relations are also explored in relation to constraints on teacher agency and provisions for minority faith and worldview students around RE and their human right to freedom from religion. This section explores minority faith and minority worldviews student's experiences of RE in their schools.

### **6.3.1 Leaving Cycle RE**

Students spoke very positively regarding Leaving Cycle religion classes. It is noteworthy that religion was a non-examination subject at Leaving Certificate level for all students interviewed. This is in line with National statistics as in 2016, only 2.6 % of Leaving Certificate students sat the State Religion examination, (State Exams Commission 2017; O'Brien & O'Caollai, 2016). Although the Episcopal Conference issue guidelines about RE. The research findings from the student interviews indicate that some of the participating schools developed their own religion course at Leaving Cycle level and resulted in students expressing positivity for Leaving Cycle RE classes. An atheist student explained she would not opt out of RE class at Leaving Cycle as it encompassed discussion and meditation.

*"I would not opt out because in religion class we don't do just religion. The name doesn't fit the class. It doesn't. We talk about our feelings in a circle or questions for circle time or we meditate" (S.9).*

While a Christian student explained she liked religion as it was a relaxing class:

*"Yes, I guess, just to have a chilled class, we have meditation and everything" (S15).*

A student explained the religion course in his school at Leaving Cycle was a joint effort by six religion teachers. Each teacher had designed a course which covered a range of topics including, personality types, addiction, bullying, suicide, alcohol and homicide studies (S1, S2, S3).

*“It depends on the topic because this year we’re changing around everything, every six weeks to each religion teacher within the school, so the first religion teacher was doing things like enneagram and personality types, describing all of them, and I think, I do look forward more to sixth year religion, as it’s not just looking at a textbook and looking at religion but it’s looking at the relationship religion has with certain aspects of life and I feel sixth year religion has become more of a life class rather than a religion class(S1).*

Likewise a student from the same school further explained:

*“We are not really talking about religion at all in religion class. It is strange. We have been talking about sexuality, nature and nurture. We rotate the area every six weeks and last time it was about the holocaust and other kind of mass murders and homicides”(S2).*

A student from a different school explained that speakers came to the school and she found their inputs valuable for example.

*“We had a woman from the Rape Crisis Centre and she was good. She’s coming in again to finish her presentation. That’s very worthwhile” (S4)*

A student also explained religion at Leaving Cycle was based on open discussion.

*“Just offering a format to discuss different religious beliefs that people have, talking about karma and reincarnation and heaven and you can talk about anything and it’s fine, it’s totally fine, it’s not oppressive at all” (S.8).*

The students reporting they had opportunities to discuss religion in an open and accepting way, aligns with the Toledo Guiding Principles and Franken (2017) views on RE. Whereby, it is advanced by both that open discussions about religions results in enhanced social cohesion (OIDHR, 2007 & Franken, 2017). Moreover the student’s experiences of open discussion around religion indicate identity humble practice by teachers and students in her school. Moreover, the communication element of identity humility whereby views are shared and discussed is evident. Open discussion aligns with a phenomenological pedagogy. Evidence of a dialogical pedagogy was not reported nor discussion on non-religious world views. The quotes also indicate that

students valued the opportunities to learn about issues pertinent to their lives. In particular, student one's description of religion class is interesting; *"it's looking at the relationship religion has with certain aspects of life"*, this interpretation of religion class as a space to discuss real life issues in relation to religious belief, indicates a shared or common space where students of all beliefs could be accommodated. Moreover, it supports the exploration stage of identity development. The students also spoke about their experiences of Junior Cycle RE. A Muslim student explained how she preferred religion at Leaving Cycle when compared to Junior Cycle:

*"Leaving Cert. religion is better than Junior Cert, they don't talk about religion as much, its more about stress management, also in stress management we are asked what can you do to relieve stress and people say like, I love a run but my opinions are different, I go to pray" (S4).*

The students reported experiences of Leaving Cycle RE is interesting and suggests teachers are practicing extensive agency by designing their own RE classes which tend to focus on social issues relevant to adolescents rather than practical or even theoretical RE. Looking at Enneagrams supports the identity exploration of adolescents whereby a variety of possibly personalities were presented. The lack of focus on textbooks further suggests teachers' tendency not to adhere to the syllabi. The reasons behind teachers' actions are also difficult to ascertain. Maybe a decreasing interest in practical Catholicism by the general population is also reflected in the teaching population. Maybe teachers' awareness of students decreasing interest in practical Catholicism, caused them to focus on issues more pertinent to students' lives. From an identity humility perspective a reduced emphasis on practical RE, makes it easier to support the individual identities of minority faith and minority world view students, furthermore their human right to freedom of religion is also improved. In relation to power relations, it is posited that teachers are mitigating between the NCCA, Catholic partners and students' interests in the delivery of RE. The above student's opinion regarding a preference for Leaving Cycle RE was common among the participants and leads on to the next section on Junior Cycle RE.

### **6.3.2 Junior Cycle Religion**

The current Junior Cycle RE syllabus was introduced in 2000 and first examined in 2003. The syllabus reads as inclusive of all beliefs but it is open to interpretation. In

2016, 44% of Junior Cycle students sat a state religion exam (State Exams Commission, 2017). Students were not generally as positive about Junior Cycle religion and described it as more focused on Catholicism. An agnostic student described religion in first year, as centered on Bible readings and explained she would have preferred more discussion on spirituality rather than the religious rules.

*“In first year it was lots of Bible readings. It’s hard to explain, I guess very restrictive in that sense, they don’t talk about spirituality enough. In schools the rules of religion are talked about” (S13).*

Similarly, atheist students’ also described the teaching of Junior Cycle religion in their school as follows:

*“In 1<sup>st</sup> year students just read passages from the bible and the teacher who was a nun told them what it meant and there was no discussion allowed. I opted out of religion class but was put sitting at the front of the class” (S.12).*

*“At Junior Cert, I didn’t really like religion at all. In this school everyone does religion. They follow the usual course but we don’t do the exam” (S2).*

Likewise a non-religious third year student explained her experience of Junior Cycle religion,

*“We are doing about Catholicism and stuff, it is expressed as if we all believe in this” (S11).*

The above students’ quotations suggest that the Junior Cycle course is predominantly about Catholicism. This could be described as a divine pedagogical approach whereby practical RE is the main focus rather than theoretical RE. Student eleven’s comments evidences misrecognition whereby she believes teachers present Catholicism as if all students believe in it, although this is not the case. This is an example of Catholic hegemony in school. It is also reasonable to interpret this as a lack of reflexivity and communication on behalf of the teacher. While student twelve who opted out of RE is an example of counter hegemony, whereby she did not comply with the social norms of participation in Catholic RE. While the placing of the student at the front of the class, could be interpreted as a breach of the State’s responsibility under article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution and section 30.2e of the Education Act 1998, to insure that a child

does not attend religious instruction contrary to their beliefs. The student although not participating in the class is still in attendance when remaining in the class. It is also fair to suggest this students' human right to freedom of religion is compromised. While it is also important to acknowledge, that when children opt out from RE, an important aspect of their education is neglected in school.

In relation to the Junior Cycle course and textbook, an atheist student expressed the following;

*“I think there is a huge emphasis on Catholicism and Christianity in the Junior Cert book. I think the book is called, ‘All About Faith’. It wasn’t exactly said but a good Christian does this because he is Christian, nearly hinting especially with the tiny sections on atheism and agnosticism, which fill half a page, in a full book, it’s nearly hinting that Christian good anything else bad, very bad. Ok and then like it studies other faiths, they are there, we will give them a little look over, then we’re going back to Christianity. I don’t think it’s fair to call it religion, full stop. I think its Catholicism with possible projects or modules of other religions”(S 1).*

The same student had this to say about Leaving Cycle RE,

*“In fifth year, the religion teachers did different topics and the great thing about it was they are religion teachers but they are not bias. OK, religion is great, it decides all your morals and anything that goes against it, is horrible or terrible or whatever. If you want to look to religion for guidance you can. It’s not as if they’re going into class saying do this, this and this because this book says so, I think there is no bias religion teacher” (S1).*

It is difficult to unpack what the students' feelings are, there appears to be an inherent contradiction in what is being described as unbiased religion teaching, when the student, suggests a view that religious morals only are acceptable and all alternative thinking is unacceptable. The student maybe describing the Junior Certificate textbook as Catholic centric, this supports bias against minority faiths and minority worldviews. However his experience in leaving cycle suggests teachers are mitigating against this

textbook based bias. This is an example of teacher agency whereby they may be constrained in the choice of textbook but in practice they do not promote the textbook content as obligatory or binding. Regarding this atheist students' expressed feeling that non-religious based morals are considered horrible is a cause for concern and indicates a hegemonic practice of devaluing alternative worldviews. From an identity humility perspective this undermines the individual identities of students and supports stereotyping. It also supports the privileging of Catholic students and the othering of non-Catholic students. It is also fair to extrapolate that the student preferred the teaching of religion in Leaving Cycle compared to Junior Cycle.

However one atheist student was very positive regarding Junior Cycle religion, while annoyed with his peers' disrespectful behavior.

*“The first thing Sister Mary (name changed) did was to ask us all to write down what our faith was, I’m dyslexic and I had to ask her how to spell atheist, she was fine with that. She’s great; she keeps saying you don’t have to be Catholic to be a good person. She told my mum she wants to clone me, we get on great, and she’s really lovely. I want to get an A in every religion test. We have great discussions and debates, I hate when some of the lads are rude and wouldn’t listen, and they can be really ignorant, it really annoys me.*

*Sr. Mary put my name forward to go to Lourdes, I was offered a place. It was a tough decision for me, I love new experiences but I decided not to go as there was a waiting list. I would have gone, if I was paying for it myself but I didn’t think it was fair to take a place from someone who believes”*  
(S.18).

Student eighteens words clearly demonstrate a positive shared space occupied by an atheist student and his Catholic religion teacher. The acknowledgement and communicative practice of asking students to describe their own identities at the start of the year supports core elements of identity humility. Moreover, the respect for the individual identity of students, whereby, the teacher acknowledged the universality of goodness was key to acknowledging difference in a positive way. It challenges hegemonic privileging of one worldview. The result was increased engagement by the student. Research supports this finding insofar as positive student teacher relationships

increase student motivation (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). Regarding the invitation of a free trip to Lourdes, by a Catholic organisation to an atheist student, ahead of Catholic students, is interesting and may suggest anything on a spectrum from evangelisation to openness to the other. The student's expressed difficulty in refusing the trip, suggests engagement limitations across belief systems. It also suggests engagement may be impacted by a myriad of factors, this student felt financial considerations alongside limited spaces impacted his decision. Likewise in the theme hegemony, resources were advanced as an obstacle for some schools in catering for minority belief students to 'opt out'. The lived experience of student eighteen, demonstrates the complexity of human interactions, alongside a wealth of possibilities. If the intention by inviting the student to Lourdes was evangelisation, this is problematic and impacts the student's human right to freedom from religion and is disrespectful of the student's atheist beliefs. It is acknowledged that a function of a Catholic school is evangelisation (Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, 2017). Moreover Pope Francis in the apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* "encourages the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelisation" (Gaudium, E. 2013 p.1).

In summation, students' experiences of RE differ but generally seemed more negative with regard to Junior Cycle religion, most particularly the emphasis on Catholic doctrine. The research findings suggest teachers' place a greater emphasis on catechesis in Junior Cycle compared to Senior Cycle. It is therefore understandable that non-Catholic students prefer and find it easier to engage with the less doctrinal focus evidenced in Leaving Cycle in the participating schools. Moreover, the suitability of teaching Catholic faith formation to minority faith and worldview students is cause for concern, especially when no alternative is available or opting out is problematic as discussed in the chapter on hegemony. These findings are supported by the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism which also report a breach of students' human rights to freedom from religion. Likewise the IHREC (2015), also reports the need to stop indoctrination "The IHREC recommends that the Education (Admissions to School) Bill 2015 should be amended to require schools to have regard to providing information in relation to religion in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner that avoids indoctrination" (p.29).

Further analysis of the students' views, found regardless of students' religious or irreligious beliefs they shared an interest in and positivity towards discussions on values and societal issues pertinent to adolescents. Research findings also support

improved student engagement when teaching is focused on real world issues (Lamborn, Newmann, & Wehlage 1992). However there appears to be limits to engagement in some Catholic centric practices for example trips to Lourdes and practical RE. Consistent with the idea of a shared space is an atheist students' belief of shared values with Catholics, which he articulated as follows;

*“Atheism means I have lots of other beliefs and probably some that are common to say people who say they are Catholic” (S2).*

However, the following student believed not all schools were as open to discussion.

*“If you go to some other secondary schools here, my friend goes to St Mary’s (name changed) he was just having an argument with his teacher because there, it is absolutely strict. There is a God, do not argue with me. It’s very different here, it’s very open and accepting” (S8).*

It is noteworthy that the above students were mainly interviewed in their own schools and this research was supported by their school as the researcher was facilitated to conduct this study by the school Principals. This may indicate an open ethos in the participating schools, which may not be generalisable to all schools. This analysis is supported by the researcher’s experience, whereby it was very difficult to find schools willing to participate in this research. For example, one large all girls’ State funded Catholic school, told the researcher “all our students are Catholic, from good Catholic homes, so you would be better asking in a school with a more diverse intake”. Within a large school it would be statistically very unusual for all students to be Catholic, hence students who do not self- identify as Catholic may have no alternative but to conform to Catholic practices, hence they may suffer from what Gramsci termed contradictory consciousness, or what Oyserman, Bubee & Terry, (2006 p.188) as the “possible self” been impossible leading to increased stress regarding developing an authentic self. Similarly, McAdams and Olson (2010); Erickson (1950; 1968) report on the concept of role confusion or the functionality of a person’s identity and suggest a lack of coherence causes difficulties for individuals. Some adolescents may find ways to reconcile conflicting roles or identities while others may struggle with role confusion which impacts on their well- being. The lack of recognition of non-co-religionist students in the school is counter to the core concepts of identity humility, communication, human rights and demonstrates a serious lack of reflexivity supported

by power relations. The school is supported by the Catholic Bishops and State acquisition to maintain Catholic school hegemony. The researcher suggests the schools which were open to this research may be more open and accepting of students' religious diversity than some schools which refused. Tangentially related are the thoughts of a student regarding this research project,

*“It’s the first I’ve heard about a project like this, it completely goes against the grain of Catholic society, lads in the school would have no interest in doing something like this, because it is different” (S.2)*

Analysis of the above comment suggests the student believes it is counter hegemonic to question Catholic school practices and the experiences of non-co-religionists. However, the basis of his belief that his peers have no interest because it is different, maybe due to constraining social forces, acceptance of the dominant world view or possibly misrecognition. Students from Catholic homes attending Catholic schools may be unaware of how their socialisation, privileges them while devaluing others within their coherent Catholic world hegemony (Foucault, 1991; Hayward, 1998). While some who recognise the inherent inequalities created by hegemony may decide to conform to the hegemony as the best means to improve their social capital, realising the dangers of a challenging a hegemony (Gorski, 2008).

### **6.3.3 World Religions**

Minority faith and non-religious students spoke about the value inherent in learning about different religions and expressed a desire to learn more about world religions as follows:

*“There are so many great religions, we only touch on them in Junior Cycle, so many great ideals, let’s say in Buddhism, which is so pivotal to life. Buddhism is literally described on an A4 page and in class you look at it, copy it down and then it’s left forever. There is huge wisdom in Buddhism; it goes so much further back than Christianity. There is great teaching, I think in the majority of religions but it really should be more openly discussed and explored in school” (S2).*

*“I love learning about all religions” (S.13)*

*“Religion is a really big part of life, I like learning about it as well, I just really don’t believe it” (S11).*

The above students’ views are supported by the Toledo Guiding Principles (OIDHR, 2007) and also by adolescent identity development theories which outline the need for an exploration of possible identities as supportive of secure identity achievement (Luyckx, Duriez, Kilmstra, Van Petegem & Beyers, 2011). The students appear to value dialogical and interpretative religious pedagogies. Both a Hindu and Muslim student described how they liked learning about Catholicism and other faiths and how teachers were very fair in discussions on Islam and Hinduism and used them as a resource to answer questions regarding their respective faiths. A Muslim student explained as follows;

*“I liked learning lots of stuff about different religions; it was a good experience for me. If they were not sure of anything they would ask me. They are very supportive, they all have respect for religion they don’t just teach about their religion, they teach about religion all around the world” (S14).*

A Hindu student expressed his experience as follows;

*“I talk about it sometimes, you know like we were doing all different religions in third year. We do Catholic and my Hinduism as well and last year, there were just some friends concerned, how many gods do you have? There is more than one different God? Normal questions. They were curious they wanted to find out about different religions and all that” (S16).*

The quotations from the Muslim and Hindu students clearly demonstrate identity humility was practised by the RE teachers, they accept they are not as competent as necessary to explain the tenets of Islam or Hinduism but replace competence with good communication. The inclusion of students’ personal knowledge and experience of religion aligns with a dialogical approach to teaching religion as operative in these students’ school. However, Selim (2014) and Al-Qadri (as cited in Frymann & Rouch, 2016) both believe caution is needed in this regard as an individual’s opinion on a religion may not be representative of that religion. The following students’ views agree with the *Toledo Guiding Principles* (2007) and the belief that religion should be taught in a way which favours no single religion.

