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THE PLACE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S WORLDVIEWS

Volume 1of 2

by Catherine Margaret Ota

Doctor of Philosophy

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This thesis has been completed as a requirement for a
higher degree of the University of Southampton.

ABSTRACT
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Adopting a narrative epistemology this study uses qualitative research with children between the ages of 9 and 11 to consider the nature of children's worldviews and the place of RE in their meaning construction. In England and Wales church schools are perceived to be particularly attentive to children's personal, social, cultural, moral and spiritual development, especially through RE. Employing a case study approach with four church schools (two Church of England and two Roman Catholic) this research utilises a broad understanding of RE (lessons, collective worship and ethos) to investigate whether these perceptions are justified.

The work is informed by a range of linguistic, sociological, educational, philosophical and theological particulars and whilst it is acknowledged that this study constitutes only a small scale study it aims to authentically represent and analyse the children's narratives and experiences of RE. Pursuing a grounded theory approach that works from open interviews with children this research develops an analytical framework that considers children's meaning construction in terms of the nature and impact of different relationships. By taking account of empirical research and theorists in complementary areas the process of analysis examines the notion of the relational self and proposes a model for interrogating the structure and effect of different aspects of relationships for the individual's meaning construction. Throughout the course of the research this study also develops the concept of worldviews by inquiring into what it means to speak of worldview development.

Combining these elements with narrative theory this relational analysis and conceptualisation of worldview development explores the place of nurture and the provision of RE in church schools. Taking account of the contemporary theoretical debate in this area this study offers a critical reflection of its findings at the four schools involved with this work. Highlighting the crucial role of relationships and experience, together with how this is addressed in the learning process, the fundamental distinction is made between RE that focuses on **what** to think in contrast to **how** to think.

Conclusions and recommendations are drawn which address: (1) the need for better communication between those who contribute to the shaping of models of RE in church schools; (2) the need for practitioners to develop a clear understanding of their role in the classroom so that they might confidently engage in those relationships necessary for children's worldview development; (3) the need for a broader theoretical debate in relation to church schools and RE; (4) the need for further research in this area.

In advancing a way of understanding children's meaning construction and worldview development this study offers a framework and suggestions for further research which speaks to both the context of church schools as well as the broader field of education generally.

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VOLUME I

Acknowledgements

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INTRODUCTION: THIS STUDY

> 'Stories are interpretative resources, models and scenarios through which we make sense of what is happening to us and frame our own action...They shape the processes of life. It is through stories that our social selves, which are our real selves, are actually produced...We are the collection of stories that we are acting out, the stories that proliferate and reproduce themselves in us.'[1]

This study is about stories: their construction, articulation and significance for meaning making and worldview development. My own story is inevitably intertwined with this study and the narratives of other educationalists also contribute to this work. Whilst these have their part to play the main concern of this research is to work with children's narratives so that their worldviews are authentically voiced and analysed.

Empirically based, this inquiry explores what it means to speak of worldviews and the concept of worldview development. Unravelling the imbroglio of these processes this enterprise addresses a variety of issues: the power of narrative in human lives and the specifics of research, education and religious education. Grounded within the study's data, this investigation contends with the complexities of a methodological and epistemological framework that is rigorous and appropriate for understanding worldview development.

The general acceptance of an objective, rational framework of knowledge has been challenged over the last few decades as alternative epistemologies critique its view of the human subject, historicism, meaning and philosophy[2]. This wider epistemological debate is reflected in the radical shift of research paradigms from a positivist/ objective/ causal view to one that is increasingly hermeneutic/ subjective/ interpretative[3]. This study's own epistemological position is grounded in a socially-constructed theory of knowledge where stories motivate and explain, enabling understanding and learning, as well as providing a powerful research tool[4]. Justifying

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[1] Cupitt, 1991, p.ix.
[2] Sarup, 1993, p.1.
[3] As observed by Kuhn, 1970 and Bosacki, 1998. See also Ely et al, 1991; Witherell and Noddings, 1991.
[4] Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p.280.

this standpoint necessarily means that this inquiry contributes to the contemporary epistemological debate by pointing to the significance of narrative, constructivist knowledge paradigms for learning and education.

Within the complexities of a narrative epistemology, and alongside its conceptualisation of the term worldview, this study attends to a diverse range of linguistic, sociological, educational, philosophical and theological particulars. It considers the nature and impact of different ways of communicating by individuals in their professional roles; the status and recognition of the child's own meaning construction; the significance of a process approach for learning and RE, and the effectiveness of different models of RE and nurture within church schools.

Since the Education Reform Act of 1988 RE, children's social, moral, cultural and spiritual development has been a prominent issue in the educational climate of England and Wales. Throughout the twentieth century church schools have developed alongside county/ grant maintained schools. Despite society's predominantly secular nature[1], and critics who claim that church schools are too divisive and anachronistic, the continuing popularity of church schools amongst parents is reflected in the fact that even today they are usually oversubscribed[2]. Regarding RE and children's moral, spiritual, cultural and social development church schools are generally perceived as particularly attentive to these aspects of education provision. Using a case study approach with four church schools this research questions whether such a perception is justified and whether church schools really are effective in contributing to children's understanding of themselves and the world around them.

This study marks a new direction in trying to answer such questions: the use of qualitative research with children is itself rare, as is an inquiry into the impact of RE in church schools, Church of England and Roman Catholic[3]. Combining these two elements this investigation seeks to offer an important, original and relevant contribution to whether RE in church schools really does influence and enable children's worldview development.

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[1] As noted, for example, by Chadwick (1994, p.4) and Wilson (1982).
[2] Chadwick, 1994, p.4.
[3] Whilst I acknowledge the quantitative research of Lesley Francis, as well as other smaller studies (e.g. Egan, 1988 and Levitt, 1996), research in RE, particularly at church schools, remains relatively limited in comparison to the proportion of educational research generally.

Relying on open interviews with small groups and pairs of primary-aged children in four church schools[1], this study uses a dialogic, qualitative research process to allow children to share stories about their lives, what is important to them and their experiences of RE. By developing an appropriate and rigorous analysis of the children's narratives, this study:

1. identifies the nature and construction of the children's worldviews;
2. locates the elements that can be seen to contribute to children's worldview development;
3. reveals when, where and how religious education participates in the children's meaning construction and worldview development, according to their own perceptions and understanding.

Thus through its epistemology, methodology and field of inquiry this research considers a question that until now has not been directly addressed: what is the place of religious education in the development of children's worldviews? In chapter one the research process is contextualised within the broader framework of epistemologies, concepts of childhood, RE and church schools. Chapter two justifies and details the study's methodology and data collection process in each of the schools involved. Chapter three presents the results from each of the schools in turn: mainly the children's conversations and narratives from their interviews, but also data provided by staff at the school[2]. Reflecting on these results chapter four develops a framework of analysis that considers (1) the nature and construction of the children's worldviews (2) the place of RE in these narratives and worldviews. Chapter 5 presents further consideration of the findings and offers some conclusions and implications which point to possible directions for future research and debate regarding church schools, RE and wider educational theory.

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[1] Two Church of England (CE) Schools and two Roman Catholic (RC) Schools.
[2] Data collected from recorded conversations with staff as well as questionnaires issued to class teachers and heads at each school.

INTRODUCTION: ANONYMITY AND THE SCHOOLS

In this study the children are identified by their original first names. To preserve the anonymity of the schools and their staff the following details have been changed: the names of the schools, heads, class teachers, clergy and churches. In an effort to make it easier for the reader to locate and apprehend individuals and schools each of the four communities involved have been assigned new details that can be grouped together by the letters **A, B, C** and **D**. Thus the schools, heads, class teachers and parish priests/ vicars (where appropriate) are named respectively as follows[1]:

School	Head	Class Teacher	Parish Priest/ Vicar
St Anne's RC Primary	Mr Andrew Adams	Miss Alison Armstrong	
St Beatrice's RC Primary	Mrs Baker	Miss Bailey	Fr Barry
St Christopher's CE Primary	Mr Cartwright	Mr Chapman	
St Dominic's CE Primary	Mr Dennis	Miss Denise Daniels	Fr Dave Fr Desmond

An additional codification of the different communities, as illustrated above, is that **A** and **B**, denoted by female names, specifies the RC schools, whilst **C** and **D,** referred to by male names, distinguishes the CE primary schools.

The data from each of these schools is set out in the appendices contained in Volume II of this thesis. Continuing with the **A, B, C** and **D** differentiation 'Appendix A' presents data from St Anne's; 'Appendix B' presents data from St Beatrice's; 'Appendix C' presents data from St Christopher's and 'Appendix D' presents data from St Dominic's.

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[1] There are some occasions in the data where children refer to other teachers, schools and parish communities: the names of these have also been altered.

Chapter 1: CONTEXT

WHERE THE QUESTIONS COME FROM: MY STORY

To begin at the beginning the context and direction of this study emerges from my own story. My story is about growing up within the Roman Catholic tradition, being a parent and wanting to listen to and understand other people's stories as well as my own. My Catholic-ness remains an important and integral part of who I am and being a parent encourages my continuing reflection on this as I consider what sort of education and religious understanding I wish to provide for my sons.

Whilst grappling with these personal questions about my role as a parent of two young boys I became a research assistant on *The Children and Worldviews Project*. This project was in its early stages when I joined the team and I was able to work in a wide variety of schools, listening to children from a range of ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds[1]. Listening to the children tell their stories I realized that the questions I was asking about my children could be extended to the role of education and religion for all children. I found myself asking similar questions to those posed by Forward[2] - in the light of increased mass communications, the 'global village', cultural, ethnic and religious diversity what sort of religion should we have? How is any religious faith forged and lived in this context? As regards education and children's developing worldviews is religious nurture and the exploration of religious concepts of any value for the child? Does it offer any more than comfortable words that crumble when put to the test?[3] Does it equip them with skills for the present and future, skills to preserve and develop their personal and social identities? Pursuing these ideas I came to recognise the need for rigorous, authentic research that addressed the following questions:

- what is the place of religious education, in its broadest sense as formal curriculum and religious nurture, in the worldviews of children in today's society?

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[1] See Erricker et al, 1997.
[2] 1995, p.10f.
[3] Ward and Wild, 1995, p.21.

- if I listened to children in denominational schools would they really be affected by the religious nature of their education? Could it be seen to be a relevant to their worldviews?

- were the claims of church-aided schools being realized in the present, let alone any judgment that might be made concerning preparation for the child as an adult?

Hence my story brings us to the beginning of this study, a consideration of the place of religious education in the development of children's worldviews.

FRAMING THE QUESTION - EPISTEMOLOGIES

This study is grounded within a narrative paradigm, an alternative epistemology to the model of rationality that has characterised Western thought from Descartes to the present. In this latter positivist epistemology the scientific paradigm, as espoused by Comte, is accepted as the pinnacle of human thought and development and any other form of knowledge or thinking (such as that which relies on feelings, intuition or religious understanding) is perceived as inferior[1]. Challenging this 'objective characterization of reality'[2] and its role as a 'central presupposition of our culture'[3] this study seeks to present an alternative epistemology as appropriate for the nature of this research. Instead it grounds itself within an alternative epistemology of narrative that focuses on mental construction[4]; where knowledge and understanding is constructed within the interaction between perception, language (in its variety of forms[5]) and memory.

Although narrative and the importance of storying one's life has been part of the human condition since the beginning of human language, interest in it as a cultural and literary convention has only developed during this century's paradigm revolution[6] so that 'once again [we can] acknowledge the drama and metaphor of good stories as an equally significant way of understanding human experience'[7]. The authenticity of a narrative epistemology that grounds itself in the notion of narrative, storying and relationality is widely supported - both for its central role in the formation of the self

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[1] Wittgenstein (1953); Russell (1956).
[2] Ortony, 1993, p.1.
[3] Ortony, 1993, p.1.
[4] Ortony, 1993, p.1.
[5] For example as metaphor, narrative or story.
[6] Kuhn, 1970.
[7] Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p.3.

and for its place in the construction, transmission and transformation of cultures[1].
Within the concept of narrative the role of metaphor, myth and imagination is also
crucial, providing a meeting ground for meaning and interaction that is not just nice
but necessary[2]. Metaphor in particular has been discussed extensively as of
paramount importance for both conceptualization and language development[3]: the
principal tool through which we make sense of and communicate about meaning and
mystery[4], as well as providing a unique insight into reality and a way of effectively
bridging the gap between new and old knowledge[5].

Contemporary thinking and ideas that are loosely grouped together under the
umbrella term 'postmodernism' also reflect the character of this alternative narrative
epistemology[6]. Speaking of society's move towards postmodernism some
commentators[7] have identified a large-scale shift throughout society in 'the structure
of feeling'. Others however are more cautious in their observations[8]; they question the
nature and depth of such a change but also accept that there is

> 'a noticeable shift in sensibility, practices and discourse formations which
> distinguishes a post-modern set of assumptions, experiences and propositions
> from that of a preceding period'.[9]

Hassan[10] sets out a useful starting point in understanding postmodernism by giving a
range of stylistic oppositions to demonstrate the differences between postmodernism
and modernism. Presented simply as polarizations he identifies a range of
dichotomies such as play/purpose, chance/design, participation/distance,

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[1] Bakhtin, 1981; Benjamin, 1996; Bettelheim, 1978; Bruner, 1985; Casey, 1993; Coles, 1989, 1990;
Compton in Dwivedi, 1997; Cupitt, 1991; Gilligan in Gilligan, Ward and Taylor, 1988; Hardy in Meek,
Warlow and Barton, 1977; Harper and Gray in Dwivedi, 1997; McLaren in McLaughlin and Tierney,
1993; Mumby, 1993; Narayan in Witherell and Noddings, 1991; Stewart, 1996; Wells, 1986; Witherell
and Noddings, 1991.
[2] Bettelheim, 1978; Bhattacharyya in Dwivedi, 1997; Gardner in Dwivedi, 1997; Glucksberg and
Keysar in Ortony, 1993, p.583; Greenhalgh, 1994; Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p.4.
[3] See Black in Ortony, 1993, p.22; Meek in Wells and Nicholls, 1985, p.57; Soskice, 1985;
Walkerdine, 1988, p.183ff.
[4] Greenhalgh, 1994, p.140ff; Black in Ortony, 1993, p.22; Soskice, 1985.
[5] Petrie and Oshlag in Ortony, 1993, p.607.
[6] Usher and Edwards (1994, p.7) specify that the term postmodern is not a fixed or systematic 'thing'
but is instead a loose term that encompasses 'at one and the same time, a condition, a set of practices, a
cultural discourse, an attitude and a mode of analysis'. It is this understanding of postmodernism that is
employed in this study.
[7] For example the editors of PRECIS 6 cited in Harvey, 1990, p.39.
[8] For example see Huyssen, 1984; Harvey 1990.
[9] Huyssen, 1984, p.
[10] Hassan, 1985.

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immanence/transcendence, selection/combination, dispersal/ centredness[1]. In contrast Harvey[2] characterizes postmodernism by drawing attention to its fragmentary and chaotic nature:

> 'I begin with what appears to be the most startling fact about postmodernism: its total acceptance of the ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity, and the chaotic ...but postmodernism responds in a very particular way. It does not try to transcend it, counteract it, or even to define the 'eternal and immutable' elements that might lie within it. Postmodernism swims, even wallows in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is'.[3]

This affirmative approach to fragmentation has a range of consequences and taken to its conclusion Foucault[4] and Lyotard[5] claim that this means a refusal to accept that there might be a meta-narrative or meta-theory through which all things can be connected or represented. Accordingly universal and eternal truths cannot be specified, even if they exist at all, and are replaced instead by the plurality of 'power-discourse' formations[6] and 'language games'[7]. A further element of the postmodernist paradigm that is especially pertinent to this study is the element of letting groups speak for themselves in a voice that is accepted as legitimate and authentic – 'essential to the pluralistic stance of postmodernism'[8].

INFORMING THE QUESTION: NARRATIVE IN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, CONCEPTS OF CHILDHOOD, R.E. AND CHURCH SCHOOLS

Within the particularly extensive theoretical base that informs the broad nature of this research[9], we can contextualise this study within the most relevant areas of:

1. narrative in education and research;
2. concepts of childhood – history, the rights of the child in today's world and models of child development;
3. Religious Education;
4. church schools.

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[1] Hassan, 1985, p.123f.
[2] 1990.
[3] Harvey, 1990, p.44.
[4] 1989.
[5] Lyotard, 1983.
[6] Foucault, 1989.
[7] Lyotard, 1983
[8] Harvey, 1990, p.48.
[9] For example philosophy, education, child development, religious education, theology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, social policy and research (a list which is not exhaustive).

Narrative in Education and Research

Although narrative thinking and knowing is embraced in this study, it can be noted that the emphasis in our education systems tends to be on content and a moving away from fantasy to a vision of life 'as it is'[1]. Challenging this structure Witherell and Noddings contend that 'to educate is to take seriously both the quest for life's meaning and the meaning of individual lives'[2]. Developing this definition they suggest that stories and narrative are central to the work of educators because in using one's own and other people's stories

> 'those engaged in this work can penetrate cultural barriers, discover the power of the self and the integrity of the other, and deepen their understanding of their respective histories and possibilities'.[3]

If, as Witherell and Noddings suggest, education is about taking a person and humanity's quest for meaning seriously, the same can be said about research, especially qualitative research: both being an inquiry in and through narrative. From a practical perspective this narrative stance challenges the roles, responsibilities and relationships of educators[4] and researchers. Within the research process a narrative approach affects how research is conducted, the kind of data that is collected and the way data is analysed. Again the application of Witherell and Noddings' thoughts on education are useful in understanding the place of subjectivity in the research process: all narrative and dialogue exists within a historical, cultural and social context and therefore it cannot be anything but subjective. However, through such subjectivity one can arrive at a level of reflective awareness that promotes 'new insights, compassionate judgement, and the creation of shared knowledge and meanings'[5].