*“I think they should teach it from a detached way, where they are not enforcing it as much, more these are the facts and opinions rather than this is a belief and you have to take it on (S.7).*

Student seven’s opinion that teachers present RE as a belief that has to be accepted and taken on board, is contrary to the opinion expressed by student one above, whereby he believed textbooks were biased but not teachers. Student’s seven as an atheist being expected to take on Catholic beliefs, which was a breach of her human right to freedom from religion and also shows a lack of identity humility by the teacher. Moreover the contrast in experiences articulated between student one and seven maybe accounted for by teachers’ different beliefs and agency. Student sevens’ account indicates a divine pedagogy is employed by her teacher. In contrast the Muslim (S14) and Hindu (S16) students account suggest a dialogical pedagogy. In light of these findings it is necessary to acknowledge that RE is fluid and developing subject. It is impacted on by both the NCCA guidelines and Catholic Bishops Guidelines which may be interpreted in different ways by teachers, leading to very different classroom experiences. It is noteworthy and reflective of the varied experience of students that although the Irish State signed up to the Toledo Guiding Principles the Holy See did not. Hence the NCCA and Irish Catholic Bishops have different agendas and starting points regarding RE. Critique also posits, Catholic Bishops may not be aware of all teachers’ classroom practices. Teacher practices may include the provision of retreats, Catholic services and the mandated time allocated to RE classes which are easily assessed by Diocesan advisors. However it is more difficult to assess how the interpretations of individual teachers impact on RE lessons. It is also possible that rejection of the Toledo Guiding Principles by the Holy See does not equate with complete rejection of the principles. Rather with concerns of interference and detached teaching of RE or a need to maintain power over RE in Catholic schools. Gramsci’s theory of hegemony would support this need to maintain power by maintenance of a common, in this case Catholic worldview through education. The evidence suggests teachers are currently teaching about world religions as it is part of both the Junior and Leaving Cycle syllabi. However, Diocesan advisors and Catholic Bishops may not be aware that it is not always been taught through the lens of Catholicism, due to teacher agency. Moreover students articulated fairness in the presentation of world religions, while also expressing an interest in learning more about world religions. Atheist, agnostic and

non-religious students appear open to exploring others beliefs. Hence, challenging perceptions or stereotypes that atheists are anti-religious. It is reasonable to suggest schools providing opportunities to explore different beliefs could support students in acquiring a secure identity. Moreover, the interest students articulated in learning about world religions may be a useful shared space and has the potential to counteract stereotyping and “othering”, while practising and teaching identity humility.

The next section explores the area of practical RE or faith formation as distinct from theoretical RE. An atheist student’s views on teaching practical RE are interesting:

*“I think religion should be taught. I don’t have a problem. I’m very fine with religion, unless it’s hurting someone else. So I think it’s nice it’s been taught in the schools. I think it’s nice they have something like to think about and believe in, that I don’t,” (S10).*

Student ten’s view is in line with the European Convention on Human Rights (article 9) as it also supports everyone’s freedom to manifest their religion and advises limitations should only be imposed, in order to protect the safety or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others, (ECHR 2010). Hence, limitations on the manifestation of religion in schools, maybe an assurance that individual students’ beliefs are respected and no student is coerced to attend practical RE. However, agreement that all religion is taught in a detached way is a challenging concept. The passing on of a faith from one generation to the next, encompasses more than the passing on of doctrine or knowledge. Selim (2014), in explaining education in Islam uses the term ‘Ilm to refer to knowledge, “ ‘Ilm includes theory, action and education while knowledge refers only to information” , the key point is that, being a Muslim requires more than acquiring knowledge of Islam, “No field of Muslim life exists-divine or corporeal, economic or political, or even daily affairs of Muslim lay people- that remains excluded from the scope of the term ‘Ilm”,(Selim, 2014, p.75). The concept of ‘Ilm is similar to the concept of ethos or the integration of Catholic values into school life. In essence Catholic and Islamic faith education requires the values taught, to permeate the life of a believer. The researcher believes detachment is therefore challenged. Hence in order to uphold freedom of thought, conscience and religion for all, it is necessary to separate practical RE from theoretical RE in Catholic schools. The researcher suggests an alternative maybe to include all students in theoretical RE and only separate students at certain times for practical RE or Ethics. Due to the small numbers of some minority

faith students groups, supporting targeted practical faith formation classes may be unworkable. Moreover research from Finland reports; when the numbers of minority religion students are low, they reported “feelings of otherness” and a “negative sense of difference” when separated from the main group for RE. However these feelings were not reported among students attending ethics classes (Zilliacus & Holm, 2013. p.282). Hence a workable strategy maybe to provide non- Catholic students with the option of attending ethical education classes rather than practical RE. It is important to ensure all students have opportunities to explore life’s questions, which supports students’ identity exploration and hence their achievement of a secure identity. It is reasonable to suggest attending a class on ethics with other students can better support a student’s sense of belonging and identity rather than opting out. Research reports opting out causes a sense of isolation (Mawhinney, 2013). A Baptist student believed the following option was fair,

*“Sometimes together and sometimes not, it should be an option a choice “(S4)*

A deeper analysis suggests persistent challenges due to the need to integrate practical RE and faith values into the life of the school. It is hoped a compromise position could be found whereby universal values are integrated, while more contentious faith specific values impacting the human rights of some would be taught during practical RE only, with alternate provision offered to non-co-religionist students. The research findings and acknowledgement of the complexities of individual and institutional needs indicate difficulties may arise between school personnel, students and parents. However, the practise of identity humility centred on engagement and open communication alongside critical self-awareness could help to identify issues and help to navigate the best possible educational outcome for all students.

#### **6.3.4 Analysis of Teacher agency and RE**

Analysis of the above findings suggest students preferred how Leaving Cycle RE is taught in comparison to Junior Cycle RE. The students clearly articulated preferences for discussion lead inquiry into societal issues pertinent to their lives, world religions and opportunities to meditate rather than bible readings or the Junior Cycle syllabus, which focused on practical RE. Although student 18, was very positive about his Junior Cycle RE class, he described the same elements as Leaving Cycle students as key to his positivity e.g. “class discussions and debates are great” (S.18). The findings support the

literature on teacher agency, which found an exam orientation can negatively impact on teacher agency with repercussions on teacher engagement and sense of purpose, (Conley, 1998). While Long et al (2017), suggest using national testing as a tool to monitor teacher performance reduces teachers ability to provide a quality education, they suggest a system which supports teacher agency would enable teachers to be more responsive to the variety of students needs. The research findings support the benefits of giving teachers opportunities to develop their own courses and also evidenced the improvement in meeting diverse students needs. Coherent with the finding that students' preferring Leaving Cycle RE to Junior Cycle RE and the link with the negative effect of an exam orientation on teacher agency is supported by the very small number of schools which have chosen to provide religion as an examination subject. In 2016 only 2.6% of Leaving Cycle students sat a state religion exam compared to 44% of Junior Cert students (State Exams Commission, 2017). The research findings suggest the “wriggle room” afforded by the non-examination and non-use of the RE syllabus at Leaving Cycle level, resulted in teachers developing their own courses and hence a more positive reaction by the minority students interviewed. Accordingly, these findings suggest the teaching of religion at Leaving Cycle reflected a discourse on the broader purpose of education, as it focused on a fundamental purpose of education as a preparation for life. Indeed the religion course described by student 1 and 2 was titled “Life”. This finding concurs with Higgins (2011), who reports that teacher agency is necessary in order for teachers to remain focused on the purpose of education and to defend good education. Likewise, Long et al (2017) suggest “agency is essential to enable teachers to support independent and autonomous thinkers”, which is the purpose of education as advanced by Biesta (2009, p.9). While the NCCA guidelines on *Intercultural Education in the Post Primary school*, has in the introduction the following statement: “Education is therefore an education in freedom—freedom from inherited biases and narrow feelings and sentiments, as well as freedom to explore other cultures and perspectives and make one’s own choices in full awareness of available and practicable alternatives”. (Bhikhu Parekh, 1986 cited in NCCA Guidelines on Intercultural Education in Post Primary School, 2006 p.i).

In other words, if teachers are to be the guardians of education they need to be afforded the agency to do so. Furthermore the collaborative nature described, whereby six teachers worked together to design a course, is in line with the theory of competence

and teacher agency described by Pantic (2015). The discussions, debates and guest speakers as an integral part of religion class at Senior Cycle suggest an openness to ideas and opinions, which supports identity development as outlined in chapter three. Moreover, by enabling engagement and communication between individuals on a range of pertinent issues the communication pillar of identity humility is supported. Some students were afforded the opportunity to discuss personal beliefs with the Hindu and Muslim students. According to Gatens and Lloyd (1999) and Fielding (2004) these exchanges can help to develop reason and enable both students and teachers to understand something they did not understand before. Regarding pedagogy, these exchanges align with a dialogical approach to teaching whereby personal knowledge and experience were employed by some teachers. Moreover inviting a range of guest speakers also aligns with a dialogical pedagogy. Pantic (2015), research is also noteworthy as it reports teachers must believe in the importance of an issue in order to act as agents for change. The following quote articulates clearly the teacher and student engagement which resulted from the teacher being supported as an agentic professional.

*“The teacher I just had, did alcohol, social issues, very passionate about Facebook and the dangers of that, which is very important to hear” (S2).*

The topics the students mentioned align more closely with Social Political and Health Education (SPHE) than RE. It is difficult to understand why this teacher is not more focused on the RE curriculum, maybe the leeway afforded by the lack of a mandatory examination and the differences in opinions between the NCCA and the Catholic Bishops regarding a shared praxis alongside socio-political shifts have trickled down to school level and resulted in some teachers concentrating on topics they perceive to be important. This teacher has reflected on his role as an educator and decided at a personal level what his students needs are, reflexivity is a core element of identity humility. The teacher reflected on his own position and also on his students’ position in deciding on pertinent topics which he wished to address. While the next quote explains how a teacher felt her agency was constrained in relation to the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education, (RSE).

*“There was one incident that was very interesting, there was a trip anyway one day and half the class wasn’t here and the teacher started talking to us about being safe in a sexual manner. She said you know lads, I really shouldn’t be telling you this now, this is a Catholic school but I think it’s*

*important and I'm going to say it to you anyway. The fact that, that thought was going through her mind and the fact that she had to say it and it nearly cushioned it by saying that and then she started going on about contraception and the morning after pill. These things are very important to be taught. You have lads in this school, who are like rabbits," (S2).*

In support of the above student's account, the literature also reports challenges to the teaching of RSE in Irish Post Primary schools, (Neary, 2016; McGuire, 2014; Department of Education and Skills, 2013a). Currently schools may change the State designed RSE programme to reflect their school ethos. A DES report in 2014 found 45% of schools invite external non State regulated parties to teach some elements of RSE in schools. Parties include the Health Service Executive (HSE) and also conservative groups promoting abstinence, such as Love for Life or Pure in Heart. Key concerns addressed by the DES report centred on the teaching of 'contraception', 'sexually transmitted infections', and 'sexual orientation'. Moreover the DES inspectorate has highlighted deficiencies in relation to the quality of RSE provision at senior cycle in 30% of post- primary schools (p.10). Hence the DES has advised schools that under the European Health Charter, students have a right to objective sexual and reproductive health education which does not involve censoring, withholding or intentionally misrepresenting information, (McGuire, 2014). Hence, schools need to ensure external agencies present accurate information. The above student quote also supports the existence of a counter hegemony whereby the teacher regardless of the school's ethos or hegemony showed agency in the delivery of RSE. Gramsci understood counter hegemonies are always present to challenge a dominant hegemony. At the current time in Ireland the Catholic Church's teaching on sexuality is challenged, at a societal level, as evidenced by the popular support for marriage equality despite the Church's opposition. The teacher employed her agency when her regular teaching timetable was interrupted, the interruption allowed her "wriggle room" to talk openly with her students in a less formal way than had all the class been present. In the context of teaching RSE, it is worthwhile to consider the role of identity humility in finding a workable strategy to address the needs of all within the school community. Identity humility would support flexibility, while maintaining a human rights agenda, it would challenge the superiority of any single belief being imposed on everyone. Identity humility accepts the interplay between individual and

institutional accountability. Both the teacher and student two, were cognisant of the interplay when he articulated, *“I really shouldn’t be telling you this now, this is a Catholic school”*. A different student also referred to the interplay, while sharing his beliefs about the Junior Certificate syllabus. He understood the school was doing what was expected as outlined in the religion syllabus and change would need to come from a higher source.

*“I don’t think the school can do an awful lot. I think reform needs to come from a bit higher. I do think the Junior Cert syllabus in its present form needs to be completely scrapped, the idea of an exam in religion. I don’t think it is a good idea”, (S8).*

It is noteworthy, that the student’s opinion on religion as an exam subject is reflected in the fact that a minority of students sat a State exam in religion in 2016. In tandem with these findings research by Kavanagh (2013), on intercultural education in Irish primary schools, also reports constrained agency is evident in religious education practices, whereby, “teachers deploy subtle counter-tactics, seizing agentic opportunities and actively resisting the regulatory power of the Catholic hierarchy and the NCCA”,(p.278). The State in handing over responsibility for school management to the episcopal conference, indicates change in relation to religious diversity maybe slow within a predominantly Catholic school system. Coolahan (cited in Traynor, 2015), concurs with this view and believes “there is little political will to disrupt the status quo at a constitutional level. Instead, there will be smaller-scale adjustments made over time”. Moreover, the Catholic Bishops and JMB /AMCCS Guidelines on Inclusiveness of students of other faiths, report the main focus and challenge for Catholic schools are their own identity, not the needs of minority faith or non-religious students;

*“Before we can comfortably host students of other faiths and their needs, it seems necessary that we address our own identity as Catholic schools”.* (Mullaly, 2010 p.6).

### **6.3.5 Meditation**

An unexpected theme was students’ positivity towards meditation, both male and female students from across different schools clearly identified their enjoyment of meditation, in particular they appreciated the stress relief it provided. It is noteworthy that the majority of students interviewed were in senior cycle and eleven students were

in sixth year, which for many can be a stressful year. The following students' quotes illustrate students' opinion on meditation;

*"It's a great stress relief, I love it", (S.13).*

*"I love meditation, I love it", (S.15).*

*" When we go to the prayer room, it's nice, it's relaxing, it's quite as well, we went today , the time flies", (S.16).*

Some students mentioned that the meditations had a religious element. However, they described how they had developed their own strategies or thoughts to counter the religious element, which enabled them to both enjoy and benefit from meditation.

*"Meditation is really a very nice experience, have you seen our prayer room, it's absolutely beautiful its carpeted, there are cylindrical cushions and since two years ago, lovely stained glass windows. I really enjoy it, a lot of the time you can completely detach from the day and whatever is going on. You don't need to imagine exactly word for word what is being said, they say you meet your friend Jesus on a mountain. I say I would meet some figure or no one on a mountain. I would meet myself. We're allowed to lie down and you can sleep, if you don't snore. That's a great rule. Meditation would be some of the best experiences based on religion in the school", (S.2)*

Similarly a student who initially came across as a very quiet person with an inner sadness became animated and jolly when describing meditation in her school as follows:

*"It's a bit weird when she's trying to relax you and she's saying imagine yourself on a beach and it goes in depth and then imagine Jesus standing next to you and you're not relaxed. Because I moved here from Chicago, the first time I sat in that class and she said Jesus is there, it actually scared me. I was in the moment. I was on this beach and ahh! Jesus appears next to me and I'm like, Oh my God! I did not expect that at all, I was just like, I did not expect that at all. Now, if I know Jesus is going to appear, I just imagine a hot actor instead of Jesus appearing. It's just kind of funny. Even the Catholic girls think it's funny when she says "and then Jesus appears", (S.9)*

In tandem with student two, student nine had also developed a coping strategy, in this case Jesus was replaced with a hot actor! These findings could also be used to support theme four “Compromise”, whereby students side stepped the explicit religious references enabling them to benefit from the spiritual or mindful experience afforded through meditation. The above student quotes also demonstrate the acceptance of the religious element of the meditation as normal, no student complained. This could be explained by Gramsci’s theory of hegemony whereby the dominant world view is accepted as normal. Moreover the religion teacher by incorporating a Catholic element into the meditation may have done so without “conscious recognition” of how this would impact on some students in her class. Misrecognition is described by both Gramsci and Bourdieu (Litwitz, 2000; Navarro, 2006) as occurring within societies when hegemony is historically embedded and culturally cemented as normal. The religion teacher may have been socialised as a Catholic from her earliest years, attended a Catholic Primary and Post Primary school and a Catholic teacher training college, moreover she is supported both institutionally and by legislation to teach religion through the lens of Catholicism. Litwitz, (2000) suggests a strong cultural tradition supports Catholic centric practises as legitimate.

### **6.3.6 School retreats**

Similar to meditation some students expressed positive experiences with regard to school retreats. According to the CEIST website, student retreats provide time for students to reflect on their faith, their relationships with God and others and to experience a sense of belonging to a community of faith, “retreats for students are an essential element in supporting their spiritual growth and faith development,” (www.ceist.ie). Schools are expected to provide retreats for all classes and the Diocesan advisor assigned to the schools records this in an annual report made available to the Bishop (Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, 2013, p.15). Examples of the positivity students expressed with regard to retreats are provided by two atheists and one non-religious student as follows;

*“We went to ..... Abbey (name omitted) followed by a spiritual day, it was great, I had no problem with it at all”, (S10).*

*“It’s kind of a nice day out”, (S11).*

*“There was a play done, and then a sort of theatre performance, it was based on a gospel story, and there was another one done on the theme of bullying. I thoroughly enjoyed it, to be honest”, (S2).*

However, for some minority faith students it may be more difficult or prohibited to attend a retreat with an element of Catholic faith formation and hence students may feel they are missing out, as articulated by a Muslim student;

*“My mum had to come in and give her a note (school Principal), I couldn’t go to the school retreat. Everyone was telling me how much fun they had and I was at home for the whole three days”, (S6).*

Taken in tandem, the above quotes maybe explained with reference to Jensen (2011) and his theory of othering as linked to agency. The atheist and non-religious students decided to participate in the retreat, they are not Catholic, yet may have decided this difference was not enough to exclude them from participation in the retreat. Conversely, the Muslim student and parent identified as other and claimed the difference meant they would not participate in this school activity. Both atheist and Muslim students showed agency in the situation albeit with different outcomes. The absence of “doxa” within atheism afforded these students more agency than the Muslim student. However, a different analysis is also possible whereby the schools may have been more supportive of students of minority faith opting out from the retreat than atheist students, as evident with regard to opting out of religion class, as described earlier. In other words agency may have been constrained for atheist students by the school authorities. Links between constrained agency and rational conformity are also evident, as non-religious and atheist students may decide to conform because they feel it will result in personal benefit and also avoid negative consequences, while not agreeing with the faith formation element of the retreat, (Guandong et al, 2008). It could also be argued that the atheist and non-religious students willingly participated or complied with the dominant world view due to the hegemonic dominance of Catholicism in their schools. It is difficult to unpack which analysis is most relevant to each student’s experience. Notwithstanding the choices made, it is important to recognise that student six felt she had missed out on an enjoyable experience, moreover no alternative was provided by the school to counteract the sense of ‘othering’ experienced by student six. Also student six was not facilitated equally to reflect on her

faith or feel a sense of belonging to her community of faith, which indicates an inherent inequality in the school system. Further analysis of the above quotations with regard to the positivity expressed by those who attended combined with a sense of missing out by those who did not attend, suggest students' value opportunities for reflection as a key element of both retreats and meditation. Eck (2017) further explains the importance of reflection due to the diversity of beliefs at this point in time, "there is the *dialogue within*—reflection on what all this means for one's own faith, recognising that the diversity of spiritual voices and perspectives is not only "out there" in society, but in here, within ourselves"(p.25). This is in line with the need for adolescents to spend time exploring as outlined in chapter three. Research by Luyckx, Duriez, Klimstra, Van Petegem, and Beyers (2011) and Schwartz, Beyers et al (2011) suggest the exploratory stage of identity development is very important and those who actively seek out answers to life's questions are more likely to achieve a sustainable individual identity. Hence the importance of providing spaces such as retreats and meditation to enable students to reflect and explore is evident. On a different note it is reasonable to suggest identity humility was at play as atheist and non-religious students enjoyed the retreat. However, it is unclear as to the extent identity humility was practised by both students and educators. The Muslim student's experience suggests it is the student who must be humble in order to participate. This links with what O'Donnell, (2014) described as "conditional hospitality". Moreover, the practise of identity humility would necessitate strategies were worked out to avoid 'othering' of Muslim students at these times. There appears a need to build in strategies and provide spaces to enable all students to participate in an exploration of their beliefs and enhance their feeling of belonging to their community. Franken (2017) suggests an open exploration and discussion of world views in religious education is supportive of all students. Hence the challenge for Irish schools is to provide spaces where all students can reflect on their individual world views. The next section explores the theme of compromise.

#### **6.4 Compromise**

The secondary theme of compromise was prevalent during student interviews. This section presents findings on three tertiary themes of Compromise namely; Students & Compromise, Impact of Parents and Student Opinions on Religion and Schooling.

Theories of hegemony, conformity and agency are used to analyse the findings through the lens of identity humility.

#### **6.4.1 Students and Compromise**

Students accepted the Catholic ethos in their schools as the dominant world view or as Gramsci described “Weltanschauung”. The following students’ quotations describe their understanding of their minority position and the need to compromise;

*“ I do think the opportunities for spirituality are important and to be honest with the majority of the students in the school being Catholic, I think it’s fair the mediation in the school is Catholic driven”, (S.2).*

*“Well, we can’t change the system because then it’s unfair for other students. I’m the only Muslim in my whole year. And it’s just me. It would be weird, I can’t say you have to change all this because of me, like you know”, (S6).*

The quotations could be understood as an example of “fatalism” (p.337) as described by Gramsci (1995). Fatalism suggests minority groups accept the inequalities as they believe they have no power to change them. In an Irish educational context O’Donnell (2014) reports those who feel they do not fit into the “dominant norm” remain silent and do not oppose inequalities as they believe they will not be listened too (p.7). The above students’ quotes suggest a belief that their own needs are unimportant and irrelevant within their schools. No suggestion of tweaking current practices was put forward. However it could also be analysed as an identity humble position, as the students do not seek to dilute or object to anyone’s belief system. Moreover, there is an acknowledgement of the difficulties in providing for minorities in the current school system. Furthermore, compromise is accepted as realistic. The students’ views could be described as reflexive as they demonstrate an understanding of their positionality in the current system.

The following student’s belief also supports an identity humble position.

*“You have to take into account the people who founded this school. They were Catholic and did have their morals and views and wanted them to be upheld, so maybe not make it non- denominational maybe keep it Catholic but make it more accepting and neutral in its form and the way it educates. I don’t want*

*to completely change it because that's again like forcing certain peoples' opinions on others", (S1).*

This atheist student is aware of the climate and context of religious education in Ireland, which coincides with theories of agency which recognise the social forces which impact on change. Moreover, he articulates the need to respect everyone's rights and suggests compromise can find solutions. This concurs with Vatican II teaching on religious freedom and Tuohy (2013), who argues "schools' right to manifest their religion is equal to non-co-religionists right to freedom from coercion, proselytising and indoctrination", ( p.123). However, the student's views on making Catholic schools "more accepting and neutral in its form and how it educates" (S1), maybe challenged by some current thinking on Catholic schools place in education. There appears an intention to make Catholic schools more distinctively Catholic than at present as articulated by Keogh (2016), at the National Conference titled the Future of Faith – Based Schools in a Pluralist Age. However particularly in rural Ireland it is important to recognise that a Catholic school maybe the only school accessible to some minority faith and worldview students and their needs must be considered regardless of the patron. All children have a right to an education and state funded schools have a responsibility, whether they are Catholic, Church of Ireland, ETBI or Educate Together, for educating students of diverse beliefs, or in the case of adolescents' fluid beliefs. While identity humility practice would require that both individual and institutional inequalities are addressed.

The findings also uncovered some students' willingness to participate in practical RE as explained in the following quotes;

*"No, although I am atheist, I don't mind going to Church and just, it's no problem at all ", (S10).*

A Muslim student also explained that he did not mind reading out prayers.

*"Yeah, they ask me to read prayers and I'd be like OK. I wouldn't mind because the teacher's really nice, so I read it out to participate" (S15).*

It is also reasonable to analyse the participation of non-Catholic students' in Catholic centric practices as "compliance conformity" (Guandong & Lei, 2007), which is understood as an agreeable response to an expectation of a behavior, in this incidence

by school teachers and principals on non- Catholic students. The students' complied after due consideration even though they may not think the behavior is right. Indeed the teacher in asking the Muslim student to read out prayers is placing an expectation on the student to comply.

Similarly, with regard to the graduation ceremony an atheist student explained he was happy to read out a prayer of the faithful but would use the coping strategy of crossing his fingers for the response, "Lord hear us" (S.2). The student also touches on the commonality of human needs by using the example of good health as a prayer of the faithful he would have no problem with. Although the students willingly comply with Catholic centric practices, this is problematic from a human rights perspective in relation to the students' right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. From an identity humility perspective placing an expectation on students to comply with Catholic norms while simultaneously ignoring students' identities is problematic. Identity humility theory would expect all identities are respected equally and good communication would ensure measures were taken to support all students' identities and ensure any issue relating to human rights were addressed.

*"I would have no issue with giving a speech, I would be happy to read from one of the books or to say a prayer of the faithful. If it's a fair prayer of the faithful, say if we ask for health for those who need it, for those who are struggling. I would have no issue with that but I would cross my fingers for lord hear us", (S2).*

Likewise, the following students also articulated the sameness or commonality of humanity. For example a Hindu student expressed how he felt religions' shared common values of respect and treating others as you would like to be treated,

*"Most religions are the same, they all have different Gods and things but most values respect, treat other peoples as you treat yourself. It's all the same in a way "(S16).*

An Atheist student also felt irrespective of a person's religion or belief, the important thing was to try and build a person's character around being nice to people.

*"The golden rule of be nice to people, they will be nice to you, I think that's important" (S2).*

The above understanding or concept that all of humanity share a common set of needs and values is very important. Acknowledging human sameness is an antidote to stereotyping and 'othering'. The language of solidarity is key to addressing all needs in a society, (Dussel, 1997; Levinas, 1969; O'Donnell, 2014). Furthermore, the above students' quotations are evidence of their respect for Catholicism and beliefs different to their own; moreover they acknowledge our common or shared humanity. The idea of a shared humanity is mirrored in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The collaborative realisation of and the worldwide respect for this declaration is evidence of our shared human values. In tandem, from an education policy perspective the NCCA (2006) Guidelines on Intercultural Education also report that "education should respect, celebrate and recognise the normality of diversity in all areas of human life", moreover it states a "breadth of worldviews enriches all of us" (p.3). The above encapsulates the essence of identity humility. However, students also articulated their need for inclusion as their rationale for participation in Catholic faith formation. The following quotations explain;

*"I'm happy to go to the graduation mass. I'm so used to it now, I find things out that are kind of nice, I think that even if you are an atheist you should still be open to religions and other peoples' beliefs and enjoy being a part of it. It's has a social part. It's not all beliefs" (S13).*

*"The school masses and stuff, all the students come together for that, it's nice", (S11).*

In considering all of the above quotations on the theme of a conditional shared space, it is reasonable to deduct that students joining in practical RE is because they recognise the value in it from a participatory perspective. This ties in with adolescents need to feel they belong and to avoid otherness. Levine (2000) suggests adolescents have an inordinate need for a sense of belonging. While theories of othering support the idea of claiming normality in order to avoid otherness. While research by Arnett, (2003), Brandt (1994) and Carr (2015) all report difficulties around student wellbeing when students face prejudice regarding their identities. Hence, it is deeply problematic that a student has to acquiesce to Catholic norms in order to feel they belong and avoid a sense of otherness, it points to systemic inequalities in the current system.

#### 6.4.2 Impact of Parents on Students

It is evident from the above students' accounts and with regard to school retreats that some students participate in Catholic faith formation school activities while others do not. Hence in order to try and further unravel the reasons behind this the impact parents may have on students' ability to compromise and participate is explored. The following quotations suggest some students are free or encouraged to participate by their parents in Catholic centric school practices. An atheist student described how he intended on going to his graduation mass because both his parents wanted him to.

*“No my parents would want me to go anyway, I would go because, it’s my last year here. I wouldn’t have anything against religion. It’s probably the last time I’ll see all these people” (S3).*

Likewise, the Hindu student described how he participated in his class mates' preparations for their Confirmation, again his parents were open to his joining in.

*“I went to the CBS primary. I didn’t make my Confirmation. I still went to help all my classmates. My parents are very open minded as well, my parents don’t mind me studying in a Catholic school they don’t mind anything like that”, (S16).*

However, some students and/or parents may wish to avoid participation in practical RE or Catholic faith formation, for example some Muslim parents may feel it is against their beliefs or the teaching of their faith to allow participation (Mazhari, 2010). The impact of Catholic centric practices on minority faith and minority worldview students is addressed in chapter seven. Furthermore, in relation to parents, it became apparent that some students had parents of mixed religions or worldview. The following table identifies the extent of parental diversity in this relatively small sample. Moreover, it demonstrates that some participants had a different belief or worldview to one or both parents. It is considered a shortcoming of this research, that the religion or world view of all students' parents was not identified.

The labels are as students described their own and parents' beliefs at interview.

**Table 2: Parent and Offspring Religions or Worldviews**

<b>Parent</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Student / Offspring</b>
Russian Orthodox	Protestant	Atheist
Agnostic	Christian	Agnostic
Church of Scotland	Catholic	Non-religious
Catholic	Realist	Non –religious
Non –religious	Zen Buddhist	Atheist
Non practising Catholic	Non practicing Catholic	Atheist
Non practising Catholic	Non practicing Catholic	Agnostic
Hindu	Hindu	Hindu
Buddhist	Buddhist	Buddhist
Catholic	Catholic	Non-religious
Catholic	Catholic	Atheist
Muslim	Muslim	Muslim

The above figure suggests some parents and students live with familial worldview differences and may have developed coping strategies in order to navigate daily life together. However, research suggests, inter faith marriage is associated with increased psychological distress (McAloney, 2012). While research by Moulin (2015) and Scholefield (2004) report students find it difficult to negotiate their home values with their school values. In particular students were critical of their teachers' values and views which clashed with their own, or their family's religious views. These findings are not only relevant to minority faith and minority worldview students but also to culturally Catholic students. Culturally Catholic students may also find it difficult to

marry their schools Catholic expectations with their home values. It is reasonable to suggest, intrafaith challenges are increasing in Irish Catholic schools, as growing numbers of Irish people remain affiliated to Catholicism while not adhering to Catholic practises or teaching for example; reduced Church attendance, support for divorce and marriage equality and increasing numbers of non-church marriages, all of which are at odds with traditional understandings of Catholicism and Catholic doctrine.

There may also be an impact on students' identity as articulated by the following Atheist student,

*“I think my parents put me down as Protestant because my mum, she’s Russian orthodox which is Catholic in Russia and my dad is Protestant so we are basically Protestant in a way, I think they put me down as Protestant because I went to a Protestant primary school” (S10).*

In relation to student 10, the teacher who helped facilitate the researcher, described this student as Protestant. It was not until the interview was underway, that the researcher was told by the student herself that she was an atheist. In relation to this research it points to the complexity of the student experience and a need for school personnel to communicate with families in order to understand student's world views and to avoid stereotyping all family members as sharing a common belief or world view. As a teacher the researcher believes due to students having to navigate a personnel identity within an array of different family and school identities, their need for open discussion and debate may be very important for their identity development. Hence the inadequacy of 'opt out' provision is challenged as it does not address the needs of minorities to explore their beliefs. Moreover, Brandt (1994), reports educators need to accept difference in order to facilitate students to develop a secure identity within different home and mainstream communities.

### **6.4.3 Students' Opinions on Religion and Schooling**

The following section explores students' opinions on religion and schooling. It was clear the students interviewed wished all beliefs to be respected and to be educated together. No student suggested separatist schooling on religious lines as an option, which is counter to current Government policy to increase the number of patrons in order to provide multiple school types. However the policy to remove faith formation from Community national school in order to enable all students to study religion

together is in tandem with students wishes. Research by Faas also found students did not want to be separated for RE, moreover his research reports children felt Catholic students were privileged in RE provision (Hilliard, 2017). An atheist student explained the importance he placed on acceptance of everyone's views,

*“I want to live in a world where my views can be taken into account and everyone can hold their personal views or opinions and not be seen as different, as an outcast or lower class or anything of the sort, as was the case in history, I definitely feel acceptance is a big thing on my list”(S1).*

Student one's opinion aligns with REDCo (2006, 2009) findings as a majority of students reported; “to desire peaceful coexistence across religious differences, and believe that this is possible“(Weisse, 2009 p.2). The following Atheist student also wanted everyone's religious views to be respected in one school.

*“I think if we took the kind of view that it's not a one religion school that all religions are taught, all are catered for, then you can choose yourself any which one you go for”(S2).*

This student's view resonates with findings from the Netherlands where 23% of people report adherence to a multiple religious belonging (Berghuijs, 2017). While an atheist student shared her belief and experience that learning together blurred differences between people. She had attended a Protestant Primary school;

*“I went to a Protestant Primary, there was a lot of Catholics, Protestant, two Muslims one Jewish but religion didn't matter that much at all. Everyone just got on. No one really knew what religion anyone was. When you get to know each other, it doesn't really matter about a person's race or religion”(S10).*

Student ten's experience and expressed views are in agreement with the Toledo Guiding Principles rationale for teaching about world religions regarding the benefits for social cohesion. The following student spoke about what she would like for her own children. Although she preferred a non-religious school this was not based on wanting to separate children from religious beliefs. It is noteworthy that this student attended an Educate Together Primary school.

*“I’d let them go to a non- religious school but still have them knowledgeable about other religions and let them know some people believe this and that and the other. I want them to be open and if later on they wanted to adopt a religion, I would be very happy for that to happen” (S11).*

The following student spoke about the need for schools to be more inclusive rather than a need to create new schools, where students’ differences might lead to segregation.

*“I think the state should probably not provide schools but change what is already there, because that would only be making differences between students. Still go to school together and have different views and learn about religion and the way people believe it, so it wouldn’t just be strictly kept in your Catholic religion. Maybe even feel different but they wouldn’t think that’s right they wouldn’t have any other outside view on things (S7).*

It is noteworthy that the student decided the researcher was Catholic, in reality as white, Irish and a teacher this was a reasonable presumption. It is also noteworthy that the student felt it would be difficult for Catholic schools to be open to different views, her feelings maybe based on her lived experience of a Catholic hegemony, whereby a Catholic worldview was dominant.

In summation, the following student quotation in relation to her graduation ceremony draws together concepts of belonging and solidarity which were articulated as important by some of the students interviewed. Moreover, it addresses the challenge of providing Catholic practical RE without causing some students to feel ‘Other’.

*“A big speech at the end of the year saying you did so well, you know, you really did it, you got through this school, congratulations. I hope you all had a really good time here. So let’s all get together for a big hug and have a cry, that’s the kind of thing we should do, not bring it back to religious speeches” (S8).*

Taken as a whole, a strong sentiment emerges for the need to respect all beliefs, while acknowledging and addressing challenges together. Equality and acknowledging challenges through good communication aligns with the practice of identity humility. Moreover, research by Rasul (2009) found attitudes of Bosnian Youth who were

educated in multinational compared to mononational schools were more tolerant of otherness. His research also found those living in mononational environments showed more intolerant views. Rasul (2009) concluded, “Tolerance is conditioned by interaction, acknowledgement and respect of others”, (p.238). Likewise, an American study on Catholics’ opinions of Muslims found “Those who know Muslims have considerably more positive views of Muslims than those without Muslim acquaintances. Twice as many Catholics who do not know a Muslim personally reported having “very unfavorable” views of Muslims. And twice as many Catholics who do know a Muslim report having “somewhat favorable” views. Nearly four times as many Catholics who do know Muslims reported “very favourable” views, compared to those who don’t” (Duffner, 2016. p.19). Similarly REDCo.(2006,2009) findings also report those educated about religious diversity at school are more open to discussions on religious differences than those who are not afforded this opportunity at school (Weiss, 2009 p.2). In essence proximity doesn’t support prejudice. Hence both students in this research and international research, question the value of a State policy to provide for diversity by providing a diversity of Patrons enabling segregation on religious grounds. Moreover, the following section examines the positivity students’ had with regard to their lived experience of a Catholic school ethos.