It might be that an appreciation and understanding of the subjectivity and embeddedness[6] of each of our stories lies at the heart of both the teaching-learning experience and good research. Once this is accepted within research the issue of subjectivity is no longer something which needs to be dealt with but instead becomes valuable, acknowledged and inevitable. When viewed positively subjectivity within

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[1] Hardy in Meek, Warlow and Barton, 1977, p.13.
[2] 1991, p.3.
[3] Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p.4.
[4] Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p.8.
[5] Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p.8.
[6] The term embeddedness is used by Witherell and Noddings (1991, p.3) to refer to and acknowledge how each person's story emerges from and is fixed firmly within his/her culture, language, gender, beliefs and life history.

the classroom and research process creates the potential for a broader vision of interaction and understanding, a means of affirming the need for dialogue as a way of negotiating meaning and understanding. Alongside such implications for the educator/ researcher there are a number of paradoxes that have to be recognised, paradoxes that appear contradictory or oppositional but are in a central sense compatible[1]:

- that in either situation there is a balance between the public /private person and their narratives;

- that the roles of educator and researcher call on narrative and analytic ways of knowing;

- that narrative knowledge deepens understandings and respect which makes strange things familiar and familiar things strange;

- that educators and researcher live in the actuality of the world whilst at the same time inhabiting a world of possibilities and vision;

- that as educators and researchers we need to see clearly and attentively whilst at the same time recognising that a particular way of seeing is also a way of not seeing.

An awareness of these paradoxes as researcher/ educator offers a way of recognising and appreciating the value of narrative knowing for human interaction and understanding.

Concepts of Childhood

The concept of childhood prevalent in British society today can be traced as a social construct with historical variability[2], emerging from 1800 through to the present as a result of adult formulation, usually adults of the professional middle class[3]. An approximate chronological order of development can be outlined as: the Romantic child, the Evangelical child, the factory child, the delinquent child, the schooled child, the psycho-medical child, and the welfare child just prior to the First World War. Between 1914 and the late 1950s an apparent 'reconstruction' is observable which produces the 'child of psychological jurisdiction', 'the family child' and the 'public' child (usually in care)[4]. Within this later construction Hendrick[5] cites practitioners

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[1] See Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p.8f.
[2] Hendrick in James and Prout, 1990.
[3] Hendrick in James and Prout, 1990, p.36.
[4] Hendrick in James and Prout, 1990, p.37.
[5] Hendrick in James and Prout, 1990, p.52.

such as Burt, Isaacs, Bowlby, Klein and Winnicott as providing the message that 'childhood mattered' through the three inseparable themes of the mind of the child, the child in the family and child management. A charting of the historical development of childhood provides a context for understanding contemporary concepts of childhood because in the present the varied and complex history of childhood is woven together:

> 'it is more difficult to distinguish the perception of childhood during the last twenty years. On the one hand, popular images of children have reverberated with past interpretations, heavily laden with tradition, while on the other hand, within social science, law, and educational philosophy numerous practitioners are attempting to incorporate children into civil society, primarily through a multi-faceted notion of rights'.[1]

In the present Hendrick identifies two important developments that contribute to a further reshaping of childhood: children's rights and child abuse - both of which signal a clear indication of changing attitudes in official circles and among practitioners[2]. This shift in understanding is exemplified in organisations such as *Childline* and *The Children's Legal Centre*, both of which seek to listen to children's problems and grievances and campaign on their behalf.

Although commentators continue to draw attention to the way children are overlooked in today's society[3], there is also acknowledgement of 'a quiet revolution'[4] during the last decade in the formulation and establishment of children's rights on the diplomatic and international legal agenda. For example, both the United Nations Year of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child demand greater scope for children's self-representation and self advocacy, thus recognizing the capacity of the child to act independently. Within the arena of rights they highlight the need for not just protective rights, but also enabling rights, such as the right to freedom of expression and association[5]. In Britain the 1989 Children's Act also emphasizes the child's status, taking the child's perspective seriously and giving it due weight - unfortunately this is unevenly matched by the subsequent 1993 Education Act which

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[1] Hendrick in James and Prout, 1990, p.37.
[2] Hendrick in James and Prout, 1990, p.54.
[3] Qvortrup in James and Prout, 1990, p.94.
[4] Van Bueren in John, 1996, p.27. See also John, 1996, p.3.
[5] Boyden in James and Prout, 1990, p.193ff.

'does not once mention children'[1]. Despite this somewhat inconsistent pattern of change the notion of personhood for children does seem to be gradually evolving and gathering momentum in today's society[2].

This consideration of the concepts of childhood reveals the origins and influence of dominant attitudes to children and how this shapes our perceptions of children today. As well as necessitating a general re-evaluation of the concept of childhood, with its own political and societal implications[3], I would contend that this exposes important implications for education and research: as adults we need to address not just how institutions and society at large defines (and therefore controls) childhood, but also how we participate as individuals, forgetting the child as person and seeing them instead as an object of concern[4]. As a consequence I suggest we should consider:

1. how we engage with the narratives and voices of children;
2. the restrictive sentiments we as adults may consciously or unconsciously assume and impose;
3. what children are, what children can do and what age means;
4. the plurality of pathways to maturity, especially in culturally diverse societies such as Britain, and speak of the variety of different childhoods[5].

The need for re-evaluation is epitomized in the themes of children's innocence and their need for protection, which, however unconsciously, can influence the way one interacts with and writes about children. As Kitzinger comments, the protectionist approach invariably encourages children to live in fear[6] and therefore does little to empower them in their development.

Therefore it would seem that one of the challenges of this study is to expose and confront dominant conventional attitudes to children and develop a research process that is concinnous with 'child-centred and child-sensitive methods…that emphasize involving…children'[7]. It is possible to cite an increasing number of researchers who

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[1] John, 1996, p.14.
[2] Hendrick in James and Prout, 1990, p.56.
[3] Qvortrup in James and Prout, 1990, p.81.
[4] This very point was highlighted throughout the Cleveland Report on Sexual Abuse (1987) which emphasizes the personhood of children.
[5] Woodhead in James and Prout, 1990, p.73.
[6] Kitzinger in James and Prout, 1990, p.167.
[7] Kitzinger in James and Prout, 1990, p.167.

give credence to a research process that values children's experiences and narratives and allows them to be communicated and listened to with respect[1].

Within the particular focus of this study Robert Coles' research into the spiritual lives of children is especially useful and affirming of the suitability and feasibility of a truly child-centred research process[2]. Likewise similar research conducted specifically in England[3] also demonstrates the value of an open-ended methodology that enables and encourages the child to reveal their meaning making through narratives that speak about their own experiences and understanding. As children's views and experiences are taken more seriously, documented and used as the starting point for exploring ideas, valuable insights can be gained from the methodological implications and the subject area investigated:

> 'again and again the word 'human' comes up - children want to be treated as humans; they want to be allowed to behave in a human way and to show other people that they are human. It is very shocking that they should even need to talk in these terms, and it is tempting to simply deny what they are saying by suggesting it is exaggeration. If, on the other hand, we try to listen to what lies behind their words, I think it gives a clue about one of the most important aspects of working with children'.[4]

In reviewing the theoretical context of understandings about children and childhood the considerable influence of child development models (within education and for concepts of children generally) has to be acknowledged. The most profound influence in this field is widely recognised as Piaget's developmental framework[5]. Addressing the nature of children's thinking structures Piaget identifies the three main processes of organisation, assimilation and accommodation, which can be located within a 'single invariant sequence of stages'[6]. The main stages of this linear developmental model proceed from sensori-motor (up to age two) through to pre-operational (two to seven years), concrete-operational (seven to twelve years) and formal operational

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[1] See, for example: Coles, 1990, Cullingford, 1992; Erricker et al, 1997; Gates, 1976; Hay with Nye, 1998; Hay, Nye and Murphy in Francis, Kay and Campbell, 1996, p.64; Kiddle, 1996; McCreery, 1996; McCrum, 1996.
[2] Coles, 1990.
[3] McCreery, 1996; Erricker and Erricker in Best, 1996; Gates, 1976; Hay with Nye, 1998; Hay, Nye and Murphy in Francis, Kay and Campbell, 1996, p.64.
[4] McCrum in John, 1996, p.86.
[5] For example, see Blenkin and Kelly, 1987, p.22; Donaldson, 1987; Hill and Tisdall, 1997, p.10f; Rutter and Rutter, 1993, p.192.
[6] Meadows, 1993, p.204.

(twelve years and over)[1]. Challenges to Piaget's claim of this universal progression of stages address an inadequate methodology[2], the diagnosis of stages[3], an underestimation of children's abilities[4] and failure to consider individual and cross-cultural variability[5]. Despite these problems Piaget's appreciation of the child as an active learner can be viewed as a positive contribution to the developing understanding of children[6] and it is this feature of his work that is most relevant to the relational, narrative framework of this study.

In contrast to Piaget's internal and individualistic cognitive model, Vygotsky offers a more relevant alternative for this study: emphasising the primacy of the social world Vygotsky proposes that cognitive abilities and capacities are formed and built up in part by social phenomena. Meadows depicts this model of cognitive development in the following way:

> 'the child is helped by the adult in the 'guided reinvention' of the accumulation of knowledge and ways of thinking which preceding generations have constructed. The skills required of the child are of observation and imitation, and of generalisation and decontextualisation, but even these fundamental skills develop under the fostering support of social interaction'.[7]

In grounding cognitive development within a social, relational understanding Vygotskian thinking also necessarily focuses on the fundamental role of language. The inter-relatedness of these themes as a model for understanding children's thinking fits comfortably with the broader narrative framework of this study.

Moving on to another key player in the arena of theoretical models of development, Kohlberg's model of moral development is a further influential theory that warrants attention within the context of this study. Building on Piaget's construct of stages and his own research into how children, adolescents and adults deal with moral dilemmas, Kohlberg proposes a developmental model for moral judgement where the capacity to construct the point of view of other persons and groups is defined as an important aspect of moral thinking and knowing. Kohlberg's model does not offer a theory of the moral self, character or conscience, instead 'strictly speaking[,] his stages describe

[1] Piaget, 1932.
[2] Donaldson, 1987; Dunn, 1988; Wilde Ashington, 1994, 12ff; Willig, 1990, p.9.
[3] Gelman and Baillargeon, 1983; Rutter and Rutter, 1993, p.193ff; Willig, 1990, p.10.
[4] Donaldson, 1987; Cox, 1980.
[5] Meadows, 1993, p.205.
[6] Blenkin and Kelly, 1987, p.24; Rutter and Rutter, 1993, p.192; Willig, 1990, p.10.
[7] Meadows, 1993, p.239.

a succession of integrated structures of moral logic...[and do] not explicate the dynamics of the inner dialogue in moral choice between actual and possible selves'[1]. One of the most remarkable conclusions drawn by Kohlberg in his work is that girls and women cluster at an inferior stage of development. In response to this, and challenging the influential position of Kohlberg's model and conclusions, the work of Gilligan

> 'has revolutionised discussions in moral theory, feminism...and many related fields...[and] more than a decade later, the moral, epistemological, and methodological ramifications of her work are still being explored'.[2]

Working within a different epistemology, away from standard empiricism, and confronting the perceived underdevelopment of women in previous male-based studies, Gilligan contends that claims, such as those of Kohlberg, are a result of the construction of theory rather than the 'truth'[3]. Drawing on her research, Gilligan argues that women and girls approach their moral dilemmas with a 'different voice', one which his not accounted for in Kohlberg's work[4]. Gilligan's basic tenet is the proposition of a dialectical moral theory in which women's relational, caring voice should be added to the voice of the separate self, so that

> 'adding a new line of interpretation, based on the imagery of the girls' thought, makes it possible not only to see development where previously development was not discerned, but also to consider differences in the understanding of relationships without scaling these differences from better to worse'.[5]

Gilligan's work speaks to this study on two levels for as well as providing a thorough critique and alternative to Kohlberg's model, her methodology is pertinent to the narrative and relational direction of this inquiry. Departing from the traditional scientific understandings of truth and method[6] Gilligan's research centres on listening to the stories that women tell about their lives[7] and giving them a voice. As a result of this Gilligan advances two key theses:

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[1] Fowler, 1986, p.22.
[2] Hekman, 1995, p.1.
[3] Gilligan, 1982, p.171.
[4] Gilligan, 1982, p.2.
[5] Gilligan, 1982, p.26.
[6] Hekman, 1995, p.4; Gilligan, 1982, p.6.
[7] Gilligan, 1982, p.2; Hekman, 1995, p.7.

'first, that we need to alter our interpretative framework in order to hear these stories as moral stories, and, second, that women (and men) make sense of their lives by telling stories about themselves'.[1]

Having considered the context of cognitive and moral frameworks of development the third and final model to be highlighted is Fowler's model of faith development, a theory that has generated a great deal of interest amongst theologians and educators worldwide[2]. Drawing on a Piagetian stage approach, (much like Kohlberg)[3] Fowler uses his empirical research to posit a descriptive and normative model[4] where faith is defined as

'the process of constitutive-knowing underlying a person's composition and maintenance of a comprehensive frame (or frames) of meaning generated from the person's attachments or commitments to centres of supraordinate value which have power to unify his or her experiences of the world thereby endowing the relationships, contexts, and patterns of everyday life, past and future, with significance'.[5]

As with Piaget and Kohlberg, the significant influence of Fowler's theory can be balanced alongside criticisms regarding his theory and methodology. These criticisms include Fowler's definition of faith[6], lack of detailed empirical evidence[7] and a perceived in-built cultural bias to Western liberalism[8]. In addition to these challenges evidence suggests that women score less than men in Fowler's scale[9] and this aspect of Fowler's model has been subject to a feminist critique[10] and reworking that follows the same lines as Gilligan's refinement of Kohlberg's work[11].

Although Piaget and Kohlberg's substantial contribution to education and the conceptualisation of children must be recognised, Fowler's model of faith development, together with the theoretical reflection[12] and research it has spawned[13], is particularly germane to a study like this which seeks to probe the character of religious

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[1] Hekman, 1995, p.7.
[2] Slee, 1996, p.73.
[3] As observed by Moran, 1983, p.108ff.
[4] Fowler, 1981, p.199.
[5] Fowler, 1986, p.25f.
[6] Moran, 1983, p.122f; Parks, 1986;
[7] Slee, 1996, p.74.
[8] Slee, 1996, p.86.
[9] Slee, 1986, p.88.
[10] Harris, 1986.
[11] Cooney, 1985; Devor, 1989.
[12] Dykstra, 1986, for example.
[13] Nipkow, Schwietzer, Faust-Siel and Krupka, 1996, for example.

education and nurture. Fowler himself offers his theory as something he expects to be directly useful for education[1] and for those involved in this aspect of education this may be interpreted as 'get[ting] people to advance across the stages as soon as they are ready'[2]. Whilst an important and especially relevant contributor to the context of this study I do not intend to utilise Fowler's stages of faith development as a framework for this research for like Dykstra I maintain that

> 'it does not give us direct answers to most of the questions that we, in our enterprise, must ask and answer. But it has been and can continue to be an important conversation partner for us...Faith development theory can be most helpful to us, however, when we keep up our end of the conversation...We must ask our own questions first. If we do this, we are free to ask what it has to offer us. And we are also free to ask whether what it provides is what we need'.[3]

A key concern for this study is the prominence of adult conversations and questions when what is being discussed is children's understanding and personhood. The models presented here illustrate the overwhelming prominence of adult discourse in understanding children, where little attention is paid to children's voices and involvement. It may be observed that the voices of children are extremely quiet, if not silenced throughout society[4] and through a framework of narrative this is a situation that this study seeks to redress.

Religious Education

It is appropriate that the historical, legislative and research context of RE should also be set out in this chapter. To do so charts the changing nature of RE and its peculiarly unique place in the present education system of England and Wales. The Education Reform Act of 1988 can be cited in recent times as a landmark in determining the shape of education in England and Wales. To appreciate its affect on the character of religious education its continuity with 1944 Education Act should be acknowledged. The Education Act of 1944 made collective worship and religious instruction a legal requirement in all British schools and was itself 'something of a milestone in modern educational history'[5]. The 1988 Education Reform Act can be seen to supplement

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[1] Fowler, 1978, p.38; Fowler, 1981, p.114.
[2] Moran, 1983, p.112.
[3] Dykstra, 1986, p.269.
[4] John in John, 1996, p.21.
[5] Morris, 1990, p.5.

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rather than supersede the RE stipulations of the 1944 Act[1], offering continuity and stimulus[2] which reinforces and clarifies the existing provisions whilst giving 'a renewed significance' to make RE and collective worship more applicable to the plurality of British society today[3]. In addition to changes in ethnic composition other developments - educational theory and practice (the influence of Piaget for example, and a movement from authoritarian to more inductive methods), theological and moral thinking[4], and attitudes to religion[5] - all contribute to a different context and understanding of RE compared to that which existed in 1944[6].

On a general level the 1988 Act reforms introduced a closer control of the curriculum at a national level. Within the specifics of RE the act specifies the following:
- religious instruction becomes religious education;
- whilst officially maintaining its equal status with other subjects, RE is identified it as a basic subject, rather than a core or foundational one[7];
- rather than having a national curriculum RE, LEAs are required to draw up local agreed syllabuses;
- constitution of agreed syllabus panels extended to include broader religious representation beyond Christian and Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs);
- distinction made between teaching denominational formulae and teaching about denominational formulae;
- syllabuses must 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking into account the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'[8].

In addition to these points the act also reinforces the place of collective worship (a legal requirement since 1944) in school life. With the changing shape of education and British society in general it can be observed that between 1944 and 1988 this Christian act of worship was by no means universally heeded by schools as it became

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[1] Cox in Cox and Cairns, 1989, p.1.
[2] Hull, 1989, p.28.
[3] McLeod in Morris, 1990, p.38.
[4] Such as the work of Goldman, 1965; Kohlberg, and Robinson, 1963.
[5] Such as the phenomenological approach and the implicit religion approach characterised by Loukes.
[6] Cox in Cox and Cairns, 1989, p.14.
[7] DES Circular 3/89.
[8] DES Circular 3/89.

increasingly problematic and difficult to keep[1]. 'Ignoring the fact that intellectual and social changes in the constitution of British society...make the provision of it more difficult and its justification less apparent'[2] legislation in the 1988 Act continues to demand that all schools must provide a daily act of worship, one which 'shall be wholly or mainly of a broad Christian character'.