## **6.5 School Ethos**

This section reports and analyses students’ experiences and opinions in relation to school ethos. This subordinate theme is supported by four tertiary themes namely; Ethos, Safe Space, Pastoral Care and Academic Achievement.

### **6.5.1 Ethos**

The concept of ethos is explained in detail in the literature review in chapter two. An agnostic student spoke very positively about her school as follows;

*“I do think this school has encased the good things in Christianity, I do really like this school. I think the ethos is good” (S.13).*

Similarly an atheist student explained;

*“The atmosphere, it’s a great school. It is. There is holiness around the place. It is a very religious but great school. The values been taught are to*

*be kind to each other. What's that quote from the bible do onto others as you would have them do onto you, it's that "(S.10).*

The students' opinions regarding the "good things in Christianity" and "be kind to each other" could be analysed as further evidence for the existence of a shared set of values, inclusive of kindness between and across all worldviews. Moreover student ten's words about a "holiness around the place", although, it may at first appear counterintuitive for an atheist student to admire "holiness", it is supported by the literature that those who become atheist or agnostic often miss aspects of their religious tradition, (Goodman and Meuller, 2009). The following Buddhist student's quote could also be analysed as the student valuing certain aspects of a Catholic schooling.

*"I would prefer if religious content was reduced. It does give a spirit to the school, without which it might be cold. It gives the school a warmth", (S17).*

A description of warmth or spirit as adjectives to describe a school's ethos is interesting, warmth is synonymous with cosy or welcoming or benevolent, while spirit is synonymous with harmony between body and soul (Oxford Compact Thesaurus, 2005), it is reasonable to suggest the definitive and lived ethos of this school may have played a real part in creating a harmonious and welcoming ethos. The researcher concurs as her experience in working with the school was characterised by a kind welcome.

Likewise an atheist student articulated the following;

*"I feel there is a good atmosphere. There is respect for everyone and everyone is treated equally. You do something wrong your punished. You do something good you're rewarded. It's what happens here", (S1).*

This student uses words like respect and equality to describe the atmosphere, which again could be considered as shared human values. This aligns with a statement by the Irish Catholic Bishops; "The values that appear fundamental to this vision are equality and inclusion, justice and fairness, freedom, democracy and respect for human dignity and identity. There is a clear affinity between these values and those of all the major world religions, including Christianity" (Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, 2015 p.5-6). However, it is noteworthy that the Bishops statement is not inclusive of all minority

worldviews, such as atheism. Student one also addresses the strictness or expectation of high standards of behavior associated with Catholic schooling, this aligns with research by Lynch et al, (2012), Norman (2008) who report a high level of control in Voluntary Catholic Schools.

In summation, students describe a positive characteristic spirit or ethos in their schools. The findings concur with the literature regarding schools been considered as safe spaces, with an emphasis on academic achievement combined with high levels of control (ESRI, 2013). In essence students considered certain Catholic centric practices as adding to rather than detracting from the ethos. In relation to pastoral care, school are active in trying to address students' needs, however findings also suggest challenges in relation to identity based stereotyping and counselling provision for minority belief students.

### **6.5.2 Safe Space**

Students spoke positively about a number of different aspects of their schools' ethos. Students reported feeling safe in their schools which concurs with the descriptions reported by Voluntary Secondary School Principals (ESRI, 2013).

*"I do feel safe, it's more like a community everyone knows everyone, it's small and stuff"(S.13)*

*"Everyone just gets along. It's an all-girls school and sometimes that can be a bad idea, all this fighting and whatever but there has never been a fight here, not a physical fight. It's a great atmosphere. I feel safe. Very safe, it's how they go about teaching us things the teachers' and stuff and very strict on everyone being equal" (S.10).*

It is noteworthy that student 10 spoke about teachers being strict on equality which is very important from an identity humility perspective. Moreover the student acknowledges how the teachers act as role models in creating this atmosphere. The researcher was impacted on by her experience while interviewing students in this particular school. The researcher at one stage was moving between classrooms and proceeded to move quickly and with determination through the students in the corridors, as was normal practice as a teacher in her all boys' school. However, she was embarrassed to realise that the teacher accompanying her was allowing students to pass and was role modelling courtesy. This aligns with Norman (2008) and his description

of ladylike role modelling in all girls Catholic schools. In essence the researcher's experience of the ethos of the school was of a calm, efficient, co-operative and courteous atmosphere. It is also noteworthy that the researcher was impacted on by two different operative ethea and changed her own behavior accordingly. This is reflective of habitus and hegemony controlling peoples' actions.

### **6.5.3 Pastoral Care**

Students concurred with principals reports in the ESRI (2013) study, regarding the presence of a pastoral care system. A number of students' described how pastoral care was realised in their schools by providing spaces for communication and discussion between students.

*"I think getting very involved with the students. A lot of groups, a lot of projects, mixing, also group activities. A lot of classes in First year where we are all getting to know each other, speaking with each other" (S2).*

*"It's not just about education here. It's like Yeats, it's like creating a personality, a character, an opinion. It's not just giving us information" (S8).*

Moreover, the role played by the school Chaplin was acknowledged by some students. A Muslim student described how the school Chaplin helped her to deal with her feelings as follows;

*"I go to her room, and let all my anger out, She's lovely, so nice. She's really good, she's very open. She's into listening. She went to the English teacher and told her, would she mind been less.....with me as, it's hurting me. It worked in that she wasn't any nicer but she just ignored me" (S6).*

It is noteworthy that Student six, a Muslim student attended a Voluntary Secondary school, where the State does not fund a Chaplin. Yet a Chaplin was present. Moreover, it was the Chaplin who facilitated the researcher in one of the participant Voluntary Secondary schools. It is unclear how the Chaplin was funded but it suggests schools make efforts to provide Chaplin's services in support of pastoral care.

An atheist student in a Catholic boys' school described how a teacher had asked him to help ensure a peer was not being bullied. However the student's belief that the school could do very little is noteworthy.

*“There was another lad who was ahead of me. He didn't make an effort on his own behalf to make friends at the start of first year, which is the most important time. I remember when in second year a teacher said to me, do you mind keeping an eye on that lad, if you find people are openly bullying him, I would appreciate if you said it to me. So there is an interest but there is very little the school can really do. They have an anti-bullying charter in every room in the school. Nobody has ever read it. It's never been read out to us (S2).*

This student also described homophobic comments in his school as a cornerstone of lads' conversation and again described teachers as “powerless” in stopping it.

*“In this school especially, particularly gay jokes are one of the cornerstones of conversations, it's terrible. It's really bad. If I went through a lunch time without at least once hearing the term queer or faggott, it would be a strange day”,(S2) .*

It is cause for concern that a student believes very little can or is done about bullying in his school, especially in light of the fact that the Department of Education and Skills (2013b), issued a circular directing schools to develop an anti-bullying policy. These procedures make clear that the following types of bullying are included, “identity-based bullying (such as homophobic bullying and racist bullying)” (p.5). It is difficult to unpack the many reasons which support bullying, however being considered different is enough to make a student more prone to be bullied. The DES named the pupils of minority religious faiths and lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) pupils and those perceived to be LGBT as among groups particularly at risk or vulnerable to bullying (DES, 2013 p.14). A contradiction or difficulty maybe felt by some teachers in supporting LGBT or those of different faiths or of no religion within a Catholic school culture. However, Archbishop Martin, believes judgementalism is wrong and needs to be removed from the Church, in particular in order to stop any further harm by the Church towards gay and lesbian people. Moreover he acknowledged “powers of darkness” which were “still active in our times”, (McGarry, 2017) and according to

student two evident in our schools. The impact of Archbishop Martin's words, alongside the passing of the Marriage Equality bill and changes to the Employment Equality act which removed discriminatory provision against LGBT teachers, alongside targeted research and teacher education on bullying, centred in the Anti-Bullying Centre (ABC) in DCU, should filter down and change the culture of bullying as described by student two for LGBT pupils. However identity bullying as described by Carr (2016) of Muslim students warrants further research. Moreover unlike LGBT teachers, non-co-religionist teachers may still be legally discriminated against in State funded schools. Likewise minority faith and minority worldview students may also be discriminated against particularly in relation to school admission.

The focus now shifts to another facet of pastoral care, or the need to support students' who have suffered bereavement. A non-religious student described how she had found a memorial service very pleasant.

*“We read a prayer at a memorial service and I liked that. It's not about being Catholic; it's about remembering the people that have passed. I feel that would cater to all religion, even though it was technically a prayer. It was very pleasant”, (S9).*

The above quotation supports the commonality of the need for space to enable students to grapple with human suffering. However research on bereavement at Primary Level found, teachers' felt unable or ill prepared in responding to the needs of non-Catholic children suffering from bereavement, (Lynam, 2016). In particular, teachers reported concerns' regarding what was appropriate to say to students as they did not understand or know the normative responses for students of non-Catholic belief (Lynam, 2016). Moreover, this research finding again points to the need for increased teacher diversity. It is noteworthy that steps have recently been put in place to encourage greater diversity in initial teacher education. Groups particularly targeted include people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students with disabilities and members of the Traveller community, however it is hoped religious minorities would also come under the remit of groups under-represented in teaching. However an issue remains regarding the employment prospects while current Employment legislation allows school patrons to discriminate against non- co-religionist teachers. In the interim, the practice of good communication, a pillar of identity humility would support teachers to

navigate and support individual students at these difficult times. The expectation that teachers understand all belief systems is not plausible indeed it would most likely result in stereotyping, hence teachers need to engage with individual parents and students to learn how best to support individuals. The need for avoidance of worldview stereotyping within families was realised as part of this research, as described in the theme of Compromise. The importance that teachers expressed concern is a good starting point in addressing the needs of minorities in our schools.

#### **6.5.4 Academic Achievement**

Students also concurred with the literature regarding the importance placed on academic achievement within Voluntary Secondary schools which they explained as follows:

*“Mum wanted me to go to this school. She heard this school would be better. In the school I was in, there wasn't a lot of graduates, so my mum said you need to change your environment because maybe you might adopt the attitude that you don't care, whereas here every one cares about their education” (S.15).*

Student fifteen explained her parent's reason for choosing the All Girls Catholic School, was due to its reputation for the high academic standards. The parent may have studied the annual school league tables published by the Irish Times, which compares schools' based on the number of Leaving Cycle students who progress to University. The following students also explained his reasons for been happy in his school.

*“Overall I'm happy with it because I'm getting opportunities to do what I want. Do the subjects I want to do and go off to college (S.3)*

Student three acknowledged the opportunities for academic progression afforded to him by the Catholic all boys school he attended. Both students are aware of what Morris (2005) described as the “Catholic school effect” whereby Catholic schools are believed and mainly supported by school league tables as equated with improved academic attainment. Moreover, according to an ESRI study (2013) reported many voluntary secondary schools are oversubscribed. Hence the different data sources agree that academic achievement is linked with a Catholic school ethos. Although, scholars question aspects of the lived reality or ethos of inclusiveness and suggest, Catholic Voluntary Post Primary schools appear to focus on academic and sporting

achievements, maintain a gendered curriculum and support Catholic faith formation (O'Higgins Norman, 2010, 2008; Smyth et al., 2004; Boldt, 2000; Lynch and Lodge 1999; O'Keefe, 1998; & Hannan et al, 1996).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

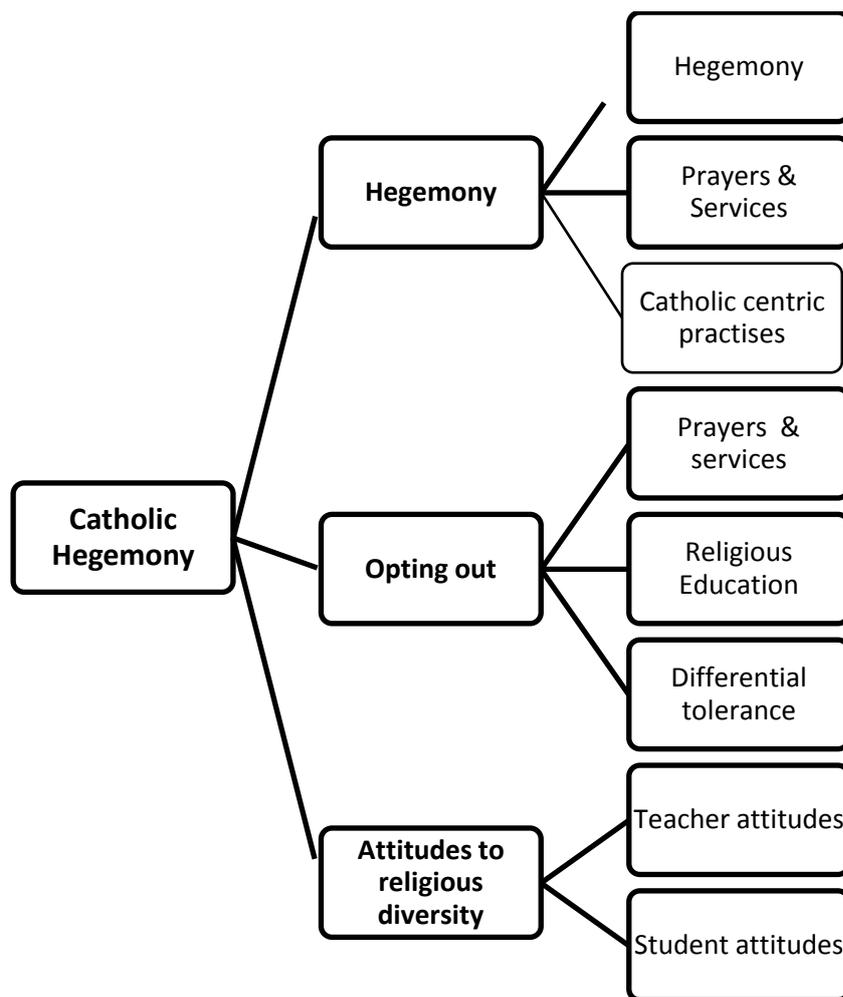
A result of coding and analysis of students' words crystallised the theme of a Conditional Shared Space. Students expressed an overarching positivity in relation to learning about world religions together. Moreover, students valued class discussion, meditation and retreats which also provided them the space to reflect on life's questions and social issues. Students also valued the academic standards and opportunities presented in their schools. Teacher agency resulted in a more positive regard for Leaving Cycle RE when compared to Junior Cycle RE as the focus on Catholicism was reduced in favor of real life discussion. Moreover, teacher agency proved beneficial in addressing diverse student needs. Key challenges emerged with regard to practical RE which resulted in some students feeling 'other' and excluded. Likewise pastoral care issues exist particularly around student identity, RSE and counselling for diverse needs. Notwithstanding the challenges students wish to be educated together and hold strong beliefs on the universality of human values and the need to participate in order to belong. Identity humble attitudes were prevalent alongside a will to compromise in order to advance human solidarity. This aligns with a statement by the Irish Catholic Bishops regarding shared values among major world religions, (Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, 2015). However, it is noteworthy that the Bishops statement is not inclusive of all minority worldviews, such as atheism. While human agency and school charisms present a range of possibilities and experiences.

## **Chapter Seven: Findings and Analysis: Theme three – Catholic Hegemony**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the primary theme “Catholic hegemony” which emerged from the thematic analysis of the student’s individual interviews. Catholicism was described by students as the dominant and accepted worldview. Moreover regardless of students’ individual worldviews, compliance was also evident. Initial codes were collated and then grouped into three subordinate themes namely hegemony, opting out and attitudes to religious diversity. Hegemony is subdivided into hegemony, prayers and services and Catholic centric practises. Opting out is supported by subordinate themes of opt out from prayers and services, opt out from RE and differential tolerance. While the theme attitudes are comprised of two subordinate themes, namely teacher attitudes and student attitudes. The key theories used to analysis the data include Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, theories of identity development and Song et al’s theory of conformity. While the conceptual framework of identity humility is used as a lens to critique the findings. A conclusion draws together the key findings. The following figure outlines the thematic map for the primary theme Catholic Hegemony.

**Figure 8: Hegemony Thematic Map**



### 7.2.1 Catholic hegemony

Students clearly articulated how they felt, Catholicism was dominant and pervasive within their schools. Moreover, they described how Catholicism was supported both culturally and politically and how a Catholic habitus was maintained by and for the dominant Catholic majority.

Student 15, who described herself as a Christian, believed the school in no way supported her beliefs, that rules were based on Catholic views.

*“They don’t do anything about supporting my religious beliefs, cause it’s a Catholic school so it’s based on Catholic rules and everything” (S15).*

Student one also articulated a lack of recognition of his atheist beliefs; he reported no discussion regarding atheism was facilitated. He used the phrase “there is no light shed on atheism”, which could be understood, that he would value discussions on atheism in order to illuminate his self- understanding and support an exploration of his evolving atheist identity.

*“I feel there is, just complete and utter no recognition or involvement whatsoever, that these kind of beliefs exist and I think that’s kind of an issue, because you go to religion, your taught about religion and other sorts of beliefs but you’re not taught about those, who don’t believe, you don’t have explained where their point of view is coming from, there is no discussion, there is no light shed on it” (S1).*

It is noteworthy that in England where non-religious beliefs are an integral part of the RE curriculum, recent research by Jackson and Everington (2016) report it is “intrinsically worthwhile and instrumentally important in contributing to pupils’ personal and social development” (p.7). While analysis of student one’s comment, also suggested a counter hegemony, in so far as he identifies a lack of recognition of atheism as an issue. However, students’ experiences differed and student fourteen said her Muslim identity was sometimes acknowledged. It is noteworthy that student fourteen is remembered by the researcher as having, a very self- contained and self-controlled presence. Her facial expression was noncommittal for most of the interview; however when she recalled teachers and other staff members acknowledging it was Eid,

her face lit up with a broad smile. The researcher interpreted this change, as indicative of the importance and happiness she had felt when remembering times when her Muslim identity was positively affirmed at school.

*“If they know it is Eid they would say it to me, not only the teachers but other staff as well, we don’t miss school just 30mins in the morning or maybe one hour” (S14).*

The quotation also highlights the fact that the school calendar is centered on Catholic religious festivals only. This causes particular difficulty for practicing Muslim students, when Ramadan coincides with the Leaving certificate examination period. Hence Catholic students are privileged by the school calendar, while Muslim students have to accept and work through any difficulties. This resonates with hegemony theory whereby power results in privilege.

*“all our primary schools are Catholic anyway, so I think your used to the whole shenanigans , prayer every day at mid-day, masses , you’re used to it” (S15).*

*“They are not going to cater for atheist students” (S4).*

Student fifteen’s thoughts suggests an acceptance of catholic centric practices as the norm in both Primary and Post Primary schools. Normalising Catholic centric practices is part of hegemonic control (Litwitz, 2000). Furthermore, the resultant inequalities, whereby atheist, Christian and Muslim students’ spiritual needs were not supported, is accepted as normal within a hegemony (Blumenfeld, 2009;Young 2001). Student fifteen’s acceptance could also be described as fatalism, which is described as a sense that one does not fit with the dominant norm and there is no way this can be changed (Gramsci, 1995). From an identity humility perspective the privileging of Catholic students’ needs over minority faith and worldview students is concerning and suggests the individual identities of students are not equally acknowledged or respected in school. A lack of recognition can inflict harm, as it devalues a person, (Taylor, 1994). The above quotes illuminate hegemonic school practises and evidence the dominant Catholic worldview is legitimised, while other worldviews are not afforded equal treatment. From the perspective of identity humility the power relations, in this case between church and state, which support these inequalities should be challenged.

According to Douzinas (2000), a democratic state should protect the rights of minorities, in essence it is argued the State should ensure all students' beliefs are respected at school. In similar vein, the support from and allegiances formed between the Irish State and Catholic Church was recognised by student eleven, moreover, he also articulates the link between Irish culture and Catholicism.

*“I think the Irish state is so firmly intertwined with the church it has become a thing, a lot of the laws aren't changed because of the influence of the church so it's kind of a cultural thing because everyone is so involved. It's hard to step outside it. It's everywhere, everywhere” (S11).*

The linkages made by student eleven between Catholicism and Irish culture are supported by research conducted by Inglis (2007) and Demerath (2000). Similarly White (2010), establishes a link between Catholic imperialism and Irishness. He suggests a deeply embedded relationship between national and religious identity, which he believes is a result of a back lash to Ireland's battles for liberation from British colonialism. The writing of the Irish constitution by DeValera in association with archbishop McQuaid further embedded the union of Irishness and Catholicism (Keogh & McCarthy, 2005). Hence, it is not surprising that analyses of student interviews suggest Catholic values subjugate minority faith and non-religious students' beliefs in the participant schools. Moreover, research by Parker- Jenkins and Masterson (2013), agree and report, Post Primary schools' are struggling to acknowledge religions and worldviews which are not Catholic. The following students' comments also suggest an ethos or habitus of Catholic imperialism. Catholic imperialism can be understood as “an attitude of mind which says that that which I believe should be believed by everyone else”, (Manshardt 1932 p.526).

*“I don't think people should feel their religion is better than anyone else's, it's kind of unfair” (S6).*

*“Every other religion you can respect and all that but Catholicism is the superior religion” (S3).*

The evangelical remit of Catholic schools alongside a history of missionary endeavor to convert people to Catholicism is part and parcel of an imperial attitude. Litwitz (2000) suggests a strong cultural tradition of Catholicism may support a Catholic centric school

practice as normal and legitimate. While O'Donnell (2014) further explains, hegemonies present and support biased views as normal. It is noteworthy that student three did mention the idea of "respect for other religions", according to the Oxford online dictionary, respect is defined as; "A feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements". Moreover it suggests, "specific actions and conduct representative of that esteem". Hence, ignoring minority faith and world view students' beliefs is not consistent with respect. Moreover, this understanding of respect is challenged by student three also believing that Catholicism is presented as a superior religion. Tangentially related is the idea of the superiority of Catholic schools, which Morris (2010) describes as the '*Catholic school effect*', he reports that in Ireland, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada there is a belief that students attending Catholic schools have improved academic attainment. Furthermore, the most prestigious schools in Ireland are Catholic schools and Catholic schools are often oversubscribed. Hence it is reasonable to suggest the success accorded to Catholic schools alongside the reality that they are oversubscribed, indicates a majority of parents are implicit in supporting Catholic schools current practices, regardless of inequalities. This compliance is necessary to allow hegemony to flourish. However from an identity humility perspective the inequalities are problematised. A lack of acknowledgement of the religious and worldview beliefs of minority faith and worldview students is incongruous with concepts of humility and respect for difference. Ignoring the identities of students may impact negatively on their identity development, as opportunities to discuss emerging identities maybe lost. The next section explains the practical implications of hegemony as experienced by minority belief students.

### **7.2.2 Prayers and Services**

An everyday experience for many students is attendance at Catholic prayers. Students' views and experiences are encapsulated in the following responses:

*"I think there is a certain amount of respect but the thing I disagree with, is the fact that there is a prayer at the start of every class, it's obligatory to stand for the prayer"(S2).*

*"I know they are catering to the Catholics, prayers that hurts" (S.9).*

Student two self-identified as an atheist while student nine had no particular religion and preferred her personal beliefs were not labelled. From a human rights perspective,

the appropriateness of non-Catholic students attending Catholic prayers is concerning. While Catholics have a right to practise their religion, non-Catholic students have an equal right to freedom from religion (ECHR, 2010 & Tuohy, 2013). However, it is also noteworthy that a recent challenge to remove the daily prayer from Dail Eireann was defeated (Gallagher, 2017). This is an example of Catholic hegemony whereby, allegiances between Church and State are evident in the Dail and also in schools. However, the situation is complex and unclear, as in direct contrast, is the decision by the ETBI to remove faith formation from Community Primary schools. Moreover the researcher; as a Post Primary teacher for 14 years in an all boys' Catholic school, has never started her class with a prayer and has never been requested to do so. Hence, it appears teacher, school and State departments practice agency regarding prayers. The practice of agency suggests counter hegemonies are present; hence the experiences of non-Catholic students may differ within and between schools. However, the feeling of hurt expressed by student nine cannot be ignored and requires reflection. The hurt seems to center around Catholics being catered for and others not. Irwin (2010) suggests a person's sense of identity is impacted on by others misrecognition and can inflict harm. Moreover Irwin (2010) suggests the term "patronising recognition" to explain the treatment of non-Catholic children in Catholic schools (p.461). The student may feel hurt and devalued due to misrecognition. It is difficult to discern the status quo but it is reasonable to suggest from the students' points of view that minorities face uncertain and sometimes hurtful situations. Indeed the following students' quotations exemplify a denial of the human right to religious freedom, alongside coercion to acquiesce to Catholic norms.

*"I can recall in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year at night study, everyone had to stand up and say the prayer and this is like 80 / 90 people in the GPA, and like one person wasn't saying the prayer and we had to stop and say it again and that person had to say it"(S4)*

*"Yes, I remember in 1<sup>st</sup> yr. there is a Catholic prayer they do and I never learned it and I was kind of scared the prayers I wouldn't know, my sister she learned them off as she was scared she would get in trouble for not knowing them.... I don't really like going to the Catholic prayers and stuff but I feel I have too, so I just go along. Let's get it over with" (S10).*

*“Saying no to prayer? No, No, not in all my time here, that I have observed, nobody has actually just said that or even gone out of the classroom. No one has ever left the class at all, that is never something that I have noticed, It doesn’t happen” (S.2).*

*“I am expected to go to the masses, I go along” (S17)*

The above students’ attended four different schools, yet all spoke about an expectation to attend Catholic prayers and services. Student four’s account evidences active coercion, while student ten describes feeling scared. It is evident the students are practicing rational conformity based on obedience (Song et al, 2012). Hence, many pillars of identity humility are challenged: respect for individual’s identities “doesn’t happen”, human rights are denied and power relations are unchallenged. Catholic practices are maintained and one worldview appears to trump all others and demand acquiescence. Similarly, Bryan (2008) describes intercultural education as practiced in Ireland as a form of “symbolic violence” (p.47), rather than supporting egalitarian values. It is clear; the institutional practices described by the students support the maintenance of a Catholic hegemony and are akin to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus. The purpose of habitus and hegemony is to practice dominance and maintain a powerful position. To further understand the implications of a hegemony, it is worth considering the possible impacts of coercion and acquiesce to one worldview on the development of “conventional morality”. The highest form of morality supports the development of an individuals’ conscience, so they decide for themselves what is right and wrong. Hegemony presents one set of moral beliefs and when a student is coerced to acquiesce to others’ moral beliefs the development of conventional morality is challenged (Kohlberg, 1984). Gramscian understanding of religious hegemony suggests when a child is socialised with a set of religious doxa and values it may be difficult to envisage alternatives. However, he also held that critical thinking could support an individual to develop a new worldview (Gramsci, 1995). Similarly, achieved identity status is best supported by facilitating opportunities to explore many moral viewpoints and beliefs rather than insistence on conformity with one moral code. However, minority faith and worldview students’ needs cannot be considered in isolation from traditional and cultural norms. Hence it is also acknowledged that in a Catholic school, moral development would require students are socialised in the Catholic faith, moreover Catholic parents have a right to educate their children in their faith tradition

(Constitution of Ireland, Article, 41). However, the arising difficulties for minority faith and minority worldview students are also evident and many have no alternative but to attend a Catholic school. A balancing of rights is necessary, which could be supported by identity humility practices.

○ Provision to pray for minority faith students

At interview Muslim students described the ways in which their schools addressed their prayer needs. The following student's need to pray was not facilitated in her school.

*“At lunchtime I have to walk home, have my lunch, pray, go back, I don't like walking at all, if there was a room I could pray in, it would be better” (S.12)*

Tuohy (2013) argues that all people both religious and non-religious have equal rights to their beliefs, hence in education religious people have a right to manifest their religion but not to impose it on others. Tuohy states, *“At a basic level others must refrain from coercion, proselytising and indoctrination”* (Tuohy, 2013 p.123). However, as student 12 stated above, not all religions or worldviews are enabled to practise their beliefs equally in school. Research by Parker-Jenkins and Masterson (2013) in twelve Irish post-primary schools also found that religious convictions which differed from Catholicism were not acknowledged or catered for. From the perspective of identity humility strategies would be explored in order to ensure equality of opportunity to practice one's religion.

However a Muslim student from a different school said she thought a room was available in which to pray.

*“Yesterday there was a girl, she is in 6<sup>th</sup> year, she was a Muslim as well, she said you can pray in the religion room, but it's a religion room. I kinda feel it's not the best for us, we can pray there but there are like statues of Mary, pictures of Catholics, so I am wondering if I can or not,”(S.6).*

The fact that the room is called the religion room, when it is clearly the Catholic religion room is an example of a hegemonic practice. Further analysis of this quotation suggests, the school may, through “misrecognition”, believe they have provided a religion room for Muslim students to pray in, while failing to recognise the student's concerns regarding the appropriateness of praying in a space with dominant Catholic

iconography (Navarro, 2006 p.170 & Gramsci, 1971). Had the communication element of identity humility been practiced, the issue may have come to light and a different, more suitable space may have been provided. Moreover the difficulty and confusion expressed by the student in trying to negotiate different home and school understandings is noteworthy and may challenge the students' developing identity (McAdams and Olson, 2010 & Erickson 1950; 1968). However the following Muslim student did not have any issue regarding praying at school.

*“I don't pray in school, it doesn't really matter” (S.14).*

In this case identity humility is important in order to avoid stereotyping all Muslim students as wanting to be facilitated to pray. Similar to Catholic students practicing cultural Catholicism as opposed to traditional Catholicism, Muslim students are also interpreting their religious beliefs in less traditional ways (Gillat, 1994 & Mandaville 1998). The different provisions made by the schools for Muslim students to pray, is a direct consequence of the patronage system and the autonomy afforded to schools to manage schools. The findings correlate with the States response to the hijab controversy. The state would not offer schools any guidelines albeit to say it was for the board of management of each school to decide whether niqabs or hijabs were allowed to be worn (Rougier, 2013). Hence parents and students right to religious freedom and to practice their faith is left to boards of management to decide, resulting in a range of possibilities. However on foot of the landmark Louise O'keefe case, where the European court of Human Rights, held the state rather than the school board of management responsible and liable for compensation due to a violation of rights, the current situation may be open to further legal challenges against the State rather than schools boards of management (O'Keefe v Ireland. 2012). Moreover, Sahlberg a leading Finnish scholar when addressing the Department of Education in June 2015, warned that the State needs to lead the way in making decisions on education policies in order to avoid greater inequalities and described current practice as “ a clear sign of a lazy or reluctant education policy” (Humphreys, 2015, June 26). Furthermore Daly (2008) considers decisions in the Irish courts tend to preference established religious groups over minorities. Moreover, Hogan (2005), describes a consequence of this philosophy of law as assimilationist. Similarly, Mawhinney (2007) believes the current system has resulted in grave issues for dispersed minority faith and worldview students. In tandem with the above scholars, Devine (2011) describes the current situation as follows:

“Schools are thus left to determine the reception they give to minority children and determine whether 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland will simply tolerate or respect and recognise-Muslim’s and other religious and cultural minorities’ identity and practices within their mist” ( cited in Rougier, 2013 p.162). This leads on to the next section on Catholic centric practices.

### **7.2.3 Catholic centric practices**

At interview students articulated how Catholic-centric school practices challenged and impacted on their school experience. Practices of particular concern included: uniforms with a Catholic symbol, graduation ceremonies with a Catholic service and school awards.

#### **○ School Uniforms**

School uniforms may have a crest with a religious symbol. A Muslim student expressed her concern in having to wear a school jumper with a Catholic cross on the crest.

*“Mine does have a crest and it does concern me cause it doesn’t represent me and it represents the people in my school but not me” (S5).*

Student 5 clearly linked the concern she had in wearing the crest with her identity “it doesn’t represent me”. Research by Parker-Jenkins and Masterson (2013), in Irish Post Primary schools reports, students were given no choice regarding the wearing of a uniform with a Catholic symbol. No exceptions were made and religious beliefs were disregarded. One vice-principal explained, that all students had to sign up to the school policy, which included the wearing of the school uniform. However a different Principal felt the DES, by refusing to have a policy on school uniforms, left him in “limbo” and he had to “make it up as he went along”(p.482). The agency afforded to the principal by the DES to make it up as he went along, could be viewed positively from an identity humility perspective. The Principal was free to communicate with the individuals and agree workable and innovate strategies. The need to communicate with individuals would avoid stereotyping, which may be difficult to avoid with a predetermined uniform policy. It is only fair to point out explicit religious inequality whereby it is taken for granted that Catholic religious personal in schools may wear a clerical collar, a veil or cross, while some schools may disallow the wearing of the hijab or niqab. It seems unjust and inequitable to expect a Muslim student to wear a uniform with a

Catholic symbol, while disallowing the wearing of a hijab. The students comment also suggests a feeling of otherness from her school, “it represents the people in my school but not me”. This is cause for concern as recommendations to schools from the Health Service Executive, The Department of Education and the Department of Health state that a positive school climate where students feel a sense of belonging and connectedness with their school helps build their resilience (HSE, DES, DH, 2013).

It is noteworthy that not all Post Primary schools have a uniform. The nine Educate Together Post Primary schools do not require students wear a uniform. Student 13 who attended an Educate Together primary school articulated the following;

*“Primary it felt more diverse more accepting and stuff, like it didn’t matter at all, nobody questioned it. Here, I think more people would say, oh, why is she wearing the hijab? They’re just not used to it. Educate Together, let me hear and see what other people think and feel, I liked it a lot” (S13).*

Student 13’s opinion is interesting, most particularly as it supports Mittler (2000) who believes schools have a capacity to enhance and foster harmony and support human development in order to reduce ignorance, othering and exclusion ( Delors Report, cited in Mittler, 2000). From an identity humility perspective, freedom to practice ones religion would be facilitated for all students’ and no student would be coerced to wear a religious symbol which was incongruous with their identity. Likewise, it is reasonable to suggest equality would necessitate all or no religious dress was permitted in schools. Moreover the positioning of one belief as superior to all others is an antithesis of humility.

#### ○ School Graduation

A majority of students had concerns regarding their school graduation. Most students interviewed were in their Leaving certificate year; hence it may have been of particular focus for them. Their views are articulated in the following student quotations. Student six as a Muslim student explained she was prohibited from attending her graduation as it was in a Catholic church.

*“my parents as well, like the graduation mass, it’s so sad, they want to come to school and celebrate my graduation, they can’t, cause it’s all Catholic and stuff, my mum just feels so horrible”.* (S6)

The strong feelings of sadness expressed by student six are a cause for concern. Identity humility would necessitate communication between the student, her parents and the Principal in order to find a solution to the exclusion of this student from an important event in her education. The above situation serves to reinforce the ‘otherness’ felt by some minority students. However it is noteworthy that a different Muslim student said she was going to attend her graduation regardless of the Catholic content. The difference in the Muslim students’ reaction demonstrates the need not to stereotype all Muslims as interpreting and following the same religious doxa.

*“The graduation Mass, it’s all Catholic so.....I will go regardless. I just block it out. I’ll sit there and just zone out” (S.5).*

However, the fact that student five felt the need to zone out could be interpreted as a coping strategy she has developed to deflect a feeling of otherness at certain times. Attending a Catholic mass, while holding Muslim beliefs could cause identity confusion, the student is trying to navigate her home and school identities by blocking out certain aspects of her school’s prescribed Catholic identity. Trying to negotiate different home and school expectations is challenging and may impact on the student’s developing identity (McAdams and Olson, 2010 and Erickson 1950; 1968).

Student one, an atheist student from a different school also articulated how he felt the situation was unfair.