The ensuing debate regarding collective worship and religious education post 1988 has been extensive. Interpreting the Act as supporting a liberal and open approach to religious education Jackson[3] suggests that RE should encompass the following elements: a sensitising element, a knowledge element, an experiential element, an analytical element, an imaginative element, an expressive element[4]. Also reflecting on the 1998 Act and the nature of religion in schools Hull poses the following checklist which illustrates the direction and character of RE today:

> 'the essential questions which we must always ask of religion in our schools are these. Is it behaving in a way that is truly educational? Is it tending towards balance and broadness? It is enhancing the moral and mental development of pupils and of society? It is deepening the human qualities of children and young people by encouraging an independent quest for the truth and, at the same time, transmitting a broadly based and balanced understanding of the religious traditions of humanity?'[5]

Alongside and often contributing to the historical and legislative developments of RE, a diverse range of research in the field has continued to gather momentum since the 1960s[6]. While we do not have the space here to consider this research in any great detail it can be noted that early empirical research, such as that of Cox[7], Goldman[8], Greer[9] and Loukes[10], set out to explore children's religious thinking and attitudes. More pertinent to the concerns and methodology of this study is the broader scope of RE research that has emerged since the 1960s which does not rely exclusively on cognitive or developmental models. This wider field of research is reflected in the

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[1] Cox in Cox and Cairns, 1989, p.33.
[2] Cox in Cox and Cairns, 1989, p.37.
[3] Jackson in Jackson and Starkings, 1990, p.12.
[4] Jackson in Jackson and Starkings, 1990, p.10f.
[5] Hull, 1989, p.4.
[6] Francis and Campbell, 1996, p.ix.
[7] Cox, 1967.
[8] Goldman, 1965.
[9] For example, Greer, 1972.
[10] Loukes, 1991.

qualitative work of Gates[1], the more recent ethnographic research of Jackson[2], and the investigation into children's spirituality by Hay and Nye, Erricker et al, and McCreery[3].

Church Schools

As this research is conducted within the framework of CE and RC[4] denominational RE, the final part of this chapter will:

1. address the place of church schools in the educational system of England and Wales;

2. refer to aspects of the theoretical debate about the role and nature of church school RE that are pertinent to this research;

3. acknowledge previous research that has been conducted in church schools.

The Place of Church Schools in the Educational System of England and Wales

In England and Wales church schools have developed alongside state schools as part of a dual system since the nineteenth century[5] and, with only a few exceptions, the majority are Church of England or Roman Catholic. Although present day's society is increasingly secular it is interesting to note that church schools remain generally oversubscribed[6] with a prominent role in the broader educational system.

Historically, the evolving character and role of these schools is different for the CE and RC denominations[7], reflecting perhaps their distinct aims and shifting closeness to the state throughout the last century. Representing the established church of the nation CE schools have/are traditionally seen to maintain a balance between a general/ inclusive aim to serve the local community and a domestic/inclusive aim to educate the children of its own church. Whilst this is generally the case for CE schools, RC schools can be identified as unequivocally favouring a domestic approach[8], existing in relative isolation and providing a Catholic education for children of Catholic families[9]. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the RC Church was perceived as something of

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[1] Gates, 1976.

[2] See Jackson, 1996; Jackson and Nesbitt, 1997.

[3] Erricker et al, 1994; Erricker and Erricker, 1996; Erricker et al, 1997; Hay with Nye, 1998; McCreery, 1996.

[4] Church of England and Roman Catholic respectively.

[5] See Chadwick, 1997.

[6] Chadwick, 1994, p.4.

[7] For a comprehensive overview of the historical development of CE and RC schools in England and Wales see Chadwick, 1997 and McLaughlin, O'Keefe and O'Keeffe, 1996.

[8] Chadwick, 1994, p.8.

[9] McLaughlin, O'Keefe and O'Keeffe, 1996, p.4ff.

an enclosed society. However in more recent times the attitudes of its institutions, theologians and educationalists have become more open and wide-ranging, stimulating a closer engagement with the modern world, as well as a more radical discussion about the nature and aims of RC schools[1].

Although it is can be useful to represent the distinctions between CE and RC schools in this way, it is as well to remember that in reality there is a lack of agreement or co-ordination amongst the churches and a broad diversity of priorities and procedures within church schools. As a consequence it may be observed that there is as much multifariousness for the child educated in a church school as for the one who is educated in a county school[2].

The Role and Nature of Church School RE: The Theoretical Debate

In England and Wales all schools are legally required provide a religious education for their pupils that is non-denominational and does not aim to convert: this can be described as a secular RE[3]. Although this issue alone gives rise to much debate[4], the theoretical discussion regarding the place and role of RE within the church school setting is even more complex. The roots of this greater complexity lie in the way church school RE is drawn in two directions: firstly, towards the catechetical instruction of children and secondly, towards an academic teaching of RE that does not presuppose personal commitment. Reflecting on this Chadwick highlights the kinds of questions that characterize the present theoretical debate about church school RE:

1. how does the Christian school explicitly nurture the faith of its pupils while educating them to be intellectually critical?

2. what should be the relationship between the Christian school and nearby Christian parish communities?

3. in what ways will the ethos of a Christian school be distinguished from that of a county school?

4. to what extent will that ethos affect the teaching of non-religious subjects in the curriculum and the way in which members of the school relate to each other?[5]

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[1] Chadwick, 1994, p.14f.
[2] Gates, 1996, p.130.
[3] Cooling, 1994, p.153f.
[4] See, for example: Hull, 1989; Jackson, 1997; Watson, 1992.
[5] 1994, p.4f.

In discussing these issues there has been much consideration given over to discriminating between nurture, evangelism, instruction, education, indoctrination and catechesis, and addressing the place of such concepts in juxtaposition to RE[1], the church and the home environment[2]. Although there are those who seek a return to exclusivity[3], the theoretical debate in this arena incorporates others who urge a serious reassessment of the notion of nurture and catechesis within the church school environment[4]. Rossiter, for example, challenges the way 'religious education in Catholic schools has long been regarded primarily as education in faith or more intensively as catechesis'. Calling for a 'creative divorce' between religious education and catechesis Rossiter is amongst those who suggests that 'perhaps Catholic school-based education should be re-conceptualised more along educational than catechetical lines'[5]. Representing the pursuit of an even more critical appraisal, Groome, citing Friere, raises an epistemological consideration in looking for a way forward that incorporates the notion of critical praxis:

> 'at the bedrock of our Christian education task there is an epistemological question – what does to know mean – and in this case, to know Christ. The pedagogical question is how we should go about enabling others with ourselves to know him...I believe that much of our traditional Christian education has been based on...a banking concept of education to deposit divine truths in the minds of people...Instead I opt for a praxis approach...then I believe our educating can be truly liberating and our future will be built on our past and present but not on a reproduction of it. However, this assumes that our task should have the interest of liberation in the first place'.[6]

Isolating the key components of critical reflection, action and dialogue[7], Groome defines his praxis approach with the following aims:

1. Christian education should lessen gap between persons articulated faith and his/her action;

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[1] See, for example, Arthur and Gaine, 1996; BCC, 1984; Church of England Board of Education, 1967; Crump Miller, 1990; Day, 1996; Degenhardt, 1990; Groome, 1994, 1996; Hastings, 1996; Holley, 1994; Hull, 1990; Leahy, 1994; Rossiter, 1990; Scott, 1994; Theissen, 1990; Westerhoff, 1994.
[2] See, for example, Astley, 1994 and Chesters, 1990.
[3] See, for example, Arthur, 1995.
[4] See, for example, BCC, 1984; Church of England Board of Education, 1967; Crump Miller, 1990; Day, 1996; Hastings, 1996; Hull, 1990; Leahy, 1994; Melchert, 1994a, 1994b; O'Leary, 1983; Phillips, 1994; Rossiter, 1990; Westerhoff, 1994; Zipfel, 1996.
[5] Rossiter, 1990, p.291.
[6] Groome, 1994, p.224f.
[7] Groome, 1994, p.227f.

2. Christian education should help people to personally appropriate the meaning of their faith in a way which enables them to go on reinterpreting and doing its meaning in later life situations. In other words Christian education must enable people to become decision makers who exercise their freedom as God's children in creating with God and each other their future[1].

Such a demand for critical openness and autonomy in RE, even in church schools, is exemplified in the endorsement offered by Hull[2] and the British Council of Churches[3]:

'a religion can only encourage the personal freedom of its young people towards their future if the religion is free with regard to its own future. If Christian faith sought merely to reduplicate itself, to form young Christians who were the exact repetition of the previous generation, to pass on Christian faith as if it were like a parcel handed down from generation to generation, then it would be very difficult to distinguish between the passing on of this sort of thing and closed, authoritarian instruction or even indoctrination. But the Christian faith is such that it can only be passed on if it is renewed in the reception. Christian faith is constantly critical of itself. Christianity itself is in process of changing, and it always has been. There is no fixed and final form of Christian faith, and this is why there can be no fixed and final form of nurture into it '.[4]

Phillips[5] suggests that the broad discussion that has emerged across a range of positions in this debate can be portrayed as a form of struggle - 'a battle for the minds of the young': depending on which side is listened to it is either a fight by enlightened parents and educationalists (to purge education from indoctrination) or an attempt to defend basic values.

Previous Research in Church Schools

If the diversity of opinion outlined above charts the nature of the theoretical debate, we can look to research in the field of church school RE for possible insights into how RE is constructed and experienced within the reality of the church school environment. As useful as this may be the extent of specific research in RC and CE

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[1] Groome, 1994, p.225.
[2] Hull, 1990, 1994.
[3] British Council of Churches, 1984.
[4] The British Council of Churches, paragraph 59.
[5] Phillips, 1994, p.439f.

schools is extremely limited[1] and what we have at our disposal amounts to the work of only a few researchers.

Leslie Francis is perhaps the most prolific and prominent researcher within the field of church schools. Utilising a rigidly quantitative methodology and *The Francis Scale of Attitude to Christianity*, he has conducted a number of studies to investigate Christian attitudes and Christian identity among children and young people[2]. Across his work Francis contends that he is able to demonstrate a positive correlation between self-esteem and a favorable attitude toward Christianity, with a strong gender influence - girls and women recording much higher scores than boys and men[3]. Amongst the range of subject areas considered Francis has looked at age trends[4], generational trends[5], social class[6], parental religious example[7] and the relationship with extraversion[8], moral values[9] and the specific influence of church schools[10].

The extensive research of Francis and others who have made use of his scale of attitude towards Christianity[11] raises interesting methodological questions: whilst a quantitative approach might offer a valid methodology in some circumstances, can it be considered an appropriate way to uncover the attitudes and thoughts of children and young people? Can prescriptive questionnaires, presented to children/ young people within the school or church setting, provide an indication of a child's true convictions and ideas, or does such a style of research simply deliver what the child perceives to be the right answers to questions they are asked? I would apply these same reservations to the studies of Egan[12] and Hornsby-Smith[13] who also rely on quantitative methods in their research within church schools. In each of these cases I would contend that a strictly quantitative framework has the strong possibility of

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[1] The dearth of research in this area is also recognised by Hornsby-Smith (1978, p.141) and McLaughlin (1994, p.179).
[2] See Jones and Francis in Francis, Kay and Campbell, 1996, p.196.
[3] Jones and Francis in Francis, Kay and Campbell, 1996, p.199.
[4] Francis, 1989a.
[5] Francis, 1989b, 1992.
[6] Gibson, Francis and Pearson, 1990.
[7] Francis and Gibson, 1993.
[8] Francis, Pearson, Carter and Kay, 1981.
[9] Francis and Greer, 1990.
[10] Curran and Francis, 1996; Francis, 1986; Greer and Francis, 1990; Greer and Francis, 1992; Wilcox and Francis, 1996.
[11] For example Montgomery and Kay, 1996.
[12] Egan, 1988.
[13] Hornsby-Smith, 1978.

misrepresentation and inaccuracy[1] and could therefore benefit from incorporating other qualitative methods to confirm findings.

The quantitative studies acknowledged here form the main body of research within church schools and, despite the reservations that have been expressed, they can be seen to highlight a number of issues that speak to both the theoretical debate about church schools and the direction of this study. An example of this is research that dates back twenty years: amongst his findings and conclusions Hornsby-Smith's study of RC schools documents a struggle for personal autonomy among pupils and an impoverished conceptualisation of God and religion that is likely to be rejected in adolescence[2]. Citing the significance of authority relationships[3], Hornsby-Smith affirms what he perceives to be the special case of value-orientated education in denominational schools and identifies both the problems and potential in such a climate:

> 'it is important as an example of the potential, as well as the limitations, of school based systems of socialisation into the norms, values, beliefs and behaviour of specific social groups which have their own structures of mutual support and mechanisms of social control within a pluralistic form of society'.[4]

More recently Levitt's 1996 study of contemporary Christianity signals how religion and religious education in a church school might be useful and relevant while a person is young, even though such meaning and religious underpinning is lost as the child grows up and reached adulthood[5]:

> 'when it came to crisis their reisdual faith, instilled in childhood, had no answers or comfort. They asked the basic questions all religions consider; why do the innocent suffer?, why do we have to die?, as a criticism of the churches, not seeking answers. To borrow from Alisdair MacIntyre, they may have lost their capacity to use, or listen to religious language. The nice bits of religion which they wanted for their children did not seem much help when life threw up nasty things'.[6]

Previous research in church schools does offer some insight into the reality of church schools and their RE, however, its contribution to the nature and direction of this

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[1] See also Greer, 1983.
[2] Hornsby-Smith, 1978, p.137ff.
[3] Hornsby-Smith, 1978, p.139.
[4] Hornsby-Smith, 1978, p.141.
[5] Levitt, 1996.
[6] Levitt, 1996, p.129.

qualitative, narrative study sits alongside the equally, if not more informative context of other educational research within religious education generally[1], whole child development[2] and children's spirituality[3].

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[1] Gates, 1976.
[2] Erricker et al, 1997.
[3] Hay, Nye and Murphy, 1996; McCreery, 1996.

Chapter 2: METHODOLOGY

Having set out the context of this study within a narrative framework, this chapter will develop our epistemological discussion towards the methodology of this research, locating it within the context of the positivist approach, which utilizes quantitative methods, and the interpretative social science approach, which is identified with qualitative methods[1]. After considering the epistemological basis of these methods the second section of this chapter will detail the process of my data collection.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Quantitative Social Research Methods

The quantitative method is based on the testing of a hypothesis and is grounded in an approach that is concerned with social structure and social facts. Methodologically, this approach renders a particular stance of research where the social scientist is a detached observer of social reality, an analyst and interpreter of subject matter and social facts[2]. The procedures employed in this type of social research are the same as the scientific method used by the natural sciences. It is a linear research process and is sometimes referred to as the hypothetico-deductive method which progresses in the following way:

1. definition of the problem;
2. forming of a hypothesis;
3. testing of the hypothesis + data collection + analysis;
4. conclusions.[3]

Cohen and Manion[4] identify four key philosophical principles that ensure the validity of this methodology: determinism, empiricism, parsimony and generality. Through controlling its variables and remaining an objective observer, this method claims validity and reliability with respect to its findings and conclusions. These methods and principles also dictate the type of results obtained: because findings are presented as

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[1] Although very generalized this distinction represents the two contrasting types of methodology – see Silverman, 1993, p.21.
[2] Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.12.
[3] Sherman and Webb, 1988, p.82-86.
[4] 1994, p.13f.

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replicable and generalizable, predictions and laws may be made[1] and again this is parallels the natural sciences. Grounded in this way quantitative research uses a variety of research instruments for its investigations. These include surveys, questionnaires, structured interviews and statistical models[2], usually with a large sample.

Qualitative Social Research

The Epistemological and Philosophical Base

Critics of quantitative research question its claims of objectivity, especially for social research that is concerned with the complexities of human behaviour and experience[3]. It may be noted that even in the realm of natural science questions have been raised with respect to the impact of the observer on the observed. For example, Gergen and Gergen[4] cite the natural scientist Heisenberg, who suggests the possible disturbance of a subject, such as atomic particles, simply through the attempts of scientists make observations. In response to this challenge Gergen and Gergen describe how physicists have developed techniques of converting 'observer created error' to a constant, thereby allowing:

> 'a systematic correction to be made of observer estimates and restoring the observer independence of the object'.[5]

Gergen and Gergen note that social scientists have also attempted to develop safeguards such as field experiments and unobtrusive measures as ways of either containing or eradicating observer bias in their research. Through these measures they highlight how the presumption remains broadly shared that with proper caution scientists can safely avoid disfiguring the picture of nature with their own fingerprints'[6]. The possibility of an 'observer free' presentation of reality has, however, been increasingly disputed by qualitative researchers[7]: across the research fields of sociological inquiry, historical research, critical theory and feminist methodology there is no room for the independence of the researcher from the field itself. Such a dualistic distinction and claim of objectivity is challenged and the

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[1] Henwood and Pidgeon in Hammersley, 1993, p.15.
[2] Hughes, 1990, p.16.
[3] Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.12.
[4] In Steier, 1992, p.76.
[5] Gergen and Gergen in Steier, 1992, p.76.
[6] Gergen and Gergen in Steier, 1992, p.76.
[7] Gergen and Gergen in Steier, 1992, p.77.

presence of the personal in the research process is accepted as both unavoidable and necessary:

> 'there can be no such thing as truly 'objective' research in the sense that the product of research is not subject to our own value judgments. Personal biases impinge on the research process in many ways, particularly in theory formulation and interpretation, but also in development of design, data collection and analysis. However, by using accepted standards of research, the final product can be less subject to those biases. Or at least one can readily identify the biases that have been operative'.[1]

The epistemological and philosophical framework of qualitative inquiry is thus based on the rejection of the validity of objectivity, adopting instead a subjective understanding of reality. Ely describes this aspect of qualitative research as:

> 'operating from a set of axioms that hold realities to be multiple and shifting, that take for granted a simultaneous mutual shaping of knower and known, and that see all inquiry, including the empirical, as being inevitably value-bound'.[2]

To follow through this rejection of objectivity as a credible criteria for inquiry would suggest the discounting of objective, authoritative scientific knowledge. What is the researcher left with in the wake of this? If one is to take on board the subjective nature of all inquiry does this necessarily mean that all we are able to do is reflect on our own subjectivities? Pursuing this line of thought are we led to conclude that we are all locked into our own subjectivities, not certain that there is either a world 'out there' or that we are even truly communicating with others?[3]. This bleak outlook for research is centred on a constructivist position which is highly individualistic, however, Gergen and Gergen claim that if a **social** constructionist view is adopted then none of these conclusions need necessarily follow[4]. Instead of emphasizing the individual's subjectivity and understanding, the focus of social constructionism rests with language as a shared system of intelligibility, an expression of relationship between persons. Concentration is focussed on the meanings generated by people as they collectively generate descriptions and explanations in language – rather than within the individual mind. Whereas the personal subjectivity of the individualistic constructivist position causes a spiralling inwards Gergen and Gergen claim that a

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[1] Jayaratne in Hammersley, 1993, p.117f.
[2] Ely et al, 1991, p.2.
[3] Geregen and Gergen in Steier, 1992, p.77.
[4] Gergen and Gergen in Steier, 1992, p.77f.

social constructionist view invites the investigator outwards into the realm of shared languages:

> 'the reflexive attempt is thus relational, emphasizing the expansion of the languages of understanding'.[1]

The importance of the shared, social nature of reality is also highlighted in the earlier work of Berger and Luckman. First published in 1967 *The Social Construction of Reality* also addresses the issue of subjectivity and proposes that meaning and understanding is established within shared multiple realities[2].