*“The fact that it takes place in a Church, I feel is unfair and biased, anyone can walk in there but it diminishes people’s choice. I know a person who is not going to go to their graduation because it is in a church. I think that restricts them of something to experience they can’t go to their full graduation” (S1).*

It is noteworthy that student one states he knows someone who is not going to attend the graduation because it is in a Church; this is an example of a student exercising agency. However, the following atheist student had decided to attend.

*“I’ll go, if it wasn’t so emphasised on God and that, it would be better but it is a Catholic school so it’s going to be that”(S.10).*

Student 10, believed a Catholic school will promote Catholicism and Catholic centric practices. From a Gramscian perspective, Catholic centric practices are necessary to instill, perpetuate and support a Catholic ethos or habitus as normal. Student 10 seems to understand this necessity. However, identity humility theory would question the promotion of one belief system at the expense of others.

Two Muslim students also spoke about their graduation from a Catholic primary school as follows:

*“In 6th class it was a concern for me, because you have to go to the church to achieve something, but in my Primary school they took me to the Principals office instead of the Church to get my cert”(S.12).*

Student 12’s experience at Primary school indicates the school recognised, the difficulty created for the student, by holding the graduation ceremony in a church and did provide an alternative. However it is not clear whether the alternative was the result of a discussion between the school Principal and the student;s parents or solely the Principal’s decision. Martin Luther King and James Cone, were adamant that integration strategies needed to be on minorities’ terms in order to avoid assimilation (cited in Richie, 2010). Similarly, identity humility necessitates minorities are listened to and strategies for integration are a result of genuine consensus rather than a decision made solely by the dominant party. While the complexity of supporting all identities is clear in the following student’s expressed difficulties with singing.

*“Mine wasn’t going to the church it was in the hall and there was singing but singing is not allowed in our religion, it wasn’t really fun for me, well it was fun but it was a bit concerning for me” (S.5).*

Donnelly (2004), who conducted research in integrated schools in Northern Ireland also found “what is perceived to be ‘normal’ for one group is often interpreted as offensive by another” (p.270). It is also reasonable to suggest misrecognition around specific practices has the potential to negatively impact on some children’s school experience and also cause identity confusion. For example, singing may not be recognised by teachers as problematic. However, student five clearly articulated her identity confusion, when she contradicted herself in saying the singing wasn’t fun and then was fun. It appears she felt as a Muslim, she should not enjoy the singing, although she had.

The difficulty for teachers in recognising and been able to facilitate and respect all students is evident in this situation. The following student's experience further evidences the complexity in respecting a plurality of beliefs. It is sometimes unclear and difficult to determine the rights and wrongs of a situation. Student six who self-identified as Christian explained how during English class when studying a poem about suicide a conflict arose when she gave her opinion on suicide:

*“My religion defines my opinion, in a way, this is what I have lived with all my life and this is what my religion preaches, I don't think suicide is good at all and that is what my religion teaches and suddenly it's like oh you never know what the persons' feeling and I'm like you asked me my opinion and you get it and your giving out to me for it, it just makes me feel so bad. I refrain from giving my opinion in class, even if they ask. I just say no I don't have an opinion”, (S.6).*

The student's hurt and frustration in trying to marry personal and school values is palpable in this quotation. Her reaction to stop participating in class is problematic from an educational and a personal development perspective. The teacher's reaction is also understandable as she may be aware of a student in the class who has been hurt by suicide and hence maybe protective, however the need for adolescents to engage in dialogical debate on difficult issues would support their development as described by Jackson, (2004). Good communication, a pillar of identity humility and enhanced teacher education on facilitating dialogical pedagogy could be helpful in understanding and supporting a plurality of identities and beliefs (Jackson & Everington, 2016). Moreover identity humility acknowledges it is impossible to come to know and understand the uniqueness of every student's identity, without good communication (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The concept of proportionality and balancing of rights in order to find workable solutions is necessary and advised by the ODHHR, (2007).

#### ○ School Awards

Students also articulated their concerns regarding prize givings and award ceremonies with a Catholic focus, for example a Muslim student explained:

*“That Pope John Paul thing, I don't really get it. I think it's a little unfair. That's the only opportunity, to do that sort of award but it's only for Catholics. If colleges were to see that and two students had the same*

*grades, same everything, they would look at what they have done for extracurricular activities. Pope John Paul would be on that and say one student was another religion or whatever and the Pope John Paul winner, they'd choose that one" (S.6).*

Student six alongside all non-Catholic students are excluded from participating in this school based extracurricular activity. The Pope John Paul award, involves Catholic faith development through Parish involvement and social awareness activities alongside a reflective element, on what it means to be a baptised Catholic. (<http://thepopejohnpauliiaward.com/the-gold-award/>). Moreover, the fact student six believed it was the only opportunity provided by the school to do that sort of award is cause for concern. The education act 1998 Part II section 9 (d) states a school should “*promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students*”. However this students experience suggests unequal opportunities maybe provided. The education act further explains students’ development should be “*in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school*”. In this case it is clear the Catholic ethos /spirit of the school would be supported by students’ participation in the John Paul award. However from the perspective of identity humility, the differential provision for minority faith and worldview students to develop their moral, spiritual, social and personal selves is problematic. The following section explores students’ experiences regarding opting out of Catholic prayers, services and RE classes.

### **7.3 Opting out**

The focus of this section is the Opt out provision. Firstly, students’ experiences around opting out of Catholic services and prayers are explored, secondly students’ experiences around opting out of RE class are examined. Finally, differential tolerance between opt out provisions between minority faith and minority worldview students is presented and analysed.

#### **7.3.1 Prayers and services**

As with accommodations made for students to pray or not, schools again differed in how they accommodated students to opt out of Catholic religious prayers, services and RE class. Regarding opting out of Catholic services some schools offered no accommodation at all and students attended services. Other Schools facilitated students

opting out by either insisting students remain at or go home or some facilitated students to stay in school and study. One Muslim student described her difficulty around staying at home and how it resulted in her missing a school day.

*“In my school when they have masses, they only have one class and then they go to mass, so there is really no point in me going in. It is usually on a Wednesday and Wednesday is half day so there is really no point and they text my mum to collect me if I am not attending mass” (S.12).*

While the following Muslim student explained he was allowed to opt out of religious services in his school and allowed to choose between going home or studying in the school.

*“Yeah, they wouldn’t mind, they are cool but I always go home to get away from here” (S15).*

Likewise, another Muslim student was also facilitated by his school to opt out of religious services reported.

*“I suppose if they are going to a mass, they ask me if I am comfortable to go with them, so I have an option to go or not. I can go home or stay in school. I usually stay and do some study work” (S14).*

It is noteworthy that no atheist or minority worldview student reported being facilitated to opt out of religious services.

Students also articulated issues in relation to provision to opt out of Catholic prayers. The following interview is reflective of a number of interviews with Muslim students. At first the researcher did not understand the apparent contradiction but then realised that Muslim students who are present for Catholic prayer and even standing for Catholic prayer do not feel they are attending. Attending for them may mean paying attention or engaging with the prayer or they may say they are not attending as part of a coping strategy used to navigate their school and home identities.

Interviewer: Can you opt out of Catholic prayer?

Interviewee: Yep, I just stay there (S.10)

Interviewer; Do you have to stand up?

Interviewee: Yes, (S.10)

Interviewer: Would you rather sit down?

Interviewee: No we can't, there were a few times, I have sat down and I haven't prayed. I've been told to stand up again (S10).

The personal difficulty created by teachers insisting Muslim students stand for Catholic prayer maybe considerable. Muslim teaching may necessitate a Muslim does not participate in another religions prayer or service. Selim (2014), reports, in faith-based schools religion and spirituality can raise serious concerns and tensions. He believes, "For Muslims, spirituality should be based on Islamic beliefs and expressed in conformity with Islam" (p.101). He suggests it is differences which lead to tensions. Furthermore, Selim (2014) reports some parents are justified to be concerned about "their children's' religious identity which is constantly being challenged socially and culturally both inside and outside school" (p.105). However, Selim (2014), avoids stereotyping Muslim views as uniform and acknowledged both inter faith and intra faith differences in perceptions of spirituality. Hence, it appears identity humility is necessary as it seems very unfair that a student should be put in a position of attending Catholic prayers which maybe against their parents' wishes, however it is also important not to presume it is an issue for all students. For example the following atheist student was very happy to attend Catholic services.

*"Yeah, very happy to go, I've been invited on occasion to go to the school graduation mass to play music. I have no objection to a Catholic service for a Catholic school at the end of the year. It's perfectly right that happens" (S.2).*

A Buddhist student articulated her experiences of attending Catholic services as awkward, particularly around her not receiving communion as it resulted in others been alerted to her difference or 'otherness'. Song et al, (2012) suggest people conform to an expected behaviour, in order to maintain good relations with others, it is noteworthy how the student explained, that the teacher who questioned her for not receiving communion was fine with it.

*"Yes, I'm fine. I don't want to make a fuss. On Ash Wednesday, I was the only one who didn't take the ashes, all my class did. The teacher asked me why I didn't go up. I said I wasn't a Catholic. He didn't mind. It was awkward.*

*Another example was at the graduation. I was the only person in the choir not going up for communion, it was awkward. These are awkward moments” (S.17).*

Communication, a pillar of identity humility could help find workable strategies that would neither infringe the rights of Catholics to pray or minorities to religious freedom. A solution could mean allowing students to arrive a few minutes later to class or to remain seated for the prayer. While addressing issues of awkwardness around one’s difference requires changes in opinion, practices and school ethos in order to support difference as an integral and valued aspect of the school community.

### **7.3.2 Opt out from RE class**

Students also described their experiences in relation to opting out of religion class. A number of students were unaware of their legal right to opt out.

*“I didn’t know you could opt out “(S7).*

*“Maybe there should be an option whether I should do religion or not” (S14)*

Parents and students of 18yrs have a legal entitlement to opt their children or themselves out of religious services and classes as stated in Article 44.2.4 and Article 42.1 of the Irish Constitution. Furthermore section 30 (2)-(e) of the Education Act 1998 also underpins this legal right. It is reasonable to suggest students from different countries may particularly struggle in knowing their rights. Hence in the interests of fairness it would be beneficial to ensure all in the school community are alerted to their rights. However, the research findings suggest opting out of RE is problematic for students.

*“I wouldn’t opt out because I don’t know anyone who has. Even the Muslim students, as far as I know, they are still told to sit in..... like if I had the choice now I wouldn’t do religion or life now that’s 4 classes, 4 x 40 mins a week”.*  
(S.1)

*“No I couldn’t opt out of religion class, in this school my mum tried but the secretary said, no one had ever tried before, so mum said, I should just do it and it’s fine” (S13).*

Similarly, the following student felt his agency was constrained with regard to opting out of religion class,

*“Teaching religion, I don’t mind it. I’m open to learning about it as I find it very interesting but if I had a choice maybe I wouldn’t”, (S9).*

The above quotations are evidence of the challenges faced by some individuals, not in their personal exploration and commitment to a set of identities but in the freedom to implement or practise a chosen identity. Oyserman, Bubee & Terry (2006) explain “possible self” may be impossible or challenged by the social and cultural environment. It appears in the school contexts students are forced either implicitly or explicitly to subjugation of the individual self to protect or preserve the wants, needs, identity and priorities of the dominant Catholic group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991 : Triandis 1995). The following atheist student explained how although she would like not to attend Catholic services, implicit barriers and practicalities meant she had decided to go with the status quo,

*“Opting out, to not do it, I’ll just do it anyway, it just means trouble for my mum to have to come here and pick me up, so no. I’d have to leave the school if I didn’t go to religion classes, I’d have to like, there would be trouble and I don’t want to seem kind of rude. Can’t I just stay there? I don’t have to talk in it. It seems extreme to have to remove myself from the class” (S10).*

Likewise another atheist student decided it was easier to stay in religion class as she felt, if she sought an alternative it would cause a lot of hassle and she believed she would be negatively stereotyped.

*“If you make a big thing about it, people will go with the stereotypes” (S.9).*

The above students seem to be operating from a position of rational conformity in order to avoid negative consequences (Guandong et al, 2008). Furthermore, Goodman, Mueller (2009): Bourdieu, (2011) and Gramsci (1971) all suggest if one does not conform to the behaviours of the majority, the individual risks negative consequences. Research by Mawhinney (2013) with 13-18yr old students in Northern Ireland, on their experiences of opting out of religion class also reports young people were not necessarily aware of their right to opt out and experiences of provision for students opting out also varied widely between schools. Moreover students also reported a fear of feeling different, standing out or feeling excluded if they did opt out, hence like the students in this research some students decided not to opt out (Richardson, Niens,

Mawhinney and Chiba, 2013). The research is also supported by research from Devine (2011); Parker-Jenkins and Masterson (2013); Smyth, Lyons, and Darmody (2013) who found “some schools find it challenging to provide facilities for the different religious needs of their pupils. The school ethos and curriculum do not adequately address the needs of children of minority faith backgrounds, with minority faith students experiencing exclusion, ignorance, and lack of understanding (cited in Faas, Darmody, Sokolowska, 2016. p.9). Moreover, Al-Qadri chairman of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council, was also critical of current educational provision, whereby Muslim children in State schools are separated from others for religious education, because he said these practices led to their "isolation from a young age". Furthermore he believes that while denominational schools had a right to teach their faith from their perspective, there would be many benefits to adding "a standard curriculum taught in all schools that reflected the diversity" of contemporary Ireland, and that this "should try to develop acceptance, tolerance and understanding of other faiths in the child," (Frymann, Rouch, 2016). Al-Qadri's views are supported by the Toledo Guiding Principles (OIDHR, 2007). In acknowledging the considerable challenges faced by schools in attempts to cater for a plurality of students' needs, it is noteworthy that a number of minority faith students explained that they had to stand for prayer and attend religion class however they were allowed not to attend school services. This situation may imply schools are willing to accommodate students on rare occasions but not on a day to day basis which indicates resources may be a key issue rather than overt or intentional discrimination.

The complexity of the situation is further conveyed by a number of atheist and agnostic students sharing their personal family stories. Although they wished to opt out of religion, their parents did not agree or support their wishes for example:

*“I want to opt out of religion. My father wouldn't let me. He's a devout Catholic. I feel in my Primary school there was a lot of coercion to believe and even in my own home as a child, when I started to identify as atheist, I was made to go to mass. I was made to go to all these functions and things. I have no problem with Christianity although I have some problems with Catholicism as a denomination” (S8).*

As increasing numbers of students are 18 years when in sixth year, difficult negotiations may be required to determine a workable rights orientated resolution for conflicting

beliefs between students, teachers and parents. The importance of these negotiations is informed by Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which explains:

States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

However, the article also states that,

State Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child. (Nations, U.1989).

The extent of direction parents may provide particularly for students in senior cycle is debatable. Are parents legally entitled to direct a child of 17years to attend Catholic religious services and classes or could an older child or 18yr old student be legally supported to opt themselves out? Are schools violating Muslim student's rights to manifest their religion if prayer facilities are not provided or wearing the hijab or niqab are banned? It is difficult to explain how limiting Muslim students on either count is necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. The above places another layer of complexity and unanswered questions into the pool of issues and challenges facing all in Irish education.

### **7.3.3 Differential Tolerance of Difference**

The multi-layered complexity of the current situation was further illuminated at interview as it was apparent that minority faith students participating in this research were more likely to be accommodated to opt out of religious services and prayers than

minority worldview students. Reasons for this are unclear but may be rooted in the belief that atheism or a non-religious worldview is more threatening than another religion as articulated by Noddings (2008), “Christians, Jews and Muslims learn to “tolerate” one another, but unbelievers remain beyond the pale” (p.370). It is fair to state that in all of the participating schools, opting out was prevented or discouraged for students of no religious belief. O’Kelly (2015) reports a reason for the largest non-Catholic group, those of no religion been less readily accommodated was due to a *fear* that if opting out of religion is facilitated the ‘floodgates’ might open. These concerns may not be without foundation, as the census 2016 reports almost 10% of the population identified as having no- religion, an increase of 74% since 2011. Similarly, Castletroy College, the largest ETBI school in Limerick was reported to have refused to allow a non-religious student to opt out of Religious Education, however resulting from this case making the news, the school then agreed the student could opt out but would have to remain in the classroom, however O’Mahony (2015), questions the appropriateness of a child who has been opted out of RE remaining in the classroom as sufficient measure to ensure freedom of conscience. Education correspondent O’Kelly reports a reticence and problematising by schools to allow students to opt out and claims this “reticence is apparent at every level, from the Department of, through bodies like the Education and Training Boards and right on down to schools Education themselves” (RTE, 2015). Department reticence is evident as they ignored until recently, recommendations regarding school provisions for non- co-religionist students made in 2012 by the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism. The recent development at Primary level to remove faith formation from the school day in Community schools is evidence of changes and counter hegemonic action by the department. Similarly, the debate on the Admission to Schools Bill (2016) for the first time does address the need for schools to include provisions for those who chose to opt out of religion class. However Lennon (2016) suggests, it does not go far enough, as it fails to set out specific arrangements schools are required to make for children who opt out. The State response is similar to the hijab controversy, yet again leaving minorities rights for others to implement without due guidance. The findings from this research indicate schools do not have an alternative plan in place to cater for students opting out, other than to allow students to study, remain in class or go home. No student interviewed described an alternative religious or spiritual accommodation.