The subjective/objective epistemological base for quantitative and qualitative research is the most fundamental difference between these two paradigms of inquiry. Other methodological distinctions arise out of these philosophical differences, which I will now outline in a discussion of the nature of qualitative research.

Differing Terms and Methods, Underlying Principles

Differing terms such as naturalistic inquiry, grounded theory, ethnography, cognitive anthropology, symbolic interactionism and interpretative research all come under the umbrella of qualitative research and they are often used synonymously[3]. There is no standard approach among the varieties of qualitative research, but they all share the same commitment to naturally occurring data[4] that is part of their common epistemological framework:

> 'underlying this collection of competing labels are certain commonalities that link them together - a network of underlying principles and philosophical beliefs that constitute a paradigm or worldview'.[5]

By focusing on naturally occurring data the emphasis of the qualitative method lies in the value of the context and setting. This is where the researcher searches for a deeper understanding of the participant's lived experience and how they define their situation[6]. Because the research is based upon uncovering people's definitions of their worlds, the researcher works in the natural setting of the individual to see how meaning is attributed within the situation[7]. In direct contrast to the linear scientific method, qualitative researchers focus on the fluidity of meanings and interpretations,

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[1] Gergen and Gergen in Steier, 1992, p.79.
[2] Berger and Luckman, 1967, p.43ff.
[3] Ely et al, 1991, p.2.
[4] Silverman, 1993, p.23.
[5] Ely et al, 1991, p.2.
[6] Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p.39f.
[7] Burgess, 1985, p.8.

aiming to **generate** theories, rather proving or disproving a hypothesis. The generation of theory in qualitative research also depends upon this method's flexibility and cyclic style. Rather than adopting the rigid structure of the hypothetico-deductive method, qualitative researchers formulate and reformulate their work, modifying concepts and ideas as the collection and analysis of data proceeds[1]. In addition, the cyclic process of data collection and analysis is seen not to support a hypothesis, but as a way of developing categories and concepts[2]. As well as flexibility in the research strategy, qualitative methodologies also demand flexibility in the researcher[3]: an intellectual flexibility (which enables the researcher to adapt to the flow and data of the research, no matter how ambiguous it seems), and an emotional flexibility (so that the researcher can accept one's personal emotions as well as recognizing the emotions of the other)[4].

Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss's seminal work on grounded theory[5] exemplifies these ideas and frameworks for qualitative research. Commenting on their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*[6], Henwood and Pidgeon describe how Glaser and Strauss's ideas manage to 'free researchers in sociology from the theoretical strait-jackets of a few 'grand' theories'[7]. In its original application the term grounded theory described the specific procedures through which theory could be generated from the close inspection and analysis of qualitative data, something which is now widely recognised as a 'central tenet' of naturalistic research[8]. Saran[9] comments that there is still often a gap between theory and empirical evidence and she strongly supports Glaser and Strauss's proposition of bridging such a gap by starting with empirical evidence and working towards an appropriate theory, rather than vice versa. Today grounded theory is more closely associated with a specific kind of data analysis. Because the researcher starts with no theory, a vast amount of unstructured data is usually

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[1] Burgess, 1985, p.8.
[2] Burgess, 1985, p.9.
[3] Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p.39.
[4] Ely et al, 1991, p.132 –136.
[5] 1967.
[6] 1967.
[7] Henwood and Pidgeon in Hammerlsey, 1993, p.20.
[8] Henwood and Pidgeon in Hammerlsey, 1993, p.21.
[9] In Burgess, 1985, p.207.

collected. Glaser and Struass's method of analysis is based upon inspecting the data and allowing the concepts and categories to emerge.

Working within this context extensive flexibility allows the researcher to develop concepts and categories, generating a theory that is seen to fit and remain faithful to the data[1]. This highly creative process raises issues regarding the demands made on the interpretative capabilities of the researcher, as well as their own subjectivity. Careful attention should be paid to this throughout the research inquiry and the situation is kept in check through a constant comparison and linking between cases and concepts as the categories evolve. Similarities and differences are also incorporated so that the full diversity of the data is explored. Once categories are defined the next stage is to 'saturate' them with as many example cases as possible, so as to demonstrate their relevance. These categories may then be developed to a more general analytic framework that also has relevance outside of the original research setting[2].

Even with constant checking of the data and comparison of categories there remains the problem of unconscious attitudinal influences implicitly affecting the very early stages of the research. Failure of researchers to appreciate this and demonstrate an awareness of how and why research progresses in a particular way, right from the very early stages, can be highlighted as one of the main criticisms of grounded theory[3]. However, despite these problems the close connection between data and theory in this methodology is perceived by qualitative researchers as a valuable and appropriate way to conduct their inquiries:

> 'typically generating a rich, deep and well-integrated conceptual system, organized at various levels of theoretical abstraction all of which in some way articulate the data'.[4]

Methods of Data Collection

There are a variety of methods of collecting qualitative data and in many instances researchers combine a number of different techniques in order to triangulate results and provide a richer understanding of the research field. In varying degrees each of the strategies aims to immerse the researcher in the field they are working in.

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[1] Henwood and Pidgeon in Hammerlsey, 1993, p.21.
[2] Silverman, 1993, p.46.
[3] Silverman, 1993, p.47.
[4] Henwood and Pigeon in Hammerlsey, 1993, p.22.

Processes of data collection include: unstructured interviews, audio and video-taped material, observations (either as a participant or as a detached observer) and conversations. In addition secondary data sources such as documentation are sometimes used. Another part of the data material is the researcher's field log which acts as a kind of diary for the researcher to note insights, feelings, observations, comments and chance remarks from individuals. This provides a valuable tool in not only triangulating and enriching the data, but also in enabling the researcher to plan, raise questions, acknowledge and remain aware of their own subjectivity as the research process proceeds[1].

Validity and Reliability

We have observed how the positivist epistemological position frames both the methods and criteria for validity in quantitative research. Because qualitative methodology is located within an interpretative, subjective epistemology it needs to employ different principles when assessing the adequacy of its research: the verification structure of controlling variables and the principles of determinism, empiricism, parsimony and generality cannot fit the epistemology and nature of the qualitative process and so the researcher must rely on other measures to demonstrate that their research is 'relevant and good'[2]. The incompatibility of simply applying the conventional canons of quantitative reliability and validity to qualitative research can be seen to necessitate a broader discussion about rigour in qualitative research[3]. Supporting a wider debate around the issues of validity in qualitative research, Henwood and Pidgeon claim that a broader perspective avoids undermining the benefits of generative qualitative research and allows it to be taken more seriously[4].

In discounting objectivity as either a worthy or realistic attribute of research, the strength of qualitative research therefore cannot and does not rest on removing observer bias[5]. Once the norm of objectivity is removed there is no easy way of establishing either the adequacy or accuracy of a piece of research. As one possible way of addressing rigour Scholfield[6] draws attention to both external and internal

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[1] Ely et al, 1991, p.71.
[2] Henwood and Pidgeon in Hammersley, 1993, p.23.
[3] Henwood and Pidgeon in Hammerlsey, 1993, p.23.
[4] In Hammersley, 1993, p.23.
[5] Henwood and Pidgeon in Hammersley, 1993, p.23.
[6] In Hammerlsey, 1993, p.201.

validity and Henwood and Pidgeon[1] cite accountability as another general principle. Keeping close to the data is another step they recommend in maintaining accuracy, whilst also integrating theory at various levels of the process. They also cite reflexivity, ongoing documentation in the form of a field log, negative case analysis and sensitivity to negotiated realities all to be contributory factors in ensuring a tight and trustworthy piece of research[2].

In considering how the qualitative researcher should conduct their inquiry Ely suggests further steps for ensuring accuracy: prolonged engagement in the field; persistent observation; triangulation; searching for negative cases; determining referential adequacy; peer debriefing and checking with those studied[3]. With the development of qualitative research throughout the social sciences a number of alternative strategies, such as those highlighted above, have emerged as the qualitative researcher's answer to tackling and demonstrating validity and rigour throughout their research process.

Ethics

The question of ethics pervades qualitative inquiries in such a challenging and wide-ranging way[4] that the whole of the qualitative research process can be understood as an 'ethical endeavor':

> 'striving to be faithful to another's viewpoint is striving to be ethical. Striving to maintain confidentiality is striving to be ethical. Striving to be trustworthy is striving to be ethical...they are present from the beginning and are woven throughout every step of the methodology'.[5]

Pursuing the nature of this ethical awareness Anzul identifies three main aspects of the research process: the integrity of the research, the participants in the research and the broader social implications of the research[6]:

1. Integrity of the Research

These ethics are concerned with the quality, value and honesty of the research and in particular the trustworthiness of the researcher[7]. At the very least this means that the

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[1] In Hammersley, 1993, p.23.
[2] Henwood and Pidgeon in Hammersley, 1993, p.26f.
[3] Ely et al, 1991, p.96.
[4] Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.348.
[5] Anzul in Ely et al, 1991, p.218.
[6] Anzul in Ely et al, 1991, p.219.
[7] Anzul in Ely et al, 1991, p.220.

research is carried out fairly and represents as closely as possible the experiences of those studied:

> 'the entire endeavour must be grounded in ethical principles about how data are collected and analysed, how one's own assumptions and conclusions are checked, how participants are involved, and how results are communicated. Trustworthiness is...more than a set of procedures...it is a personal belief system that shapes procedures in process'.[1]

2. Concern for Impact on the Participants

When taking account of the ethics regarding participants in the research Anzul highlights the need to

- preserve anonymity;
- be aware of the effect of the presence of a researcher on the research setting;
- involve participants more fully in the research process[2].

Cohen and Manion address the specific issue of informed consent and discuss its four elements of competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension[3]: if these four elements are present Cohen and Manion assure researchers that subjects' rights will have been given appropriate consideration[4]. Assessing the concept of informed consent Anzul raises an issue that is especially pertinent to research conducted with children: that even if informed consent is achieved the researcher should recognise that they are in a better position to anticipate and appreciate the vulnerability of the participants and the possible consequences of the findings[5].

3. Wider Social Implications

Ely remarks that the completion of a study should not and cannot be an end in itself: it should go beyond the contribution made to the knowledge base of a particular field because participants who have co-operated with and enabled the research process deserve and have a right to their situation being made more widely known[6].

Anzul's analysis of the ethics of qualitative research are informative: however, in trying to remain ethical throughout the research process Kimmel points out that the

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[1] McCormack Steinmetz in Ely, 1991, p.93.
[2] Anzul in Ely, 1991, p.223.
[3] Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.350.
[4] Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.351.
[5] Anzul in Ely, 1991, p.224.
[6] 1991, p.228.

distinction between ethical and unethical behaviour is not a simple dichotomy. Instead he describes a continuum of ethical/unethical research:

> 'judgements about whether behaviour conflicts with professional values lie on a continuum that ranges from the clearly ethical to the clearly unethical. The point to be borne in mind is that ethical principles are not absolute... but must be interpreted in the light of the research context and of other values at stake'.[1]

These general ethical issues for qualitative research become more pointed when the participants are children. Indeed, research with children takes on its own particular shape and issues, which I will attend to in greater detail later in this chapter.

Results

A final area that characterizes the nature and style of qualitative research is the results. As a process that is based on the discovery and generation of theory, the results of qualitative research are very different to that of quantitative research:

- **thick descriptions**

Standardised results and the possibility of replication are two outcomes from quantitative research, however such aims are incompatible with qualitative research:

> 'the goal is not to produce a standardized set of results that any other researcher in the same situation or studying the same issues would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation'.[2]

Instead of statistical presentations and the proving or disproving of a hypothesis, qualitative research offers a 'thick description' of[3], or a 'new perspective' on[4], a setting or culture. The term 'thick description' was initially used by anthropologist Clifford Geertz to explore the concept of culture in society:

> 'as interworked systems of construable signs...culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can intelligibly - that is, **thickly** – described'.[5]

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[1] Kimmel cited in Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.360.
[2] Schofield in Hammersley, 1993, p.202.
[3] Geertz, 1993, p.10.
[4] Silverman, 1993, p.184.
[5] Geertz, 1993, p.14.

As well as its use within anthropological studies, the concept of 'thick description' exemplifies the essential nature of qualitative results. Qualitative ethnographic inquiry illustrates the content, style and value of thick description[1] as a way of recreating the shared beliefs, practices, artefacts, folk knowledge and behaviours of a group of people:

> 'examin[ing] even the very commonplace groups or processes in a fresh and different way, as if they were exceptional and unique...this allows investigation to discern the detail and generality that are necessary for credible description'.[2]

With its concern for detail and understanding of the meanings and lives of different peoples and groups, the results of qualitative research are therefore presented as descriptions that encompass a range of meanings, interpretations and experiences. The depth and breadth of these descriptions, incorporating all these aspects, is what is referred to by the term 'thick description'.

- replication and generalizations

Bearing in mind the complexity of qualitative investigations, precise replication could never be practical. Furthermore qualitative researchers would not expect others to come up with precisely the same data or conceptualizations, however Schofield suggests that providing there are no inconsistent differences between researchers there can be no serious questions relating to validity or generalisability. The use of thick description throughout the whole research process[3] is crucial to these aspects of qualitative inquiry as the range and depth of information contained within them allows others to 'fit' the concepts and conclusions from one situation to another. Here the notion of 'fit' as described by Schofield is employed as a redefinition of the concept of generalisability that is both 'useful and meaningful for those engaged in qualitative work'[4]. Traditionally given little attention in evaluation and policy research over the last ten or fifteen years, the growing use of qualitative studies has 'led to an increased awareness of the importance of structuring qualitative studies in a way that enhances their implications for the understanding of other situations'[5]. By redefining

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[1] 'Ethnographies are analytic descriptions or re-constructions of intact cultural scenes and groups' - Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p.2.
[2] Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p.2.
[3] Schofield in Hammersley, 1993, p.221.
[4] Schofield in Hammersley, 1993, p.221.
[5] Schofield in Hammersley, 1993, p.221.

generalisability in terms of 'fit' more researchers are able to use thick descriptions as a way of making an informed judgment about whether findings compare and relate to their own context and situation.

Deciding to Adopt a Qualitative Methodology

The decision to use a qualitative methodology usually rests on epistemological and philosophical grounds: for example in being able to allow a group to speak for themselves and to enable a richer and deeper description and understanding of the context and setting being investigated:

> 'in essence, the appeal of fieldwork is that it is concerned with real people and that confrontation with people, in all their baffling complexity, is a fruitful antidote to a positivist methodology and a natural science model for the social sciences'.[1]

In contrast to this detailed depicting of reality many researchers consider quantitative research to be quite shallow in comparison:

> 'no matter how thorough the questions in quantitative research, quantitative data will yield findings which are superficial in nature, compared to most qualitative data'.[2]

Ethical and emancipatory reasons may also contribute to the choice of methodology and this is a major factor in the choice of qualitative research by feminist researchers[3], as well as those conducting research with children or other minority groups[4]. In her research with women teachers Casey is clear in her reasons for deciding to work with them as a group:

> 'the ongoing educational debate...is a struggle over meaning, one in which, based on their own experiences, particular social groups formulate their own understandings and interpretations of education...in a deliberate reversal, I move the most prominent speakers in the contemporary struggle over education to the edges of my analysis'.[5]

Similar ethical and emancipatory reasons are cited by researchers working with children as justification for the adoption of a qualitative methodology:

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[1] Punch in Hammersley, 1993, p.197f.
[2] Jarantye in Hammerlsey, 1993, p.117.
[3] For example see Casey, 1993, p.15; Shakespeare et al, 1993, p.2.
[4] See Lincoln, 1993; John, 1996.
[5] Casey, 1993, p.3.

'in looking at research activity in relation to minority rights groups concerns, an analysis of the research methods themselves are important. Exciting work is emerging in qualitative research on 'voice' or 'voicing', the concerns of the silenced'.[1]

The determining of an appropriate methodology also demands a further crucial consideration - what the research question is. Of course a research question is framed by a particular epistemology, nevertheless the research question and epistemology need to be compatible for the research to be feasible – 'every research paradigm demands disciplined congruent methods'[2]. Exploring methodology from an epistemological and philosophical perspective has shown that 'methods are not so much valid in and of themselves'[3] but are framed within issues of knowledge. Despite this fundamental distinction between qualitative and quantitative methodologies there is some debate concerning the polarity of each position.

The And / Or Divide

There is a distinctly different relationship between the theory and research process in qualitative and quantitative methodologies, as well as an inherent epistemological contradiction between them. Because each stance regards the other as fundamentally inadequate it is unlikely that their differences can be resolved philosophically. Despite this researchers often employ methods from both the qualitative and quantitative fields throughout the course of an investigation. Again this relates to the importance of the research question being addressed and Silverman draws attention to this:

> 'one of the least fruitful questions one can ask a sociologist is 'to what school of social science do you belong?'...It all depends on what you are trying to do. Indeed, often one will want to combine both approaches'.[4]

Whilst recognizing the fundamental differences between qualitative and quantitative methodologies Goetz and LeCompte suggest an alternative to their polarization as numeric or non-numeric, traditional or new paradigm: instead of this dualistic representation they propose a continuum. Contrasting ethnography's qualitative approach with the scientific paradigm they cite four continua; inductive to deductive; generation to verification; construction to enumeration and subjectivity to objectivity -

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[1] John, 1996, p.21.
[2] Ely et al, 1991, p.102.
[3] Henwood and Pidgeon in Hammersley, 1993, p.17.
[4] Silverman, 1993, p.22

qualitative research, including ethnography, being typically located at the generative, inductive, constructive and subjective end[1]. Henwood and Pidgeon[2] also support this notion, describing a far more 'fuzzy and imperfect' distinction in the reality of social research. They claim that recognition of the incomplete distinction between these two paradigms can limit the frequently futile and unproductive debate about the adequacy of each research process. Instead, a dialogue of comparison between the two positions can encourage a greater diversity of approaches and methods, together with an improved critical awareness of their relative strengths and weaknesses[3].

Acknowledging the fundamental role of epistemologies does not rule out an ability to appreciate these blurred boundaries. Practically, for example, social research invariably employs a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods and rather than rigidly ruling out the opportunities offered by combining both methods Ely discusses a possible relationship:

> 'we are not now discussing marriages. We are discussing conversations. We are discussing tolerance for our neighbour, and the benefits of occasionally exchanging a tool over the back fence'.[4]

I have explored the nature and context of both quantitative and qualitative research, marking out their different approaches and structures and in doing so have shown how epistemological underpinnings frame each method. In addition to the philosophical aspects of each position I have highlighted the importance of the research question in assessing a choice of methodology. Addressing the more specific concerns of this study we can move on to consider the particular issues that arise when conducting research with children.

Research With Children and Methodology

The interpretative naturalistic epistemology of this research is the one which I believe best fits a study that sets out to listen to children's own voices and take their views into account. There is very little social research conducted with children as a separate entity to inform this discussion[5] and the low status of such research does little to encourage more researchers to work in this field[6]. Discussing the limited activity in

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[1] Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p.4.
[2] In Hammersley,1993, p.18.
[3] Henwood and Nicolson, 1995, p.109.
[4] Ely et al, 1991, p.218.
[5] Boh cited by Qvortrup in James and Prout, 1990, p.83.
[6] Kitzinger, 1990, p.166.

this area John and Lincoln describe it as 'research with the silenced'[1] and John emphasizes that 'voicing' the concerns of the silenced is not a matter of the researcher hearing what is said and acting as their advocate, but rather the developing of a methodology that is based on partnership. The researcher then is no longer a 'plunderer of information' but becomes a facilitator 'enabling the child to voice their concerns'[2]. Where the research relationship stresses children's participation and the researcher is defined as a facilitator there is a demand for a different way of working with children to that of the traditional adult-child relationship. This is because implicit in many child-adult interactions is an imbalance of power and domination. For equal participation and a child-centred approach the researcher needs to remain keenly aware of such attitudes which may unconsciously influence the research process and the true nature of the relationship between the researcher and the child. Unless this is attended to, for example through continual reflection and a detailed field log, I would suggest that the reliability of the research would be limited and the methodology not as child-centred as intended.

A further way of establishing and maintaining a child-centred methodology is to develop a research process that really listens to children and allows them to speak for themselves and voice, in their own way, their concerns and life experiences, thereby enabling them to tell the researcher what they perceive to be important in their lives. This stands in contrast to the more adult-centred approach where the researcher poses their pre-determined questions, consequently defining what is important for the child before they have a chance to speak – a clear example of the adult exerting power and domination over the thinking and ideas of the child.

Finch, discussing her qualitative work with women, endorses the concept of less structured research strategies as a way of avoiding the creation of a hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee:

> 'I have found, quite simply, that it works very well. Initially I was startled by the readiness with which women talked to me...I expected to have to work at establishing something called rapport'.[3]

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[1] Lincoln, 1993; John, 1996, p.21.
[2] John, 1996, p.21.
[3] Finch, 1993, p.167.

Research with children conducted in a similar way[1], has shown that children, when they feel listened to, also talk very easily in an unstructured research setting. For example McCrum's research leads her to endorse the idea that such qualitative methodology is possible with children:

> 'I felt I had come to understand something very important; their need for freedom to express their own views, their competence to do things adults generally suspect they cannot, their desire to be trusted'.[2]

The development of a child-centred methodology can be seen to hinge on the nature of the researcher-child relationship, something that subsequently shapes the whole research process. Measor[3] supports this, claiming that the quality of data is dependent on the quality of relationship that is built up between the researched and those being researched. The decision to adopt such a methodology does have further implications, for in taking on the issue of children's rights one may ask whether it is possible to still demonstrate a valid, rigorous research methodology. If the researcher has a commitment to the rights and empowering of children, does this have a negative affect? For example, in aiming to respect the child's right to be listened to and enabling them to speak of their own concerns, can the researcher still address their own research questions? Research conducted by Erricker et al[4], Cullingford[5] and McCrum[6] demonstrates that this is possible and that if children are approached with respect and openness by the researcher, the quality of the data and hence the whole research process cannot be anything other than improved.

Research conducted with other minority groups confirms this and Miles, discussing feminist research, suggests that any concept of 'value free' should be replaced with the notion of 'conscious partiality': achievable through partial identification with the research objects. Conscious partiality differs from subjectivism or even empathy by being a particular kind of reciprocity:

> 'on the basis of a limited identification it creates a critical and dialectical distance between the researcher and his 'objects'. It enables the correlation

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[1] Such as that of Coles (1990), Cullingford (1992), Erricker et al (1997), Hay with Nye (1998), McCreery (1996), and McCrum (1996).
[2] McCrum in John, 1996, p.84.
[3] 1985, p.57.
[4] Erricker et al, 1997.
[5] 1992.
[6] 1996.

of distortions of perception on both sides and widens the consciousness of both the researcher and the researched'.[1]

The theme of conscious partiality offers a way of allowing the child-centred researcher to remain aware of the research process whilst also being committed to working with children in an empowering way. Indeed, once one is conscious of the richness of listening to children's experiences it becomes impossible not to become moved by the affective nature of the research and develop a strong loyalty to promoting a better understanding and regard for children's perspectives and experiences[2].

Inescapably, perhaps, a child-centred methodology requires an emotional and intellectual commitment from the researcher, as Finch observes when commenting on her research with women:

> 'siding with the people one researches inevitably means an emotional as well as an intellectual commitment to promoting their interests. How else can one justify having taken from them the very private information which many have given so readily? I find rather unconvincing an argument which says I should be content with having added to the stock of scientific knowledge. Rather…as a feminist and a sociologist, one should be creating sociology for women - that is, a sociology which articulates women's experiences of their lives - rather than merely creating data for oneself as researcher'.[3]

Finch's observations speak to the nature of research with children; certainly, her perception of the research process and its outcomes speaks to the epistemological concerns of this study. Finch unequivocally values a research process that goes beyond proving a scientific hypothesis. In its place she favours research that addresses an alternative kind of knowledge, knowledge that is based on people's experiences. From the outset, this study has been engaged with investigating children's narratives and worldviews, specifically how religious education fits with children's meaning construction. I have contextualized the research methodology of this study by referring to the epistemological grounding and nature of qualitative and quantitative analysis, as well as highlighting the specific issues relevant to conducting social research with children. I will now present my own data collection, beginning with a justification of its style and development.

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[1] Miles, 1993, p.68.
[2] See Erricker et al, 1997; John, 1996.
[3] Finch, 1993, p.178.

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MY METHODOLOGY

Premises and Principles

The Research Questions – Religious Education and Children's Worldviews

The research question posed in this study incorporates two main aspects:

1. the nature of children's worldviews (which includes important concepts for the child and how those concepts are understood);

2. the place of religious education (RE) in worldview development (the role of the school and RE in enabling or restricting the development of children's worldviews).

For theoretical and practical reasons RE is defined very broadly in this study. From my own experience I felt that religious education at many schools encompasses far more than the delivery of a curriculum. In wishing to understand and unravel the complexity of how children incorporate RE into their worldviews I decided that this needed to be taken on board. The definition of RE for this study therefore includes ethos, pastoral care and collective worship, as well as the RE curriculum and its mode of delivery. This understanding of RE is also more practical, it being methodologically impossible to distinguish between the influence of curriculum as opposed to ethos or collective worship.

Defining a Research Field

In collecting data one of the key practical considerations is drawing up a research field and for a rigorous and manageable amount of data there needs to be clearly defined boundaries. For this study church schools were chosen because they were likely to present a prominent and positive environment for religious education: if RE was to have an effect on any children perhaps the best place to look would be those schools which have a policy of promoting 'the religious dimension of reality'[1]. In such schools one could presume that children have an experience of religious education more likely to impinge on their meaning making and understanding of the world. To enable the drawing of comparisons it was decided to carry out research in four schools: two Church of England and two Roman Catholic primary schools. The schools were selected so as to reflect a diversity of class, area and culture. In making these assumptions about the nature of the church schools I remained constantly aware

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[1] Leahy, 1994, p.435.

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of needing to remain open and flexible to whatever kind of data might emerge:

> 'studying what could be refers to locating situations that we know or expect to be ideal or exceptional on some a priori basis and studying them to see what is actually going on there. Crucial here is an openness to having one's expectations about phenomena disconfirmed'.[1]

The Research Methodology – Grounded Theory and Thick Descriptions

Being concerned with the way children understand themselves and the world, the scientific, positivistic approach presented itself as quite incompatible with the research question in hand, especially when compared to the interpretative, narrative paradigm where children are perceived:

> 'not as actors whose behaviour must be measured, but as documents that reflect the culture of which they are the bearers'.[2]

In keeping with this narrative paradigm I wanted the children to tell me what was important and then work with that – an attitude reflected in the process of grounded theory discussed earlier and supported by Shimahara:

> 'if it is our serious purpose to understand the thoughts of a people the whole analysis of experience must be based on their concepts, not ours'.[3]

The methodology of this study therefore defines and applies grounded theory as the generation of theory through a cyclic process of constant collection, inspection and analysis of data, progressing onto the identification of categories and concepts and the emergence of a theory. Such a theory thereby demonstrates 'fit' and faithfulness to data that can be checked, refined and tested in an ongoing process. So as to enhance the accuracy of my representation of children's worldviews, and to provide a way of improving external and internal validity, this grounded theory approach is combined with the ethnographic tool of thick description.

Conscious Partiality Not Objectivity

A further premise of this methodology is that it has no intention of being objective: the research questions and methodology do not permit it and theoretically the research hinges upon how children relate to themselves, each other and their school environment. Therefore this study investigates the nature of social constructionism: its language, generation of meaning and ways of communication. Data is consequently

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[1] Schofield, 1993, p.221.
[2] Shimahara, 1988, p.81.
[3] Shimahara, 1988, p.81.

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collected with 'conscious partiality'[1], creating as Miles suggests, a critical and dialectical distance between the 'researcher' and the 'researched', whilst also allowing for the correction of distortions on both sides and a broader 'consciousness' for both parties[2].

Methodology

The principles of grounded theory and thick description provide a reflexive, methodological process framework that is congruent with the epistemology and research questions of this study. The methodology of this project could therefore be described as qualitative and interpretative within a naturalistic, constructivist epistemology, which, through research **with** children, permits the complexity and depth of children's thinking to be respected and articulated.

The Process of Data Collection

The collection of data took place over the academic year 1994–1995 in four primary schools situated on the south east coast of England. The schools were all in within a few miles of each other, although each served very different communities in terms of social situation, culture and, in some cases, ethnic background.

Gaining Access

The Top of the Hierarchy

During the initial stages of any educational research there is a clearly defined hierarchy of access that has to be negotiated. For this study I needed to liaise with the Local Education Authority (which encompassed all the schools) and the local Diocesan Education Offices for the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Church. Through discussions with these agencies I obtained permission to approach head teachers and in addition suitable schools who might allow me to work with them for a year were also identified. After sending an introductory letter to four head teachers I arranged to meet for an informal chat about what I wanted to do. Details of my conversations and interviews with these persons at the upper end of the hierarchy of access were recorded in my field log and in some instances head teachers also allowed me to tape record my discussions with them.

The interviews with the heads varied greatly, both in terms of the relationship established by the head and the way they spoke about their schools. In very different

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[1] Miles, 1993, p.68.
[2] Miles, 1993, p.68.

ways the heads all agreed to allow me to come into the school, 'assigning' me a class to work with. In three of the schools I was 'given' a year 6 class and in the remaining Roman Catholic school I was to work with year 4/5. This situation allowed for the drawing of comparisons, if necessary, between similar aged children.

Beyond this clear-cut picture of obtaining permission and identifying schools to work with, the theme of access permeates the whole research process as a cyclic progression of negotiation and re-negotiation with all those involved, including teachers, priests, vicars and children. The degree to which I was able to negotiate access and establish a rapport with the class teachers and children played a fundamental role in the depth and richness of data I was able to collect.

The Teachers

After my meetings with the four heads I sent another letter to the teacher of the class I had been given, introducing myself and the research. I asked if I could arrange to meet them and after following up the letter with a phone call managed to set up meetings with each of them. Some of these discussions went well and others were more stilted. I was aware of the heavy workload the teachers already carried and felt awkward that some teachers were perhaps obliged to help because the head had decided I was to work with their class! This is demonstrated in my log where I describe one of my first meetings with a class teacher:

> 'meeting after school with Mr Chapman, year 6 class teacher. Quite softly spoken man, recently appointed at the beginning of term. Seemed willing to help but because he'd been told by the head? Came across as cautious (wanted time to think about when I could come in) and a bit wary of project'.[1]

In contrast to this, other teachers were more enthusiastic and keen to help, right from the beginning. One teacher in particular welcomed me warmly:

> 'arranged to meet Miss Armstrong, class teacher for year 4/5. Very easy going and pleased to see me. Eager to help and offer suggestions. Went up to staff room to chat, made me a cup of tea whilst we talked about the project. Had already gathered some materials for me regarding the school's mission statement and how they formulated it ...chatted easily until the end of break, then she asked if I wanted to come down and say hello to the children. Spent 20 minutes going round class with tape recorder having a few words with each child. Felt it was a great way of introducing myself to the children

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[1] Log 2/11/94.

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...Alison [teacher] seemed very generous of herself, class and time ...made a point of offering me the class RE books to look through'.[1]

In establishing and maintaining my relationships with the class teachers it seemed I had to balance the two issues of appreciating the caution and apprehension of some teachers whilst also trying to engage them in an understanding of what I was trying to achieve with their class. Although acutely accentuated during my initial meetings with the teachers this balancing act, and effectively the negotiation of access, continued throughout my time at the schools.

The Children

Over the course of a year my relationships with each school developed in different ways, reflecting the level of acceptance and openness which was offered not just from the teachers and heads, but also, much more significantly, from the children themselves. The negotiation and success of establishing access with this latter group was the linchpin of my study – it was also the most complex and hardest to achieve.

To get access to working with the children I had to consult the appropriate structures of head and teachers. I was struck by the way all the heads and teachers in the study automatically assumed the children's consent and co-operation in research that relied so heavily on their willingness to talk about themselves and their thoughts:

> 'pupils are rarely asked whether they want to have a researcher in their class...furthermore, teachers will commonly offer the pupils co-operation to the researcher: 'I'm sure they will be willing to help you'. This is a taken-for-granted aspect of the 'politics of childhood' that researchers regularly trade upon'.[2]

Although I felt it important not to take this willingness for granted I had little option but to collude with the adults involved. I hoped that although I had been unable to negotiate formal access with the children at the early stages, when the time came I could explain my position and ask the children themselves for their co-operation. For this reason at the beginning of my interviews with the children I spent time explaining who I was and answering any questions the children had. I then described how I would like them to help me: I spoke about why I wanted to tape the conversations we had and allowed them to make their own decision about whether they wished to allow me 'access' to their thoughts and them as individuals.

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[1] Log 2/11/94.
[2] Ball, 1985, p.40.

Although no child ever walked out of an interview I am sure a handful adopted a strategy of non-cooperation and disruption to signal a denial of access. After reflecting on two early experiences of this during group interviews I became more aware of recognizing such strategies and responded promptly by re-negotiating and redefining the setting for them so that those involved felt comfortable to open up and talk. Ultimately I believe only one boy completely refused to co-operate and allow me access. I was keen to persevere in negotiating access with the more disruptive children so that I could gain as full a picture as possible of the classes of children I was working with, for as Ball comments, 'certain 'types' of pupil are systematically missing from our accounts of school life'[1]. Extra negotiating and encouragement was also necessary with children who were not so articulate. I was particularly aware of drawing such children into discussions and making space for them to talk about themselves. This made sure that the ideas and stories of those not so articulate, as well as 'the reluctants'[2], were represented in my research and included as part of the data. Generally, the response of the majority of children was an enthusiastic eagerness to talk, to be involved and to help me. At times such generosity was an overwhelming experience as individuals grappled to recount and explain their lives and the concerns they had.

Keeping a Log

Alongside the issue of access my field log also shapes and directs the methodology of the whole research process. From the beginning of my study I kept a log in which to record my notes, observations and impressions: this included everything from recording and reflecting on the substance and variety of emotions I had regarding interviews, the attitudes of the children and my snatched conversations with teachers and heads. As well as forming a valuable source of data this 'cohesive history' also functioned as a 'receptacle of a researcher's description, vision, view, feelings, insights'[3]. My field log therefore functioned much more than the recording of 'hard facts': providing a means of analysis, description and triangulation, thereby giving greater coherence to my interviews and all other data collected from each school. As the study progressed my log supported and offered direction for the different stages of

[1] Ball, 1985, p.41.
[2] Ball, 1985, p.41.
[3] Anne McCormack Steinmetz in Ely, 1991, p.69.

research, as well as enabling me to check the feelings and attitudes that I inevitably brought to the research investigation.