*“So we would all go in one class and do what we do. The teacher wouldn’t teach or do anything with us. We will just do our own stuff and wouldn’t be important. But at least they are not expecting parents to come and collect you” (S.5).*

In Finland minority faith and non- religious students take a course on secular ethics or religious instruction in their own faith when the majority Lutheran school population attend religion class (Sakaranaho, 2013). However, there are still difficulties with this provision most especially when the number of non- Lutheran children falls below four; they tend to feel marginalised and isolated. Furthermore meaningful engagement with ethical topics or religious instruction is hampered if non- Lutheran students are out of necessity grouped regardless of age. Despite these difficulties the Finnish system does protect students’ right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The human rights agenda of identity humility practices would require the State, Principals and teachers address the inherent inequalities present in the participating schools. These findings raise serious concerns, as it is evident student’s human right to “freedom of thought, conscience and religion” is not a workable reality for all students in the participating schools (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18, 1948). The States reticence to ensure minorities’ rights are respected is apparent, despite the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Article 4 (Protection of rights) which clearly mandates that the government must take responsibility to ensure children’s rights are respected. Moreover, Article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution should protect non-co-religionist students from attending religious instruction at their school. The reality is different and the Irish Human Rights Commission has repeatedly supported the need for change within the school system to protect non-co-religionist students’ rights to freedom of conscience (IHRC, 2011). These research findings are supported as the State has been found by UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to be breach of international treaties in relation to protecting the rights of non-co- religionist students in Irish schools (McGarry, 2016). The current situation leaves minorities vulnerable and has resulted in some students expressing what Gramsci’s termed “fatalism”.

*“I don’t really care anymore, I can just sit there and ignore it, I have to accept rules and regulations” (S.5).*

*“You don’t want to go there to fight that battle, the battle not to partake in prayer”. (S7)*

*“I wasn’t allowed to opt out of religion, I knew I just had to suck it up, and there was nothing I could do. I was in a Catholic school” (S13).*

The above students’ comments suggest students see little alternative but to conform to the pressure constructed from a Catholic school hegemony. Influential others include teachers, Principals, parents, peers and also school norms, rules and regulations. It is noteworthy that there exists a power differential in schools between teachers and students. If students do not conform to a schools social norms and code of conduct they are likely to face rebukes, sanctions and even exclusion. Indeed students must sign up to their schools code of conduct on accepting a place in their school. The societal socialisation process and a feeling that there was a need to conform to Catholicism is further articulated in the following comment made by an atheist student:

*“I think it’s just drilled into us from generations and generations like everyone before me believed in this, so you should believe in this” (S3)*

Moreover the following students’ quotations provide further evidence of rational, compliance conformity which is understood to be an agreeable response to an expectation of a behaviour made by others on an individual. The individual after due consideration complies even though they may not think the behaviour is right (Guandong & Lei, 2007).

*“In a school like this the most important thing is to conform, You need to conform; you need to look like you conform” (S1).*

*“I blend, my parents told me I should blend in. I learned the prayers so I could say them. Hindus pray too many Gods” (S16).*

*“I don’t really like going to the Catholic prayers and stuff but I feel I have too, so I just go along, let’s get it over with” (S10).*

*“I am expected to go to the masses, I go along, I don’t make a fuss” (S17).*

It is clear from the students’ quotations that Catholicism is the dominant and accepted worldview in the participating schools. Catholicism is privileged and other worldviews

are devalued due to non-recognition or misrecognition. Moreover, assimilation or coercion to acquiesce to Catholic norms is evident. Hegemony is the antithesis of identity humility. Student fifteen's feelings and belief is poignant

*“To be honest, I don't really think they actually care, that's my opinion, and they are so stuck into the whole Catholic thing. I don't think they would care about other people” (S15).*

From the perspective of the Catholic Church it is unclear why this is happening, as Vatican II set out a clear position on religious freedom;

*“This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits”. (Vatican II document, 1965).*

One explanation may be that the interpretation of the Catholic Church's teaching and practice is neither uniform nor static, many interpretations and actions are possible. However, it is also arguable that current school practices may have more to do with hegemonic practices combined with the needs of power and privilege as described by Gramsci and Bourdieu rather than Catholic religious teaching. History and tradition also play a part, the development in 1840 of the Patronage system, has resulted in the Church rather than the State organising the day to day running of schools. Although over time there have been many changes with the development of the NCCA, Community schools and Education training board schools, however many traditional Catholic centric practices have been maintained in Irish Post Primary schools. Hunt, Ellis, Ronald and, Nuzzi (2005), expresses the following “The aim of a Christian education is to cooperate with divine grace in forming the true and perfect Christian “(p.36). As a theologian explains “Inhabitants of a tradition enter its stories, enact its rituals, play its roles, explore its visions, try its arguments, feel its sensibilities” (Brown, 1994 p.86). Brown's description could be summarised as religious integration of school life. While Martin (2017) is aware of the inherent difficulties in maintaining a Catholic hegemony in education. He has called on Catholic schools to build relationships and

partnerships with other patrons and agents, in order to build respectful pluralist models of education for a "new pluralist Ireland". He is firmly against Catholic elitist education and insular policies. However, it is clear not all share his vision of collegiality and would prefer to maintain or indeed strengthen Catholic school hegemony (Daly, 2016). The following section presents and analysis the interview findings on both teacher and peer attitudes to religious and worldview diversity.

#### **7.4 Attitudes to Religious and worldview diversity**

At interview students spoke about both teacher and peer attitudes to their religious diversity. The first section presents and analyses teacher attitudes and the second section peer attitudes.

##### **7.4.1 Teachers' Attitudes to religious diversity**

At interview, students spoke about their teachers along a spectrum ranging from very positive to very negative. Chapter five presented and analysed the many positive experiences students spoke about with regard to teachers. However, this chapter is concentrated on the theme of hegemony and will therefore present and analysis how some teachers explicitly and implicitly supported a praxis of Catholic hegemony. Students articulated at interview negative attitudes teachers had expressed towards their world views. Similar to Bourdieu's concept of, 'misrecognition' or what Gramsci described as unconsciously controlled hegemony was described as evident in some teachers' practices, (Gramsci 1971; Navarro, 2006).

*"I think some things might be bias but not deliberately, little things like they believe it is for everyone the same but it's not" (S13).*

*"I think for teachers, to kind of be more aware, because I remember last year they brought in some American students and they were just promoting God and it was uncomfortable for me and I think to be more aware, ask students if they want to attend, instead of everyone has to be here and it was preaching at me and it made me uncomfortable" (S10).*

*"A teacher in a similar lesson said, I assume you are all Catholic. You know she just, I had to say to her you can't just make assumptions like that, because I*

*knew there were at least seven people in the class at that point who weren't"*  
(S.2).

In essence the student's use of the term awareness or lack of awareness, is encapsulated in the Gramscian term misrecognition. Moreover Gramsci (1971) explains if a hegemony is historically embedded and culturally cemented as normal, which is the case with Catholicism in Irish schools it no longer consciously controlled for example ; *"bias but not deliberately"*(S.13) *"I assume you are all Catholic"* (S.2). While Cragun and Hammer (2011) suggests an implication of pro religious hegemony is the devaluing and even the creation of deviant identities for others. Three students articulated clearly how their religion or worldview had been maligned by teachers in their school.

*"Catholicism is the world's best religion. They are very subtle about it, you just feel so bad in religion class".....*

*"They don't teach the good side about Islam, they teach the bad side, which is murder, al quieda, don't teach only that side, there are other good sides to it as well. They should show the other good sides as well" (S6).*

*"They don't teach atheism at all and if you ask about it they don't really want to talk about it. You can see it in their expression, they open it up to the class and because most of the school is Christian anyway, it's your wrong, your wrong, your wrong", (S.3).*

Pottinger and Stair (2009) found that being embarrassed or humiliated by educators was the most frequently reported worst experience in school. As teachers are role models for their students, teacher attitudes and behaviour may be copied by students. In addition, most non-religious students interviewed felt their beliefs were ignored, as articulated by student 3. James et al (2008) found ignoring and name calling as the two most common types of negative behaviours engaged in by teachers. Most worrying is research by Latrofa, Vaes and Cadinu (2012), who report vulnerable adolescents or those with low status group membership, increasingly self- stereotype when they feel their identity is threatened. From an adolescent identity development perspective the coherence or functionality of an adolescent's life story is challenged when there is confusion between roles, for example a student with a Muslim faith or atheist worldview may find attending a Catholic school and being socialised as a Catholic both difficult and confusing. Their situation is exasperated, if their personal identity is either ignored or

maligned (McAdams and Olson, 2010: Erickson 1950:1968). Carrs' (2015), research in relation to young Irish Muslims in the education system, also found they can experience "discriminatory, unprofessional, indeed racist practices at the hands of staff", (p.149). Carr (2016) reports on a number of incidents relating to difficulties female Muslim students face with regard to wearing the hijab. For example one teacher told a student *'when you take off that stupid thing [hijab] on your head you can hear me (p.32)*. He summarises his findings on the experiences of Muslim students in schools as follows:

The experiences of young Muslims in the education system are not what they should be in a professional teaching environment that promotes not only academic attainment, but social inclusion and recognition of Irish society as increasingly diverse.....these findings resonate with findings by research undertaken by Bryan and Bracken (2011), albeit in a more aggressive form (Carr, 2016 p.32).

The situation is exacerbated due to a lack of diversity within the teaching profession in Ireland. This is evidenced by research conducted by Keane & Heinz (2015), which found, on average 98% of student teachers were White Irish versus 86% of students for non-teaching degrees. Moreover, Hajar Akl (2017) suggests there are no Muslim, Asian or Indian teachers. The difficulty with a lack of teacher diversity is the loss of positive 'role models' for students from various socio-demographic backgrounds (Villegas, Clewell 1998). Moreover, Villegas and Irvine (2010), Santoro (2009), all report minority teachers are more likely than the majority teaching group to act as advocates for minority students and to develop caring and trusting relationships with minority students. The situation is further exasperated by the Employment Equality Act 1998 section 37 which allows Voluntary secondary schools to legally give preference to co-religionist teachers and allows for teachers to be dismissed if they do not uphold the schools religious ethos. ERST's charter also states that Lay teachers must be profoundly convinced that they share in the sanctifying, and therefore educational mission of the Church. Moreover, Dunne (1995) suggests some teachers, who due to their personal non-Catholic beliefs rather than being proactive in supporting minority students, remain silent about their religious perspective or practice which he refers to as cunning. While Irwin (2010) suggests "teachers or teacher students may end up lying about their

religious perspective or practice, so as to obtain (or maintain) their teaching post” (p.8). Teachers are therefore controlled by institutional habitus. Hence, schools distribute and preserve cultural capital (Apple, 1998; McLaren, 1989; Touri, 2011). The Iona Institute welcomes a plurality of schools and argues that “a more diverse system will give denominational schools greater freedom to be true to their ethos” (IHRC, 2011, p.44). From the perspective of social cohesion addressing plurality by segregation is troubling as it supports “othering”. According to Straszak (2008) “segregation allows the opposition between self and the other to be maintained or accentuated” (p.1). Moreover the Toledo Guiding Principles also advise States against separation due to religious differences (OIDHR, 2007). Horgan (2016) makes the point that our current education system is more Catholic than the Pope. Horgan is referring to the following statement made by Pope Francis:

States must be secular. Confessional states end badly. That goes against the grain of history. I believe that a version of laicity [the French system of separation of church and state] accompanied by a solid law guaranteeing religious freedom offers a guarantee for going forward

Despite the aforementioned changes and the Pope’s beliefs, Irish education remains a Church State partnership. Hence, concerns for minority faith and non-religious students remain, as the logistics and workability of providing a school in every community for every belief system is implausible. Ironically laws such as the Equal status act section 7 (3) C, which were originally intended to support minority beliefs in particular Church of Ireland schools are now been used by the dominant majority to strengthen their hegemonic position. Thus minority faith and non- religious students and teachers particularly in rural Ireland remain vulnerable to inequalities with regard to manifesting their world views in Irish schools. Indeed their human right to freedom of thought conscience and religion is compromised and trumped in favor of institutional religious freedoms and hegemonies.

#### **7.4.2 Peer Attitudes to Religious diversity**

A number of students described difficulties they had or were encountering with their peers due to their religious difference. One student described how having come from an Educate Together primary school she felt a bit alienated at first because she was

forthright and open about her atheist beliefs. However, when she realised that it was better to stay quiet about her beliefs, her experience improved. This ties in well with the parental advice given to a Hindu student to try and blend in with the dominant culture rather than highlight ones difference.

*“I felt a bit alienated in 1<sup>st</sup> year, not majorly; it was more comments, naivety, and people not knowing what to say. I suppose students behaviour towards others, they were kind of shocked, like really shocked. Are you not worried you might go to hell? That’s what the bible says. They think I have nothing, the world is just science but that’s not at all how I feel. Some people do kind of think, I’m a Satanist or something, and some people are more enlightened than others. Students who go to Catholic schools don’t know how to react to others. I didn’t comment just left it the way it was like and it got better” (S.13).*

Another student explained her experience around her talking with her peers about her agnosticism and similar to student 13 she found students did not know how to deal with her difference as follows,

*“I feel like if after a friend asking and if like I explain it to them they don’t really get it, their faces kinda go like”, (S.9).*

The student made a very blank switched off facial expression. Similarly, a Muslim student felt his peers did not understand his religion.

*“They don’t have a proper understanding of Islam” (S.14).*

Other students also spoke about the need to stay quiet about their beliefs. The researcher found the perceived need to stay quiet as a coping strategy commonly employed by some students in their schools as evidenced in the following quotes. On asking one student if she spoke about her atheist beliefs with her peers she replied:

*“Ooh, I wouldn’t, I’d be too nervous about it upsetting people and scared of any arguments, a friendly debate could probably turn into an argument, and it’s a concern if they ask me. I’d rather just keep quiet about it, that’s just me, other people like to put their views out there but I’m like its ok” (S.10).*

The impact on students identity development in sensing from peers and teachers that their beliefs are stigmatised and that they belong to a devalued group may result in their increasing identity with those who are similarly stigmatised, the adoption of negative stereotypes and have a negative impact on their self-esteem and identity development (Crocker & Majors, 1989 ; Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002: Brown, Vivian & Heuston 1990 and Ysseldyk, et al. Matheson & Ainsman, 2010).

Moreover, minority faith students from Muslim, Protestant and Buddhist background also experienced difficulties around their peers understanding of their religious difference:

*“At first in first yr. no because there were people, I thought there was a boundary with Catholic students and people who weren’t Catholic and I remember one girl commented about mm mmm mmm what was going on in Northern Ireland was the Protestants fault and something and I’m Protestant and I’m thinking what (stuttering increased) so it was hard at first and then it got easier” (S.10).*

*“A lot of people in school don’t know I am a Buddhist. I keep it to myself. Students see Buddhism as a gimmick, a joke of a religion” (S.17).*

These findings correspond with Dennett (2006), whose research found people hide the fact they are non- religious and continue to attend services and prayers. Furthermore, another student decided it was best not to highlight her Muslim identity and decided not to wear her hijab.

*“Hijab, I don’t know, I kind of felt everyone was looking at me weird and that sort of stuff, so I decided not to wear it”, (S.6).*

This finding coincides with research by Carr (2016), whose Irish based research found “Muslim women were twice as likely to experience anti-Muslim hostility to Muslim men. Moreover the research demonstrates the manner in which the hijab, niqab and other items of female clothing are frequently targeted in experiences of anti-Muslim hostility in Ireland” (Carr, 2016; Zempi, Chakraborti, 2014 p.6). Students were aware of the vulnerability of students to bullying if they are perceived by peers as different as summed up by the following students comment.

*“Some people if they are already not the most popularly thought of people and they are atheist as well and are a minority or Muslim, they are always more vulnerable” (S.3).*

Awareness of the plight of a Muslim student was articulated as follows,

*“We had a Muslim girl in our class last year. No one tried to involve her, maybe tried a little bit but it might have been because she came in a year later or cause she’s Muslim and she was quite different and went off and prayed during lunch breaks and things like that” (S10).*

Student 10’s description of the Muslim girls isolation, is very troubling, moreover it suggests an irrational conformity or herd behaviour against difference (Song et al, 2012). Although there is a deficit in research on religious bullying in an Irish context, Carr (2016) reported incidents of bullying against the Irish Muslim community. U.K. research reports, “One in four children are bullied because of their faith, ” the reports also found that being picked on for their belief caused victims to question their religion or in some cases to self-harm (Lipsett, 2008). Student tens’ quote suggests the awareness and need some students have to assimilate rather than to make known their difference. They see it as necessary in order to garner acceptance in their school. Moreover this realisation ties in with Bourdieu’s theory of socialisation and the need to conform to gain cultural capital. Noteworthy, is an atheist student who was adamant in his belief that certain Catholic centric practices should be supported by all students in a Catholic school regardless of individual religious freedoms, he spoke about how he would support all students standing for Catholic prayers as follows:

*“This is a Catholic school. I’m in a Catholic school, being educated in a Catholic school for free. I’ll stand for the prayer as a show of respect. If I saw someone I knew who was atheist or any other faith sitting down I would tell them to stand up. And they would be told by everyone else in the room to keep standing up” (S2).*

It could be argued the above quotes show some minority faith and non- religious students accept and address the need to subjugate their beliefs in order to support the Catholic hegemony within the school, which concurs with Gramsci’s theory on hegemony. A socialisation process is also evident; and there are indicators that those

who most readily socialise to the dominant norm are likely to encounter fewer difficulties.

#### **7.4.2 Conclusion**

In summation the findings suggest an operational Catholic hegemony in the participating schools, which is evidenced by Catholic centric practises. Resultant inequalities exist in the facilitation for minority faith students to manifest their faith compared to Catholic students. Opting out of religion class is problematic from an organisational, personal, cultural and multi-generational perspective. These findings raise serious concerns, as it is evident students human right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (UDHR, Article18, 1948) is not a reality in their schools. Furthermore, both teacher and peer attitudes to religious diversity is problematic for some students. It appears an almost tacit arrangement exists whereby non-Catholic students must accept and conform to Catholic school practices.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

Initially, this chapter acknowledges the complexity of the research project. This is followed by a summation of the key findings. Subsequent to this, the research questions are revisited in light of the research findings using the lens of identity humility theory. The thesis concludes by addressing the key implications of the findings and suggesting recommendations and areas for further research.