At times this attention to recording all these aspects of myself as a researcher and the research setting proved a difficult and cumbersome task. It was especially difficult to record my personal feelings as honestly as I could, however this gradually enabled me to appreciate and understand the 'essential ingredient'[1] of the emotional and intellectual in the research process. In turn this meant a heightened sensitivity to the way I interacted at each of the schools, especially as it did not take long for very different relationships to be established with each. Friedman comments that:

> 'to deny our feelings would be to shut out one large chunk of reality...we are highly conscious of our personal relationship to our research. Because of this we must acknowledge and accept the emotional aspect as part and parcel of this method. In the larger sense, we strive to harness this aspect to become more aware, more able, more insightful'.[2]

In acknowledging factors such as my own misgivings and attitudes I saw that I was in fact improving my research skills and working to remove the bias and value judgements that an individual brings with them to any research situation.

The Three Stages of Data Collection

The delineation of my data collection into three clear stages clarifies this project's cyclic process of constantly returning to and analysing the data as a way of progressing towards the refinement and definition of a tight and coherent theory that represents the richness and complexity of the data.

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[1] Ely et al, 1991, p.1.
[2] In Ely et al, 1991, p.111f.

Unstructured small group interviews - drawings and discussion

After my meetings with the class teachers I arranged a suitable slot each week to begin interviews with mixed groups of approximately six children. I asked the teachers to choose a group who would talk well together. The children from St Dominic's were interviewed in their music room and the church next door. At St Beatrice's I was given a staff meeting/conference room and at St Christopher's I worked in a communal study area. The most conducive environment for interviews was at St Anne's, where Miss Armstrong made sure the library was free for us to use.

The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour in length, depending on the time each class teacher felt able to allow the children to be absent from class. In each school I interviewed small groups of children until the whole class had been interviewed. The interviews were taped and then transcribed. As mentioned the first part of each interview involved me explaining who I was and what I was trying to do. I tried to be as open-ended as possible so as not to give the impression that I was after any 'right' answers. I invited the children's questions and often described my work as 'listening to children to try and find out what was important to them'. This comment was often enough to stimulate a lengthy discussion, however, I also found that another useful technique at the beginning of the interview was to go round the group asking each child to introduce themself and tell me about something that was important to them. As the interviews progressed with different groups I developed further key open questions which, whilst keeping the interview child-centred, also enabled me to focus on the child's understanding of religious concepts and issues which were raised.

Only after several interviews did I develop a better awareness of the nature and skills required when listening to children. As McCrum comments, it has become quite fashionable to talk about listening to children but 'it is quite a different thing to do it effectively'[1]. Throughout the interviews my guiding principle was to remain child-centred, listening to the children, encouraging them to discuss ideas with each other and following the concepts they provided as important to them. This frequently went against my gut reaction to ask very direct questions which, after a couple of dismal

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[1] 1996, p.81.

attempts, proved that the children could not or would not answer! Learning from these early experiences of interviewing I realised that 'I was far more interested in my role rather than the children...far more interested in my agenda than theirs'[1]. What was necessary was for me to become a kind of 'professional listener'[2] and respond to what the child said rather than what I wanted them to say.

What emerged from this was a successful approach where I listened to what the children discussed and carefully steered the conversation, when necessary, paying particular attention to expressions of what was important to them and what they thought about their school and its RE. I was especially careful not to use any religious language or concepts unless they were first introduced by the children. Once mentioned I then followed them up, asking the children to elaborate further and reflect on their experiences, feelings and thoughts. Returning to my actual research question each time helped me remember what I was trying to achieve; through listening, observing and questioning (in that order) I was trying to understand the children's stories, their worldviews. Throughout the interviews I was also careful to ensure that all the group managed to contribute and, as I have already detailed, this often meant me singling out those who were quiet or not so willing to co-operate. Where there was enough time in the interview I also asked the children to draw pictures about something we had discussed and this provided a stimulus for more reflection and deeper conversation.

After each interview I tried to make contact with the class teacher to arrange my next visit and discuss what had been raised by the children. These talks, recorded in my log, were very informal but frequently explained the reasons why particular issues arose during the interviews. For example, if a child had raised a particular topic or spoken openly about a problem or experience I sometimes mentioned this to the teacher. On several occasions I learnt from the teacher that the child in question had, for example, recently had experienced bereavement, or that the class had been learning about a related area.

Observation of Collective Worship

During this first stage of data collection I also observed at least one act of collective worship in each school, noting, in my log, the style, content and degree of

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[1] McCrum, 1996, p.83.
[2] McCrum, 1996, p.86.

participation by the pupils. These additional observations were useful in providing a richer picture of the features and structure of RE in each school, as well as complementing and triangulating comments by the children about their perceptions of collective worship at school.

Relevant Documentation

Other data collected at this stage of the research included copies of each schools' documentation about RE: where available these included mission statements, curriculum outlines for RE and policy documents.

Analysis of data

It took the whole of the Autumn term and January and February to complete the initial round of interviews and finish stage one of my data collection. With each interview resulting in anything up to thirty pages of transcript this stage of data collection alone produced a large quantity of data to be examined and taken account of. Generally the children had responded eagerly and openly throughout the interviews. I had enjoyed our discussions and I was amazed at the wealth of ideas and opinions that had flowed so readily from them. Once I embarked on analysing the transcripts I found common themes and ideas were evolving from the data. The significance of family and peer relationships stood out across all the schools, as did football, going to church and more complex existential and ontological concerns. Pursuing the children's religious framework of understanding across the interviews I also found that the religious concepts of God, Jesus and the devil were frequently discussed at length by the children, particularly in relation to experiences of death and within the context of judgment, heaven and hell.

Through triangulation within individual interviews, over interviews at each school and then across the four schools generally these themes and concepts were identified and substantiated as important and relevant to many of children, regardless of the school they attended. I decided to investigate and triangulate these common concepts and themes further by collecting concept maps from the children[1]. As a different kind of data I hoped these would either confirm or dispute the relevance of these themes, defining more clearly how the children linked them together in their own meaning construction. Obtaining concept maps from each child provided further triangulation

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[1] For a comprehensive and detailed explanation of concept mapping see White and Gunstone, 1992.

of earlier data as well as the opportunity of accessing the ideas and thinking of quieter children or those who had not wished to participate fully in the interviews.

Stage 2

Concept Maps

As a means of clarifying the many themes and issues arising from the initial interviews I decided to ask the children to draw their concept maps for me based on the eight common concepts I had identified. I had already made use of concept maps in previous research and had found them a useful way of discovering how children link ideas together and perceive the larger structure of a given subject area. In developing this I drew on the work and ideas of White and Gunstone[1]. After talking with the class teachers I was able to take each class for up to forty minutes, and following White and Gunstone's suggestion, began introducing concept maps to the children by working with a simple example[2]. My explanation of concepts maps used the terms cow, milk, sun and grass.

Standing before a class of thirty was somewhat daunting, particularly with the class teacher present. The children co-operated well as we worked through the example on the blackboard together, the degree of their enthusiasm and participation was encouraging. The class then had about twenty minutes left in which I asked them to construct their own maps using the following words: me, God, heaven, hell, the world, football, church, devil. I asked them to work on their own and apart from the occasional murmur or question the class worked quietly as they produced their maps.

Analysis of data

After this exercise I analysed the maps with the respective class teachers. This was useful as they could relate the maps to the abilities of the children, interestingly there were a number of children who produced fairly complicated maps, much to the surprise of their teacher. I later revisited and analysed the maps again. Comparing them to the interview data the interrelationship and points of connection indicated by many children in their concept maps confirmed that the common themes I had identified were indeed significant to the children in the study. I was now shaping up a

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[1] 1992.
[2] 1992, p.29.

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clearer idea of what the data suggested in terms of the nature of the children's worldviews and how their experiences of RE at school fitted with this understanding of themselves and the world. Although the data from stage one encompassed all the children in each class I felt that talking with pairs of children would allow me to explore further some of the issues in greater detail, adding richness and depth to the data, triangulating, refining and testing the theories that appeared to be emerging.

Stage 3

In-depth interviews with pairs of boys and girls from each class

Bearing in mind the constraints of time and the production of a reasonably manageable amount of data it was impossible to re-interview all 120 children in pairs in an in-depth manner. Instead I decided to use a focus group of two boys and two girls from each class. After talking with the teachers and reflecting on the data already collected I identified two boys and two girls from each class. At St Anne's these interviews were conducted earlier in the term and I managed to interview a second pair of boys.

These interviews were much longer, approximately an hour, and went very well, mainly because by now I had made a number of visits to the schools and I think there was a better relationship built up between the children and myself. The relaxed and co-operative attitude of the children enabled me to probe their ideas and feelings more deeply. I found that during some of these second interviews a few direct questions from me focussed the children and stimulated an often profound discussion about themselves and the world. Despite being slightly more focussed in this stage of research my principles for the interviews remained the same: I tried to be as child-centred as possible; followed their concepts, encouraged them to talk together and pursued important ideas and concepts in detail. Drawings were produced by most of the children at these interviews.

Questionnaires

Whilst there were few problems collecting data from the children at each of the schools, I had difficulty in gaining any detailed information from the heads and teachers at St Beatrice's, St Christopher's and St Dominic's. Towards the end of my time at the schools I decided to collect some data from the heads and class teachers for

comparison and triangulation purposes. So far the problem of obtaining data from the staff appeared to rest with finding time to talk in detail about the progress of the research. I decided that it was unrealistic to expect each teacher to commit themselves to a long interview and so I drew up a short semi-structured, self-completion questionnaire which I handed to them with a stamped addressed envelope[1]. In each questionnaire I asked the head and class teacher of each school about the school's character; its RE and what they perceived to be important to their pupils. The questions were open-ended and I encouraged them to continue on a separate sheet if necessary - the teacher and head at St Anne's were the only ones to do this.

As well as using the questionnaires to triangulate other data and I also hoped it would verify or discount my own hunches and perceptions about each school's RE. I had given out the questionnaires individually to teachers and heads, however, on their return to me I discovered that in all cases it appeared that the class teachers and heads had worked together in answering my questions. Despite this I was satisfied that I had at least some record of how the head and teachers perceived their school and RE, however artificial and contrived the answers might be.

After collecting data in this last stage the second round of interviews were transcribed and analysed.

Supporting Data

I have divided my data collection into three significant stages. There is, however, further data collected throughout the research process and this includes details of conversations with teachers and head teachers, all recorded in my field log. St Anne's school was the only place where I was able to have longer periods to talk and discuss issues that had arisen with both the class teacher and head. Their co-operation and willingness to engage with me in the progress of the data collection reflected, I'm sure, the general ethos and character of the school, as well as contributing to a far richer source of data. Among the other three schools my conversations with staff tended to be a brief few minutes before children came in from their lunch break, on returning the group back to class or on passing a head teacher in the corridor. Unfortunately it seemed that in handing over the children to me many of them felt they had done their duty and did not expect to have to contribute any more. Despite

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[1] See appendix E.

this our discussions offered interesting insights and valuable background information to the children interviewed.

Bringing the Data Together

Reaching the end of these three stages of data collection the resulting bank of data consisted of a considerable amount of transcripts. Including the second set of in-depth interviews at each of the schools, as well as conversations with staff, this added up to over five hundred pages. In addition I had my log, staff questionnaires, school documentation, 120 concept maps and a large number of drawings produced by children during their interviews. The transcribing of interviews was an especially time-consuming task although doing this myself meant that I was able to grasp a rich knowledge and awareness of the range and depth of the children's narratives and discussions.

After taking a broad overview of the data a return to the question posed by this study enabled me to manage the data and make decisions about what data was most appropriate in attending to the specific focus of the research. Approaching the data in the light of my original question I re-examined the data in relation to the following key areas:

- the **nature** of the children's worldviews (who/what was important to them);
- how the children's worldview were **constructed** – key concepts, people, experiences;
- the children's **understanding** of religious concepts;
- the **significance** of religious concepts;
- the **place** of the school and its RE in their worldviews.

The same questions had guided me in the interviews and when aligned with the transcript data facilitated the process of analysis in the direction of developing an understanding of the children's worldviews and the place of RE in their development. The following chapter presents the results of my data collection and chapter 4 its analysis.

I have referred to children's drawings as an important tool in the interview process and similarly children's concept maps have been highlighted as providing supplementary data that triangulates the children's discussions. In subsequent chapters of this study neither drawings nor concepts maps will be referred to. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the constraints of space do not permit an extensive

examination of this data as distinct from the children's conversations and secondly I would maintain that the data contained in both the drawings and concept maps can also be located in the transcripts of children's interviews.

Whilst trying to convey an overview of the whole body of data, and in particular data form the interviews, it has been necessary, for reasons of space and coherence, to refer to sections of conversations that I consider to be either generally representative, useful for triangulation purposes, or particularly significant within the context of the data as a whole. As a consequence of this the volume of transcript data that will be referred to in the text or in the appendices constitutes just under half of the total volume of transcript available.

Chapter 3: RESULTS

This chapter presents the results from each of the four schools and aims to paint a broad picture of the children, the nature of their worldviews and the place of RE in their meaning construction[1].

ST ANNE'S

Introduction to School

St Anne's Roman Catholic Primary School is located in a poorer suburb of the south coast town, serving a working class and semi-professional community. During my time at the school there were 162 children on roll and two split year classes: 4/5 and 5/6. I worked with year 4/5 and consequently the children were one or two years younger than children interviewed in the other schools. Both Mr Adams and Miss Armstrong were very enthusiastic and keen to be involved in my work, providing lots of documentation about the school, its mission statement and curriculum framework. In addition Miss Armstong also gave me copies of children's work that she felt might be useful for me. The development of a good relationship with St Anne's made me feel welcome and facilitated very productive interviews, the first set of which took place during the autumn term and the beginning of the spring term. Second interviews then took place with pairs of children in the summer term: a pair of girls, Bonnie and Maria, and two pairs of boys, Robert and Stephen, and Robert and Richard.

Context of School – RE

> 'At St Anne's Catholic school we aspire to sustain enriching relationships with ourselves, with others and God by promoting child-centred developmental curriculum whose religious dimension enables us to journey together with Christ as our guide in faith, respect and dignity'.[2]

The religious and specifically Roman Catholic nature of the school was clearly evident in both the written material provided by the staff and the physical

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[1] In all extracts of transcript Q. denotes the interviewer, me.
[2] Mr Adams, questionnaire, q.2 – see appendix E.

environment of the school – there were religious paintings and pictures, as well as crucifixes and prayers displayed in all rooms. In their questionnaires the head and class teacher describe the school as operating within a broad framework of RE. In his questionnaire Mr Adams describes this as

> 'a whole school approach to the teaching of the 'Here I Am' programme [which] is aimed to ensure continuity and progression. RE is included in displays both inside and outside the classrooms; RE is given high status. The children's work shows imagination, thoughtfulness and creativity'.[1]

In her questionnaire Miss Armstrong (class teacher) comments that the children perceive RE 'very much as a subject on the timetable'[2], however, drawing on examples of children leading class prayers and participating in school masses she also demonstrates that RE at St Anne's goes beyond formal lessons[3]. Describing her contribution to the ethos of the school Miss Armstrong sums up her approach in the following way:

> 'I try to make the children appreciate that they are all special and that God is a loving Father and omnipotent presence'.[4]

The head employs similar imagery to describe what he feels are the aspects of religious faith passed on to children at the school:

> 'God as loving Father who shows his love for us by giving us Jesus in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Promoting a meaningful, developing prayer life. A living faith shown through our actions and treatment of others, we show God how we love Him'.[5]

These written comments from the head and class teacher highlight a distinct religious underpinning to the school and contextualise the ideas and concepts raised by the children at St Anne's.

Context of Children's Lives Outside of School

Family

Miss Armstrong describes the children in her class as 'all coming from a caring home life'[6] and during the interviews all the children mentioned family relationships as important to them. Two boys illustrate how the children signalled this importance:

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[1] Mr Adams, questionnaire, q.5 - see appendix E.
[2] Miss Armstrong, questionnaire, q.5 – see appendix E.
[3] Miss Armstrong, questionnaire – see appendix E.
[4] Miss Armstrong, questionnaire, q.2 – see appendix E.
[5] Mr Adams, questionnaire, q.3 – see appendix E.
[6] Miss Armstrong, questionnaire, q.6 – see appendix E.

> Q: so what would you say was the most important thing in your life then?
> Matthew: family
> Mark: yeh, my family because they're like people, they're like closest to you
> Matthew: yeh, they're the closest people to you apart from your friends
> Mark: yeh, apart from your friends.

The term 'family' was used widely by the children to include grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, as well as siblings and parents. Some children in the class were living with just one parent and speaking about something important to her Maria talks of her situation:

> 'an important thing for me is that my Mum and Dad get back together. My Mum lives with me and my Dad lives with his, his girlfriend. I don't think they will get back together though. It is sad like my Mum and Dad got married a year before I was born and they broke up when I was 2. I see my Dad on weekends, I get to sleep there sometimes'.

For some children the importance of the extended family often included relations in other countries and close links with Ireland, Malta, India and America were all discussed. Zoe's story is illustrative of this: her discussion reveals the significance of relations in Ireland and how these relationships are incorporated into the way she makes sense of religious concepts, her religious identity and their place in her worldview[1].

Several boys at St Anne's spoke of their relationship with their fathers[1] and for many this appears to be framed within a mutual enjoyment of football. As a significant theme in a number of children's narratives football is presented as much more than a game they are allowed to play at lunchtime in the playground, as Stephen and Robert comment:

> 'when I'm upset I try and calm my nerves...I calm my nerves by kicking the football over into the football pitch' - Stephen

> 'I like playing football and hitting the ball, perfectly hitting the ball and not missing it. Scoring goals is like really important to me. Football calms my nerves' – Robert.

Initially I was reluctant to pursue the passion for football that many boys wanted to discuss - I should have known better for once I allowed them to talk it became obvious that it was a crucial aspect of their worldview, a mechanism through which

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[1] See appendix A: transcript 1, p.1 and transcript 2, p.2.

they defined and communicated understandings of their relationships and deeper existential concerns.

Illustrating how many boys in the class spoke about football, Richard and Robert's discussion[1] conveys the pervasive nature of football in their lives: it provides a sense of identity and belonging where being part of different teams and scoring a lot of goals heightens this specialness and participation. Additionally, football functions as a significant point of reference for family relationships:

- in some way the whole family is included in both boy's narratives about football: Robert's mother watches him play and supports the same team as him, his two sisters are also football supporters. Grandparents are included in Richard's world of football; they give him football stickers and even though they live in Italy he is able to talk about football with his grandfather who supports Juventus;

- through their enjoyment of football Robert and Richard are connected with other members of their families;

- although other family members are discussed it is the boys' relationships with their fathers that is extensively located within the framework of football:

  - they come to watch them play football

  - each boy practices football with their father, who coaches them in their skills.

As the interview proceeds the connections between boy, father and football are examined more closely and through their reflections they reveal the way football cements and grounds this important relationship in their lives. From their comments we can see that:

- football is important because their fathers told them about it and taught it to them from an early age;

- the input of their fathers has resulted in the skills and talent that they now possess - evidenced in the large number of goals they can score and numerous teams they play for;

- despite the long hours their fathers work and are away from home, time is found to play football together; this gives the boys a valuable opportunity to be with their fathers and allows them to continue to improve their skills.

As well as communicating about families and relationships the imagery of football was used in other interviews to discuss what happens when people die:

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 3, p.2; transcript 4, p.3; transcript 5, p.4.

Q: what do you think heaven's like then?

Michael: I know, its just all people

Robert: I know what heaven's like, there's a football pitch so you can play football. I think that there's a God that plays football in his own football pitch

Jethro: in heaven.

The influence of football was found to be substantial for many boys and in providing a framework of understanding within their worldviews it would be hard to underestimate its importance.

Pets

Pets were identified by many children as important in their lives[2] and this is illustrated in Nicholas' narrative about the death of his pets and what makes a pet special[3]. Both boys and girls at St Anne's mentioned that they often talked to their pets when they were worried about something or when they were on their own and many clearly felt close to them[4]. The discussion between Jenni, Mike and Matthew[5] also alerts us to how the experience of the loss of a pet shapes and is shaped by the child's understanding of death:

- the three children agree about the importance of the ritual of burying a dead pet (note the reaction of the others when one mentions that they put their hamster in the bin);

- the reason they are buried is because they go to heaven.

Here we see how religious imagery (heaven) is ultimately used to deal with and create an understanding of this experience[6]. Although there was a general assumption among the children that pets actually went somewhere after they died only on one occasion did they offer an alternative interpretation:

Jethro: oh yeh, my budgie died two weeks ago, I buried him in the back garden. The dog keeps digging 'im up! *(all laugh)*

Q: what happens to animals when they die then?

Sinead: they go all smelly *(all laugh)*

Craig: and they rot in the ground.

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 4, p.3; transcript 5, p.4.

[2] See, for example, appendix A, transcript 6, p.5; transcript 7, p.6; transcript 8, p.6.

[3] See appendix A, transcript 6, p.5.

[4] See, for example, appendix A, transcript 7, p.6.

[5] See appendix A, transcript 8, p.6.

[6] Religious imagery is used in the same way by other children - see appendix A, transcript 9, p.7: here pet heaven is described by Maria as a 'different room', her justification for this is interesting – 'cos we

Even here there is a reference to the ritual of burying a dead pet. What is also interesting is the tone of the conversation: the children are playful, laughing and joking. In pursuing conversations about pets children frequently went on to talk about death, loss and their understandings of associated religious concepts - thereby revealing how pets and dealing with their loss had an important place in their worldviews and narratives[1]. This general theme from the data at St Anne's is aptly expressed by Keiron, who asks the question that many children seemed to be trying to answer – 'the one thing I wanna know is where do pets go when they die?'

Church

All of the children at St Anne's spoke of a connection with the local parish churches. For some this was stronger than others, consisting of regular attendance at mass and involvement in services as altar servers. For other children the connection was weaker and was described in terms of their identity as a Catholic and their relationship with the priest who was a frequent visitor to the school. Interestingly many children identified the church, not the school, as the place where they learnt about God[2].

Rather than talking about RE lessons at school, the children were more eager to discuss concepts such as God and their experiences of church. Mass at church and school (collective worship) were perceived to be very similar[3] and although recognising the importance of going to church many admitted that they found it boring, as Sinead explains:

> 'I don't go to church, it's boring and anyway, I'm at my dad's. I think school masses are boring too, all you got to do is stand up, sit down, sing, sing, sing, pray, pray, pray, stand up, sit down'.

Sinead's strong 'I' statements reflect many of the interviews where children offered what was perceived as the 'official' line of adults and authority as well as clarifying, often unsolicited, their own opinions on the issue in hand[4]. Both boys and girls talked

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all go to God's house when we die'. One could imagine this phrase being heard on numerous occasions and here she uses it as justification for her own argument.

[1] See appendix A, transcript 7, p.6; transcript 8, p.6, transcript 9, p.7.

[2] See appendix A, transcript 10, p.8.

[3] As Maria comments both provide opportunities to talk to God - 'you don't **have** to [believe] but I do think there is a God. Mass at school is well, just the same really except we have it in the hall. We pray at mass to talk to God and tell him all your worries. People go to church to talk to God'.

[4] Craig illustrates this, declaring his own feelings about going to church, whilst also acknowledging the important place of communion - 'I don't like going to church. Communion is important though because it helps you live and when you die as well'. Jethro, on the other hand, clearly expresses a different view, despite the messages he receives from those around him - 'cos our teacher says he's everywhere but I think it's a waste of time, I think its boring going to church. I think communion is just bread, normal bread. My mum takes me to church, she plays the guitar'.

about serving at masses in school and at church. This involvement in services was recognised as a way of relieving the boredom they felt at mass: the active role and responsibility of a server enabling feelings of involvement and enjoyment[1]. It may also be observed that comments about serving highlight the difference between what the children actually experience during religious services and what adults think they are providing.

I have briefly shown how family relationships, football, pets and the parish church inform and contribute to the children's developing worldviews: it structures their understanding of themselves, those around them and the world. Within this context I now turn to the children's perceptions of their school and its RE.

Perceptions About School

Discipline

In the early stages of the group interviews I often posed the question, 'so what's St Anne's like?' as a way of stimulating further discussion and raising issues which could be pursued in greater detail. This initial question proved a useful 'opener', allowing the children to settle down and engage with each other in discussion. The first answer I normally received was that school was boring. This was then often followed up with reasons why or how they thought school could be improved. Transcript 12[2] reflects other perceptions about school: Roisin and Natasha talk about discipline, which is strict, and on the same subject Mike, in a different interview, comments on what he sees as a contradiction between the strictness of teachers and what he is told by the head:

> 'yeh, like Mr Adams, he's really, his religion is really important to him and he believes in God so much, but then why does he tell you off so much? And just because, and if you've got into trouble they just like lay into you'.

Here Mike brings together his two experiences of school: the strong religious belief of the head and his experience of being told off, or 'laid into' - for him this is a contradiction, why should someone who has such strong belief shout so much and tell people off so frequently?

Religious Identity

Occasionally the children introduced the term 'Catholic' which I would promptly pursue and ask them to explain. At other times I used the word and asked them what

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 11, p.8.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 12, p.9.

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it meant. In each situation I hoped that the children's responses would explore three main issues:

- the ways in which they understood and interpreted the term 'Catholic';
- the ways in which they linked, or didn't link, 'Catholic' with the school;
- that in talking about the two above the children would also discuss the place of RE in their own identities.

When asked to consider the Catholic nature of their school most children commented that it made their school different, a difference that lay in the emphasis on religion and religious practice[1]. Transcript 13[2] shows how children in a small group interview explored the character of their school in detail, with interesting personal reflections. Following its different stages we can make the following observations about the children and their perceptions of the Catholic nature of the school:

- Adam and Mike agree that because it is a Catholic school there is more religion, more talk about God;

- despite feeling bored with lots of talk about God Mike demonstrates the security and identification he feels with the school, admitting that he wouldn't want to go to a school unless it was Catholic, he can't explain why;

- Mike also highlights a tension within this situation: as a Catholic school they talk about God a lot, it is an inevitable and accepted part of their school, the problem is that he personally finds this very boring; assembly is 'the same thing over and over and over...that God is a very nice man and every time they tell you a story about him';

- Mike and Matthew then try to resolve this tension together. On the one hand 'it is a Catholic school' and 'people should talk about God', but on the other hand there shouldn't be so much repetition of the same stories;

- in addressing this tension the boys move on to apply themselves to a deeper unresolved tension – can anyone really ever know if God is true?

- this tension arises for the boys because of the way they perceive the head and teachers at school 'as going on about God as if they know that he's really true';

- Mike comments that 'we' don't know that God is true;

- Matthew responds that 'they', the staff, don't know;

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[1] As Richard explains - 'yeh, it does [make a difference] cos like they [other schools] won't have like any Catholic things like masses and that'.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 13, p.9.

- when it is pointed out to them that perhaps there are some people who do believe that it is really true Mike declares that even these people 'still aren't really sure';

- my next question, whether they think there is a God, attempts to encourage them to connect their reflections on other people's beliefs with their own;

- Mike takes up a middle ground position, 'I think there is a God. I just don't believe in him that much';

- Mike's final comment reveals the issue to be a personal tension: 'you want to believe in God in case he's true, but then if he's not true then it's not worth doing all this stuff'.

For Mike and Matthew the conflict they highlight is the difference between thinking about what others believe and present as 'true' and what they themselves are able to believe and accept as true. The tension arises because of the difficulty in balancing and exploring these different positions. Relating this tension to the construction of the boys' worldviews we can see that:

- the concept of God is significant for them;

- the school influences the construction of the boys' worldviews; it offers information and possibilities as well as raising questions;

- in addition to the construction of their own worldview, the boys identify and try to construct the worldview of the school as distinct and separate from their own.

I will consider the implications of this further in my analysis[1].

Favourite Lessons

Apart from early comments about school being boring the children had few complaints. With encouragement they all talked keenly about their favourite subjects and assemblies that they had enjoyed being a part of. As is evident in transcript 14[2] there is a noticeable shift when the children become fully engaged in conversation and are talking about something which has significance to them: as the discussion moves on to science the children become more animated and enthusiastic, working together to 'story' their experiences. As they finish each other's sentences, recalling colours and changes in materials these science lessons obviously have had an impact on them; not only can they clearly relate details, but the story is conveyed with excitement and involvement in the experience, all of them engaged fully in the telling.

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[1] See chapter 4.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 14, p.10.

A depicting of the different levels of engagement can also be found in transcript 15[1] where the interview commences in the usual way with Richard and Robert describing anything to do with school as 'boring'. Instead of pursuing a discussion about favourite subjects I ask about the Catholicity of the school, which prompts the boys to try and explain what this means. Here Richard moves to a deeper level of engagement as he reflects that 'some bits' about God are interesting. Unfortunately as Richard ponders on the concept of 'rising from the dead', Robert continues to talk at the less engaged level. Richard's comment, 'it's hard to believe that someone rose for the dead in it?' would suggest that he is now fully engaged with his own thoughts and ideas. I draw attention to the children's levels of engagement in order to acknowledge that there were a number of ways in which the children responded to the interviews. Robert's more detached response, which borders on sabotaging the responses of Richard, was rare at St Anne's. The children were enthusiastic to talk and settled easily into an environment of listening and engaging in discussion which relied on them identifying their own feelings and opinions - Richard's progression to a different way of responding demonstrates this more intimate level of engagement. Movement to this level of talking often came swiftly in the early stages of the interviews, within the first ten minutes or so, all children enjoying the opportunity take part and express themselves in this way.

RE Lessons

Another 'opener' question that I found useful to stimulate discussion was to ask about RE lessons in the school. In general the children's first replies to my question were fairly bland and 'disengaged'[2]. Answering my question, 'what's RE like?' some children, like Gemma[3], were rational and basic, whilst others, like Bonnie, responded in a more personal way and talked about what they had learnt:

> Q: what does Miss Armstrong tell you in RE about God?
> Bonnie: she tells us that God mainly helps people when they're sad and when they're ill.[4]

When asked about RE the children were not particularly talkative and answers were generally 'dry'[5]. In an incredible contrast to the topics of RE lessons and mass, the

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 15, p.11.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 16, p.11.
[3] See appendix A, transcript 16, p.11.
[4] See also appendix A, transcript 17, p.12.
[5] See appendix A, transcript 18, p.12.

children did enjoy discussing more abstract religious ideas and concepts[1]. In transcript 19[2] not only do we see the children addressing the question, 'why is someone a saint?', but they also discuss the issue together. An exchange develops which is not centred on me as the interviewer, but instead focuses on the question in hand – what is a saint? The interchange is more than a swapping of ideas, as we can see in the way the conversation develops:

- Craig's initial response is concerned with going to heaven and helping Jesus;
- this is challenged by Jethro who states that although they are kind, they are not saints;
- Michael tries to resolve this contradiction by offering the suggestion that they are not quite good enough, to be a saint you need to be **really** good;
- ideas and answers are also challenged in dealing with the next question, who makes you a saint?
- Craig's immediate answer is Jesus;
- Jethro's response is to begin explaining what happens when you die;
- Jethro is interrupted by Michael who offers another answer, God;
- Craig then corrects himself, agreeing with Michael that it is God.

Throughout the interviews the children responded more eagerly when given the opportunity to explore ideas and concepts rather than talk about school, RE and collective worship. This exchange of ideas parallels more complicated discussions about religious concepts and other existential issues. Before detailing some of these conversations I will present data from the interviews which refer to collective worship and assembly in school.

Collective Worship, Assembly and Prayer

Prayer

The children's conversations about collective worship and assembly took place, most of the time, within the broader topic of prayer. In encouraging the children to talk about prayer and collective worship at school I was interested in trying to discover how they understood the concept of prayer and whether it was a part of their lives in

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 19, p.12 which follows on from transcript 18 and illustrates once again a shift in children's levels of engagement.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 19, p.12.

and/or out of school. Transcript 20[1] highlights a number of these elements and the following observations can be made:

- at the beginning of this conversation it appears to be accepted that they all pray;
- Bonnie identifies personal prayer at night;
- Maria relates prayer to grace before meals;
- the reason you pray before eating is to say 'thank you';
- it is something you should do;
- prayers are often said at school;
- prayers are important;
- praying can calm you down.

Here prayer appears to be accepted by the children as a natural part of life, however, it also seems to remain at a superficial level for many of them; something akin to remembering your manners and saying thank you for a meal. Martin's comment that prayer calms you down stands out from the other responses in that he moves to a more personal reflection about what prayer is about.

All but a few of the children interviewed at St Anne's School mentioned that they prayed in some way. As well as school the church was identified as another place where prayer took place, although judging by the detached response of their answers, the level of engagement in either environment was often minimal:

> Q: do you do a lot of praying in school?
>
> Paul: some, but its really boring. There's too much.

In transcript 21[2] the children speak of not only when they pray but also why, through their discussion we can see that:

- set prayers are recited in assembly;
- assemblies are often boring;
- praying takes place several times each day in classrooms;
- the reasons given why they pray are different but all relate to identity: because they are Christian, because they are Catholic, because they have always prayed in their classes.

Within school children spoke of two main types of prayer: those said in class and larger acts of collective worship - assembly and school masses. Assemblies were

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 20, p.13.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 21, p.13.

frequently described as boring, although it is interesting to note that in assemblies where children had a more substantial role these were portrayed as more enjoyable - for example, at the Friday afternoon 'good work' assembly[1]. At St Anne's School the infant children, that is those who had not yet made their first communion, only stayed for the first part of the mass – the readings, sermon and bidding prayers. I asked about this as a way of trying to explore how the children understood and felt about school mass. Such a conversation can be found in transcript 23[2] where Zoe and Sinead agree that it is difficult for them to understand what happens at mass and therefore it is perfectly natural for the younger children to leave half way through. Although Zoe admits freely that she still doesn't understand, Sinead says that she didn't when she was little, but now it's okay, just a bit boring. The next half of the transcript explores why their school has masses: in response to my question Sinead doesn't think that the school is special, whereas Zoe identifies the Catholicity of the school as what makes it special. When asked about this she cites the RE lessons and general emphasis on God. Where schools are not like this Sinead doesn't think they are missing out, although Zoe does. Zoe's attitude is tolerant and open throughout, accepting that people believe and act differently. What is raised throughout this transcript, particularly with Zoe, is an issue of identity, both for the school and for her as an individual. She grounds the school's identity in its Catholic nature, a nature that focuses on God and learning about God.

Transcript 24[3] presents another transcript about school mass. Taken from one of the second interviews Stephen, talking with Robert, raises the issues of involvement and engagement in collective worship at the school. The discussion about school masses is directed by Stephen's explanation about Corpus Christi, a special occasion for those who will be taking communion for the first time. From Stephen's point of view he seems to be saying 'special but not special for us'. The issue of involvement and engagement is addressed even more explicitly as the conversation proceeds. Robert's comment about his first holy communion is striking alongside Stephen's analysis that Corpus Christi and mass is special if it's your first time. In contrast Robert recalls his first holy communion as not being that special, 'but the party afterwards was good'. Perhaps this prompts one to ask about the differing levels of involvement and

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 22, p.14.
[2] See appendix a, transcript 23, p.14.
[3] See appendix A, transcript 24, p.15.

engagement for Robert – initially at his first holy communion mass and then at the party which followed. At the end of the transcript Stephen once again identifies serving at mass, especially ringing the bells, as resolving the problem of not liking mass and finding it boring[1].