### **8.2 Complexity of the research**

This research space is impacted on by legitimate and at times conflicting rights between those who wish to be educated or have their children educated in schools which facilitate opportunities to practise and learn about Catholicism, and those of minority faith and minority world view who attend Catholic schools and also have a need for their moral and spiritual education to be facilitated and their right to religious freedom upheld. Sullivan (2017) is correct in describing the religious space in schools as; “A space like no other” (p.7). It is difficult to interpret and marry together all ideas and views expressed by students and theorists. While the epistemology of constructivism is helpful, as it understands the complexity of understanding human experiences, it also acknowledges that we each construct our own realities. Moreover the idea of fallibilism, reminds us of the constraints inherent in human understanding. Hence it is impossible to state what the true reality is in any space. Arguably, identity humility theory is helpful as it supports the need to recognise how we construct ideas and acknowledges the limits of our individual understanding, while also putting forth the idea of resolving conflict by engaging with new ideas and being prepared to change our own. Central to this research is the power of ideas and thoughts, on the one hand hegemony supports the maintenance of a particular set of ideas, while identity humility, constructivism, agency, dialogical and interpretive approaches to teaching RE all support the possibility of change and addressing conflicting ideas. Constructivism supports a myriad of interpretations of the shared space in Irish Catholic Post Primary schools. Hence the following conclusions are couched in the above understanding. The researcher asserts that the interpretations are her viable understanding based on the literature review, students’ interviews and identity humility theory and accepts responsibility for her interpretations.

### **8.3 Key Findings**

- The research provides evidence of the experiences of “otherness” confusion, exclusion and the conflict experienced by students of minority belief in the participating schools.
- The research highlights the tensions at play between Church and State in provision of RE in an increasingly pluralist school community.
- The research highlights the students desire to study RE together.
- Questions arise regarding the hegemonic practice of conditional hospitality and a school’s ability to be reflective spaces that uphold religious freedom.
- Identity humility theory provides an alternative to a segregationist policy of increasing diversity of patronage.
- Student voice provides an important dimension to the current debate regarding the content of RE in Irish Post Primary education.

### **8.4 Research questions revisited**

The original research questions which evolved from the literature review are addressed using identity humility theory and theories of hegemony, agency, otherness, conformity and identity development in order to understand the research findings.

- How may a Catholic school ethos impact on minority faith and minority world view students’ school experience?

The research indicates students of minority belief are impacted on by a Catholic school ethos. Students expressed positivity in relation to a number of aspects of a Catholic school ethos, including valuing the academic opportunities afforded to them alongside the safe and caring atmosphere created. However Catholic centric practices in particular act as fault lines or tension points in their lived experiences. Such practices include Catholic prayers and services, graduation ceremonies with a Catholic service, Catholic only rewards and practical RE particularly as taught at Junior Cycle. Moreover students were impacted on by negative stereotyping, peer and teachers’ attitudes to their belief difference and a lack of acknowledgement of their beliefs. Hence their sense of belonging, well-being and identity coherence could potentially be marginalised. The findings regarding the tensions and practices

suggest a lack of communication, reflective practice and respect for the uniqueness of individual beliefs, which are core elements of identity humility theory. Furthermore, the practices are supported and maintained by an operative Catholic hegemony within the participating research schools.

- How is the human right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion facilitated for minority faith and minority worldview students' in Irish Post Primary schools with a Catholic ethos?

Human rights are a core element of identity humility theory. The collective right of Catholic students to practise and be educated in their faith is upheld. However, the research findings raise serious concerns regarding the rights of minority belief students, as it is evident their human right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (UDHR, Article 18, 1948) in the main is not addressed in their schools. Some students reported fear and coercion, either implicit or explicit, to concur with Catholic norms. Moreover, opting out of religion class is problematic from an organisational, personal, cultural and multi-generational perspective. It appears a hegemonic or tacit arrangement exists whereby non-Catholic students must accept and conform to Catholic school practices. While some students were facilitated to opt out, no alternative to promote their moral and spiritual education was provided.

- How do minority Faith and minority world view students experience religious education in Irish Catholic Post Primary schools?

Students expressed an overarching positivity in relation to learning about world religions together. Moreover, students valued meditations and retreats, theoretical RE and class discussion which provided them the space to reflect on life's questions and social issues. Teacher agency resulted in a more positive regard for Leaving Cycle RE when compared to Junior Cycle RE, as the focus on Catholicism was reduced in favour of real life discussions on pertinent issues. Practical RE in Catholicism tended to present difficulties for students while theoretical RE was valued. Moreover, teacher agency proved beneficial in addressing diverse student needs. Notwithstanding the challenges, students wish to be educated together and hold strong beliefs on the universality of human values and the need to participate in order to belong. In relation to identity humility theory, the reflexivity evidenced by RE teachers at Senior Cycle, and the expressed desire of students to be educated together, suggest the workability of identity humility and challenges a segregationist policy. Moreover the findings highlight the need for communication between all stakeholders in education.

- How is the moral and spiritual development of minority belief students supported in Irish Post Primary schools with a Catholic ethos?

Theoretical RE, class discussions and academic rigour, alongside a safe and caring atmosphere supports students' moral development. While meditation, retreats and theoretical RE help support students' spiritual development. However stereotyping, systemic inequalities, power imbalances and a lack of identity humility may also impact on students' moral development. Agency theory suggests students may respond in a myriad of ways. Some may accept negative identities and are vulnerable to radicalisation, while others may disregard them or in some cases use their negative experience as a catalyst to challenge injustice. The core elements of identity humility theory, particularly, the understanding regarding an individual focus, fluidity and the benefit of communication are implicit in the findings.

- Could identity humility theory and practices support a plurality of beliefs in Catholic schools and avoid a segregationist policy?

It is the researcher's contention that identity humility theory and practice can support a plurality of beliefs in Catholic schools. The charisms of most orders, alongside liberation theology and Vatican II's teaching, in particular *Dignitatis Humanae*, are supportive of religious freedom. Moreover the students expressed a sense of human solidarity and a desire to be educated together. Adolescents share a universal quest to find answers to life questions. Moreover teachers, when afforded the opportunity at Senior Cycle level, indicated an ability and desire to address the spiritual and moral educational needs of adolescents by developing life classes, practising meditation, facilitating class discussions and inviting speakers to address pertinent social issues. Advancing the idea of proportionality and in recognition of the majority Catholic population, it is posited that Catholic schools, if monitored and financed by the DES, can provide an education for students of all beliefs. Teachers have a pivotal role to play and all teachers could benefit from pre-service and in-service education on identity humility and inclusive education. Sharing an educational space between Catholic, minority faith and minority world view students' avoids a segregationist policy and is important for social cohesion and hence justifies the need for identity humility.

## 8.5 Implications and Recommendations

The implications and recommendations of this research centre on four elements namely: adolescent identity development, leadership, legislation, and communication.

### **8.5.1 Identity development**

The students interviewed spoke openly about their evolving identities and their difficulties in finding a secure identity. Post Primary schools, as providers and guardians of education for adolescents, need to take particular account of their developmental stage. New adolescent identity development theories suggest adolescents are struggling to find secure identities resulting from globalisation, cultural and societal flux, multiple world identities incoherence, stereotyping and generational differences. It is understood that one way to support adolescents is to provide spaces to explore multiple worldviews through interpretive or dialogical approaches to RE. The inclusion of non-religious worldviews is increasingly important. Moreover, students, regardless of their belief system, are supported by encouraging an exploration of both belief confirming and belief threatening ideas.

### **8.5.2 Leadership**

A lack of consensus between the DES and the Catholic bishops and patrons supports confusion, inconsistency and wriggle room which has resulted in different approaches to RE, particularly evident at Senior Cycle. While this wriggle room is very important and can be very useful in supporting workable strategies at local level, this needs to happen within a framework of human rights and inclusion, which is monitored by the State. Leadership and funding from the DES is required in order to ensure students and teachers within State funded schools have their right to freedom of thought conscience and religion upheld. Providing RE which is consistent with a democratic spirit may necessitate a separation between practical and theoretical RE. Students could learn theoretical RE together, while being provided with separate instruction on practical RE. The development of on line courses in practical RE combined with travelling faith specific teachers funded by the State could help facilitate provision for minority belief students. It is noteworthy that the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism (2012) also supports the need for the DES to take responsibility to ensure human rights are protected and schools' ethos are inclusive of all beliefs. They recommend the NCCA develop curriculum and teacher guidelines for ERB and Ethics which supports all students RE, while also maintaining practical RE classes. (Coolahan, Hussey & Kilfeather, 2012 p.111).

### **8.5.3 Legislation**

In order to advance the ideals of social cohesion, equality and identity humility both the Equal Status Act (2000-2015) section 7.3(c) and the Employment Equality Act (1998-2015) section 37 should be removed or restricted to minority faith schools.

#### **8.5.4 Communication**

Communication is a core element of identity humility theory and appears key to meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Dialogue between all education stakeholders is imperative to find workable solutions going forward. Martin Luther King maintains that inclusive strategies must be formulated by minorities in order to avoid assimilation, tokenism and safe harbours (Jay, 2003 p.6; Gorksi, 2008); all of which were evidenced in this research. Dialogue may be difficult unless those with opposing viewpoints are prepared to understand and engage with different ideas. Alongside communication, proportionality, compromise, power balancing, human rights and reflexivity are essential in order to navigate a way forward.

#### **8.6 Future Research**

Arising from this research study, four particular areas warrant further research;

Research is warranted on non-religious beliefs in an Irish context in order to understand these views at a deeper level and address stereotypical claims. Moreover, although in Western democracies non-religious beliefs are increasing, a dearth of robust and reliable research is evident.

This research demonstrates that minority beliefs students find a sense of belonging with those sharing their beliefs but minorities' belief students may have no peer within their class or school sharing their beliefs. Research is required to understand how these isolated minority belief students address their sense of belonging in Irish schools.

Research on human agency, with a focus on understanding why and how adolescents accept or reject religious identity stereotyping, has the potential to provide valuable insights and enable the development of strategies to promote resilience in young people.

According to Jackson (2004), dialogical debate on difficult issues is challenging while also beneficial to adolescents. Challenges may be exasperated in schools where an operative Catholic hegemony exists. Hence further research on using dialogical pedagogy to teach RE is warranted, with an aim to understanding inherent challenges and solutions. Furthermore, this research supports the development of pedagogies which encourages student voice.

#### **8.7 Final Words**

The final words of this research project belong to two students as they encapsulate the challenges of the current situation. Student nine is describing her feelings regarding naming

her personal beliefs: *"The label thing stresses me out a bit". (S9)* While student ones' interpretation of the impact of his identity choice on a loved one has resonance for those concerned with the inclusion and education of students of minority faith and minority world views:

*"It would break my granny's heart completely, if she heard I was an atheist, she would not be able to cope with hearing something like that. I wouldn't want her to hear something like that". (S1)*

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



Dr. James O'Higgins Norman  
School of Education Studies

15<sup>th</sup> November 2013

**REC Reference:** DCUREC/2013/188

**Proposal Title:** **Researching the Experiences of non Catholic students in Irish Post Primary Schools**

**Applicants:** Dr. James O'Higgins Norman, Ms. Kate Stapleton

Dear James,

Further to expedited 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 submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Donal O'Mathuna'.

Dr. Donal O'Mathuna  
Chairperson  
DCU Research Ethics Committee



**Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht**  
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## Appendix B

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT
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PROJECT TITLE            The experiences of minority faith and minority belief students in Irish Post Primary Schools with a Catholic ethos.

PRINCIPAL                Dr. James O’Higgins Norman

INVESTIGATOR(S)        Kate Stapleton

Dublin City University, Department of Humanities, School of Education Studies.

Contact Details : Dr. James O’Higgins Norman, Tel. [REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

Kate Stapleton, Tel. [REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

This project is funded by the Irish Research Council.

### Participant Involvement Requirements

Parents / guardians and students will be provided with information on the research. If parents / guardians are willing to allow their children to take part they will be asked to sign a consent form. Students will also be asked to sign a consent form.

Students willingly partaking in the research will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher which will take place in their school.

Prior to the interview the researcher will be available at the school to answer any questions relating to the proposed research. Interviews will take approx. 20- 60 minutes. The interview will be audio taped. The interview will take place in a suitable room with windows and a door with a glass panel. The researcher is a Post Primary teacher registered with the Teaching Council and has Garda clearance.

## Benefits to Participants

It is hoped the research will help develop an understanding of the needs of non-Catholic students in a predominantly Catholic school community. It is envisaged that the results from this research will add to other research and lead to the implementation of school policies which will improve the access to education of non-Catholic students.

## Arrangements made to protect confidentiality of data

Anonymity – relates to protecting the identity of research participants. Both schools and students names will be given a pseudonym. Geographical information, school name or even colloquial expressions will not be used as they might help to identify a student. Pieces of information will be presented together that represent experiences across a number of schools rather than a gathering of all information together for one school. This mixing will make it more difficult to identify students or schools. Interview data will not be made available to school personnel, access will be limited to the researcher and research supervisor.

Confidentiality – relates to how data is collected, stored and reported. Pseudonyms and study codes will be used on completed interview transcripts. Identifying information will be stored separately on a password protected laptop and access limited to the researcher and research supervisor. Data documents will be securely stored in DCU. Security codes will be assigned to computerised records. Any comment made which the student requests to be “off the record” will not be recorded. Audio tapes, interview notes will be stored in DCU; access will be limited to investigators only. Data will be shredded / deleted or incinerated by the researcher on conclusion within five years of completion of the research.

Students’ will be advised that it may be impossible to guarantee anonymity / confidentiality of the participant identity. Although every effort will be made to respect students anonymity.

Confidentiality of information provided can only be protected within the limitations of the law.

Participants can withdraw from the Research Study at any point.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01- 7008000.



I have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study

Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions

Yes/No

I am aware that my interview will be audio taped

Yes/No

I am aware that I may withdraw from the research study at any point

Yes/No

The school name or any person attending interview will not be named in the report

Due to the small number of students interviewed in each school, students will be advised that it may be impossible to guarantee anonymity / confidentiality of the participant identity. Every effort will be made to respect students' anonymity.

Confidentiality of information provided can only be protected within the limitations of the law.

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 to take part in this research project.

Participants Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Parents / Guardians Signature:

Parents / Guardians Name in Block Capitals:

Witness:

Date:

**Thank You**

## Appendix D

# Codebook

Codebook\\Phase 1 - Generating Initial Codes (Open Coding)

<b>Initial Exploratory Coding - 54 Open codes Developed</b>	<b>Interviews Coded</b>	<b>Units of Meaning Coded</b>
Academic Achievement	5	5
Atheist Stereotyping	10	61
Attitudes to Muslim students	11	38
Belonging	15	68
Bullying	7	24
Catholic Centric Practices	13	61
Catholic Hegemony	6	9
atheism	10	61
Attitudes to Muslim students	11	38
bullying	7	24
Catholic imperialism	6	9
Complaints	5	9
Differential Tolerance	14	67
Ethos	16	126
Good Practise	11	28
Graduation	12	16
Hegemony	10	37
Homophobia	6	20
Iconography	3	3
Identity Exploration	2	2
Impact of Parents	13	24
Junior cycle RE	12	29
Religious Teaching	16	51
Meditation	10	16
Minority Faith Stereotyping	16	53
Muslim Stereotyping	4	10
Opting out	16	72
Otherring	13	34
Own Group Identification	15	45
Pastoral Care	3	5
Personal Beliefs	14	89

<b>Initial Exploratory Coding - 54 Open codes Developed</b>	<b>Interviews Coded</b>	<b>Units of Meaning Coded</b>
Personal Integrity	12	54
Prayers and Services	16	51
Questioning Phase	9	21
Religion class	16	57
Religious teaching	16	51
Religious Education	3	4
Religious Respect	14	55
Safe Space	9	11
School Ethos	11	54
School Retreats	6	9
School uniform	4	4
Senior cycle RE	6	11
Religious Teaching	16	51
Societal Attitudes	8	24
Spirituality	5	14
Stereotyping	15	41
Student Compromise	15	107
Student interests	8	21
Student Opinions	11	30
Students Attitudes	16	48
Teachers Attitudes	17	69
Wellbeing	11	33
World religions	11	27

Codebook\\Phase 2 and 3 – Developing a Thematic Framework

<b>Developing a Thematic Framework - 54 Open codes Collapsed and Conceptually Mapped to 3 Themes with 3 Subthemes Each</b>	<b>Interviews Coded</b>	<b>Units of Meaning Coded</b>
T1 - Personal Identity	17	292
T1.1 - Identity Exploration	12	56

<b>Developing a Thematic Framework - 54 Open codes Collapsed and Conceptually Mapped to 3 Themes with 3 Subthemes Each</b>	<b>Interviews Coded</b>	<b>Units of Meaning Coded</b>
Identity Exploration	2	2
Personal Integrity	12	54
<b>T1.2 – Stereotyping</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>124</b>
Atheist Stereotyping	10	61
Minority Faith Stereotyping	16	53
Muslim Stereotyping	4	10
<b>T1.3 – Belonging</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>112</b>
Othering	13	34
Own Group Identification	15	45
Wellbeing	11	33
<b>T2 - Conditional Shared Space</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>400</b>
<b>T2.1 - Religious Education</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>92</b>
Junior cycle RE	12	29
Leaving cycle RE	6	11
Meditation	10	16
School Retreats	6	9
World religions	11	27
<b>T2.2 - Compromise</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>161</b>
Impact of Parents	13	24
Student Compromise	15	107
Student Opinions	11	30
<b>T2.3 - School Ethos</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>147</b>
Academic Achievement	5	5
Ethos	16	126
Pastoral Care	3	5
Safe Space	9	11
<b>T3 - Catholic Hegemony</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>678</b>
<b>T3.1 - Hegemony</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>149</b>
Catholic Centric Practices	13	61
Hegemony	10	37
Prayers and Services	16	51
<b>T3.2 - Opting Out</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>122</b>
Differential Tolerance	14	67
Prayers and Services	16	51
Religious Education	3	4
<b>T3.3 - Attitudes to religious diversity</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>407</b>
Student Attitudes	17	162
Teacher Attitudes	31	245

# Codebook\\Screenshot Thematic Framework in NVivo

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface with a Thematic Framework for Phase 3 - Developing Thematic Framework. The main workspace shows a table of nodes and their references.

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