Discussion about prayer at St Anne's mainly centred on practical details about what happened at school and the children's opinions and feelings about mass and assembly. A preliminary observation would seem to be that the issue of engagement and involvement has a crucial role in how the children's opinions and feelings are shaped. Isolated these comments say little about the place of RE in the children's developing worldviews. What is interesting is the very different way in which the children were keen and able to explore complex abstract concepts as they spoke about what was important to them. Taken together this broader narrative conveys more richly and intricately the way their worldviews were constructed.

The Place of RE in Religious Concepts and the Child's Worldview

The children were very eager to talk about concepts and ideas from a personal perspective and from the viewpoint of authoritative voices in their lives. The majority of interview time was given over to discussing a number of religious concepts and issues. The interview process was grounded in allowing the child to introduce concepts and then pursuing these concepts with the child and other members of the group for as long as their interest and engagement was sustained. My guiding aims in this were to:

- explore in as much detail as possible the concepts important for a child's worldview;
- try and discern the role of the school in the concepts and the total worldview of the child.

Important Religious Concepts

Although the results in this chapter are presented in distinct categories, such differentiation is purely functionary so as to mark out the different areas of discussion. As will become apparent, the discussions were not so separate and instead ideas were woven together, demonstrating both philosophical and structural complexity.

God

'God is; God is a thing. God is important to me, I dunno why' – Martin.

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[1] This feeling matches other children's comments about serving - see p.65.

In pursuing the concept of God a number of alternative images were explored. Martin's comment above is unusual in describing God as a 'thing' for most of the children presented anthropomorphic images of God. However, in common with the other children Martin's comments also suggest that the concept is relevant and meaningful to his worldview. The images of God explored by other children at St Anne's were female and male[1]. In transcript 25[2] we can consider a discussion between Helen and Martin:

- both make strong 'I' statements about God instead of backing it images with a voice of authority;

- when Helen starts talking about what she's intending to draw there is a connection between her concept of God and the experience of her mum going into hospital, suggesting that God is part of her experience and has a meaning relevant to her life;

- Martin's comments suggest that he is, to some extent, playing with possible images of God: he states clearly that he doesn't really care if God is a man or a woman and that as far as he's concerned no one really knows anyway. Later in the interview Martin employs a different way of talking about God: this time it is not in the personal sphere of what **he** thinks but rather in terms of what 'everyone says' – 'everyone says that God wears rags'.

In transcript 26[3] the children clearly play with the concept of God whilst at the same time addressing deeper issues about image. We can track the developing lines of thought in the following way:

- initially all the children play with the idea of God as an old man – 'a cool guy with a long beard and a bald head, he's like Father Christmas';

- Emily then offers an alternative suggestion, 'why can't God be a girl instead?';

- Richard, Joseph and Cedric are not willing to play with this concept and present arguments as to why this couldn't be possible;

- Richard simply states that God couldn't be a girl because 'girls are stupid';

- Joseph and Cedric then draw on the story of Adam and Eve in different ways to support their argument;

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 25, p.16.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 25, p.16.
[3] See appendix A, transcript 26, p.16.

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- Joseph introduces Adam and cites the fact that God made Adam, a man, first and so God couldn't be a woman. (Interestingly he has shifted from 'girl' to 'woman');
- Cedric takes the story one step further to reinforce the argument: Eve ate the apple and tempted Adam to take a bite as well - we have moved to an argument based on women as the reason for original sin;
- Joseph's question, 'what about the dinosaurs?' shows that he has some difficulty in completely accepting this line of thought as he tries to fit it together with other ideas which also inform him about the world in its earliest days;
- Emily responds to the boys' arguments by pointing out that '**everyone** always considers him as a man but **you** don't **know** do you?' Here she refers to people in general, other voices of authority, and then focuses on the boys in particular - neither of whom **know** what God is like;
- Joseph is forced to admit that no, they don't and Emily explains why they don't; they 'haven't been to heaven'.

There is very little input from the interviewer in this transcript, it is the children who explore, negotiate and listen with each other and as with all the conversations about God there is a greater level of engagement as the children explore the concept.

I pursued the relevance of God for the children in other interviews: many readily replied that they felt close to God, although they were unable to articulate this further as to why they felt this to be the case. In some instances, however, children like Richard showed a sensitive awareness:

> Q: do you feel close to God?
> Emily: sometimes, sometimes
> Joseph: I do all the time
> Richard: when I score a goal in football I do.

Richard's comments affirm our earlier observations about the important place of football in several children's lives and he offers a further example of how football provides a framework for understanding and communicating different experiences and emotions. Richard relates and interprets his experience of scoring goals to his concept of God and what God is like for him: the two are brought together as he identifies scoring goals with being close to God.

Jesus

Presuming that through school the children would be made familiar with a number of stories about Jesus I decided to try and put together a picture of how the these stories were integrated with concepts of God and whether Jesus had any significance or relevance beyond this in their worldview. As is evident in transcript 27[1] the school appears to have a significant role in presenting the children with an understanding of Jesus, although the children themselves differentiate between what the school tells them and what they personally think. In transcript 27, for example, Richard clearly appreciates the difference between his personal belief and what he learns at school: he is familiar with crosses at school and he has seen a video and although these enable him to build up a narrative he remains cautious of its value - they could be 'fake'.

Transcript 28[2] shows how other children at St Anne's portrayed the importance of Jesus in relation to his death and it's relevance for their lives. We can note the conversation's progression in the following way:

- the children begin by discussing the figure of Jesus in a very detached way, specifically how he looks - as a strong and big man;

- I then pose the question, 'why was Jesus special?';

- Richard replies first by saying that he died for us;

- this response is somewhat lost in an ensuing discussion about the miracles of Jesus such as healing and turning water into wine;

- Sarah, not apparently satisfied with these miraculous stories adequately explaining the 'specialness' of Jesus, returns to the fact that Jesus 'got killed for us, he died for us'.

- Emily strengthens this by adding that Jesus is now 'immortal';

- Gemma takes the discussion another step further: the reason Jesus died was to give life to people in the future, either he would die or we would;

- I respond by suggesting that we were going to die anyway weren't we?

- the children now deal with the concept of Jesus in a different way: they talk from a personal perspective and are grappling with something that has relevance to their own death and mortality;

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 27, p.17.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 28, p.17.

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- Jesus died for them because they do things wrong (Sarah), however, they will not die, but will go to be with Jesus (Richard) and through Jesus they have a better chance of going to heaven (Gemma).
- here Jesus impinges on them personally and they become engaged in the narrative in a deeper way.

Transcript 29[1] provides a further insight into the role of the school, its RE and the capability of the children to reflect on and communicate their personal worldviews. In this conversation James and Nicholas, neither of whom regularly attend church, talk about the relationship between God and Jesus. Their thoughts on the subject are quite different:

- James is not interested in Jesus;
- Nicholas is interested in Jesus;
- Nicholas is interested because Jesus is 'definitely' kind, he knows that because Jesus died on the cross, which he wouldn't have done if he was 'evil';
- James is not interested in Jesus because we had just been talking about God and they are 'exactly the same thing', the 'same person';
- Nicholas doesn't think that God and Jesus are the 'same thing', he doesn't know how they could be;
- James replies to Nicholas' question about how God and Jesus can be the same thing by answering that their souls are like pieces of a puzzle that click together.

The image of Jesus as kind and 'dying on the cross for us', presented by Nicholas, is built on what we can assume is learnt and reinforced at school. It is possible that James also builds on what is learnt and reinforced at school, however, there is, I feel, more ownership of his ideas. Take, for example, his emphatic language used to justify why he didn't want to talk about Jesus; he describes them as 'exactly' the same person. On its own this would be a weak argument to support what I interpret as James' personal reflections and construction of understanding. However, James' use of metaphor to explain how God and Jesus fit together is strikingly relevant and natural, something explained and presented with import and meaning.

Holy Spirit

In a few cases the Holy Spirit was another religious concept mentioned by the children. Sarah describes it as 'like a person but they have like wings and they're

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 29, p.18.

dressed all in white'. Other children at St Anne's School 'played' with the imagery and concept of the Holy Spirit[1] - a contrast to the type of discussions that took place about Jesus. Although the topic of the Holy Spirit is pursued with playfulness, it may be noted that these suggestions also contain notions of judgement and death, themes that appear regularly throughout the children's explorations of religious concepts.

Devil

The boys in particular enjoyed discussing the devil and in some cases changed the conversation from God to talk about the devil and hell instead[2]. As transcript 31 illustrates[3], many took delight in being as gruesome as possible in their descriptions, playing around with the concept, probing into the character and activities of the devil. Throughout these discussions the theme of judgement is evident again – judgement in relation to temptation and what happens when people die. Transcript 32[4], presenting a number of different images and ideas, exemplifies the way many groups talked about temptation:

- the devil flies around checking on people, stabbing them if they're good – Richard;
- introducing another role for the devil, tempting people, Cedric offers an idea that is eagerly picked up by others in the group;
- I ask where God fits into this imagery;
- the group work together to create an alternative, opposite image of God that urges people to be good;
- this develops into a characterisation of people as being split in two;
- Cedric identifies the outcome of this 'playing' as 'conscience'.

Through their playing the children unpack their images and recreate them. In exploring the concepts together it is interesting that they end up identifying what they are investigating as conscience, something they all appear to be familiar with.

Limbo

Transcript 33[5] presents another section from the same interview, illustrating once more the tendency of the children to play with concepts, although instead of conscience they arrived at something different; this time the concept of limbo as a

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 30, p.19.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 31, p.19.
[3] See appendix A, transcript 31, p.19.
[4] See appendix A, transcript 32, p.19.
[5] See appendix A, transcript 33, p.20.

way of resolving the middle ground between heaven and hell. In the midst of their playing, however, there are a number of ideas exchanged that centre on the nature of God, the devil, and the relationship between the two:

- Cedric proposes that God always triumphs over the devil because God is good and the devil is evil, God has to beat the devil because he is perfect;
- Joseph points out that God doesn't always beat the devil;
- Gemma resolves this contradiction by claiming that they take turns at winning;
- Joseph comes up with an alternative solution; a 'middle-man' in between God and the devil called 'limbo-man', this person is later transposed to a place between heaven and hell.

Heaven and Hell

Providing a context for the children's conversations about God and the devil the concepts of heaven and hell were discussed and played with enthusiastically by many of the children at St Anne's[1]. Transcript 34[2] reflects the diversity of images put forward:

- Jesus is in heaven, he lives forever (Richard);
- everyone lives forever in heaven because it's 'so nice' (Richard);
- your soul goes to heaven (Gemma) and your body stays on the earth (Emily);
- Joseph queries how it is possible to stand on a cloud and Gemma answers that you can walk on air;
- Emily offers an alternative image; it's a natural paradise, like Hawaii.

These images are framed within a narrative that employs language and ideas that the children are familiar with, heaven, for example, being described as 'nice', 'perfect' and 'paradise'. Through these words they express a concept of heaven which is like the best place that can be imagined.

In transcript 34[3] Jesus and souls are the only religious concepts mentioned, whereas Maria, on the other hand, presents imagery that incorporates other religious motifs:

> 'it's a nice friendly place, all white, its all white …of course there are people there. Everyone's wearing white. There's angels too and they wear white gowns and they've got a rosary, a blue rosary'.

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[1] See, for example, appendix A, transcript 34, p.21.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 34, p.21.
[3] See appendix A, transcript 34, p.21.

Making use of a stronger religious narrative Maria's construct is very different, emphasising the whiteness of heaven and introducing angels and rosaries. In vivid contrast to the peaceful, white, nice imagery of heaven, hell is invariably depicted as a red, hot place with lots of things happening. Indeed it is described as so exciting that some children comment that it would be a preferable place to be because heaven is 'just paradise'[1]. Departing from the heaven and hell narratives presented by many children, Nicholas offers a different idea that draws on his knowledge about space and lack of gravity which can cause things to float around indefinitely[2].

Most children discussed the concepts of heaven and hell and when encouraged were happy to reflect and play with the meaning of each concept, demonstrating that it not only explained what happens when people die, but also enabled them to approach and investigate the concept of judgement. This latter theme evidently had a place in their developing worldview, as I will now illustrate.

Judgement

Detailing a conversation between Robert and Stephen transcript 37[3] demonstrates the significance of the theme of judgement for these two boys. They begin by describing what they think God does in heaven, which in turn leads them on to consider the nature of God and how God judges people's behaviour. Initially the boys are dealing with how God can see everything: it is something they accept and then try to explain using the imagery of lots of eyes (five million) and God's palm (the size of the world) in which God writes down what people do wrong. Stephen also draws on familiar images from his own life - television and videos - as a way of explaining how God can watch everyone.

Transcript 37[4] details two discussions from the same interview. In both conversations punishment and judgement is linked to death: for Stephen death is determined by how bad a person is; the more someone does wrong, the sooner they die. This idea is evidenced by the fact that everyone dies, which 'proves we all do something wrong'. The inevitably of death, for Stephen, is that no one can be good all the time, and so we all have to die. Death is a punishment for doing wrong. Robert does not perceive death in the same way: for him God knows how long a person will

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 35, p.21.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 36, p.22.
[3] See appendix A, transcript 37, p.22.
[4] See appendix A, transcript 37, p.22.

live and death is not a punishment for being bad. In working through the concept of judgement Robert refers to heaven and hell as accommodating punishment for a person's wrong doings.

The Death Package

In many of the discussions about God, the devil, heaven and hell we have observed the children 'playing' with the concepts. Through their playing I would argue that we can see that these concepts impinge on their meaning construction and have a personal significance for the children involved. Further illustration of this is offered by Richard and Robert in their comments about the times when they think about 'things like heaven and hell':

> Q: do you think about things like heaven and hell much?
> Robert: no
> Richard: yeh, sometimes, like when I'm alone in my bedroom I think about it, I like it up there in my room.
> Robert: yeh, you can get away from everything.

Despite the apparent frivolity of their earlier discussions this highlights the need to recognise that such issues are of concern for these children. Playing with religious concepts such as heaven and hell, the devil and God enables them to construct their own understanding, with all these different concepts contributing to the child's own 'death package' that helps them address the whole issue of death and mortality. From the children's interviews at St Anne's other themes also contribute to this death package and they can be identified as ghosts, the practicalities of death and dealing with personal experiences of death and loss.

Ghosts

Ghosts were only briefly mentioned at St Anne's. In forming their narratives on this topic many drew on images from films and programmes seen on television, as we can see in transcript 38[1]. Here the children agree that ghosts exist and to support this Joseph refers to the television programme *Strange But True*, a programme about ghosts. Caroline backs up her reply by talking about the occurrence of unexpected events, such as things falling off shelves for no reason. I then raise the question, 'so what are ghosts?' I do this for two reasons: firstly to probe their ideas and secondly as a way of finding out how ghosts fit in with other concepts they have discussed in

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 38, p.23.

relation to death. The children's descriptions of ghosts in transcript 38 are drawn from different influences and aspects of their worldviews[1]:

- Paul describes ghosts as 'little men who want to frighten you';
- Nicholas brings in the religious concept of souls to explain them - 'people's souls that just go round and round';
- James introduces another religious concept - ghosts are 'people that go to hell';
- referring to the film *Ghosts* to substantiate his comments, James explains the ability of ghosts to turn into a liquid and go down a drain, something which he didn't think 'they' could do but he now accepts as a further characteristic of them.
- Paul deals with the nature of ghosts by depicting them as good rather than bad - 'they are true and friendly but they just like to haunt you, they don't mean to do anything wrong'.

There are two main observations that may be drawn from this conversation. Firstly, the concept of ghosts is incorporated into the children's worldviews as something that exists and is relevant for understanding what happens when people die - television programmes and films are cited in order to support this belief. Secondly, we can see that the children are able to reflect in detail on the nature of ghosts; they do this by pulling together other concepts and ideas they are familiar with such as hell and souls.

Death and the Practicalities of Dead Bodies

Several children spoke in practical, concrete terms when talking about people who had died and transcript 39 is illustrative of this as two boys consider the pros and cons of creation versus burial[2].

Experiences of Death and Loss

Personal experiences of death and loss were also openly discussed in the interviews and as we have already noted the importance of pets and dealing with their loss was a significant area of many children's lives, as Jenni and Bonnie illustrate[3]. In recounting their experiences both girls demonstrate a close attachment to their pets and display strong feelings of loss which they describe as making them feel 'sad' and 'upset'. Whereas Jenni's story explores the idea of bunny heaven as the place her

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 38, p.23.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 39, p.24.
[3] See appendix A, transcript 40, p.24; transcript 41, p.25.

rabbit might have gone[1], Bonnie's narrative[2] dwells on her communicating her profound feelings of loss and she relates a range of situations and experiences to emphasise this:

- when her gerbil died she 'got really upset' and stayed upstairs, 'I wouldn't come down all day';
- the gerbil was a special birthday present. The special attachment Bonnie feels is contrasted with two fish of hers who died at the same time; 'I wasn't really that sad about that really';
- she still gets upset about the loss of her gerbil when it is mentioned at home;
- she still thinks about her gerbil a lot and goes off to her room to be on her own to think about it.

The girls' narratives convey an intensity of experience and coping with loss that impacts upon them spiritually, morally, socially, emotionally and physically. Thus we might conclude that these experiences and reflections make a significant contribution to their developing worldviews.

In addition to the death of a pet some children spoke about their experiences of the death of a relative[3] and transcript 42[4] details part of a group interview where Mike addresses others in the group asking, 'have you had anyone in your family die?' In response the three boys all talk freely about their experiences of family members being seriously ill or dying. Three issues are raised in their discussion:

- the death of family relations, grandparents and great-grandparents, even those whom they haven't even seen, are important to them;
- they can narrate their direct experiences of someone dying, or being very ill;
- they would have liked to go to their relative's funeral but they were not allowed.

In articulating their common experiences the boy's experiences are affirmed and explored in relation to each other. What is noteworthy is not just the content of the conversations but also the processes involved as the children investigate the concepts together.

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 40, p.24.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 41, p.25.
[3] See appendix A, transcript 42, p.26.
[4] See appendix A, transcript 42, p.26.

Worldviews - Variety of Influences

Having presented data from St Anne's School to reflect different aspects of the children's worldviews this next section will point to conversations that demonstrate the influence of different agencies in the worldview construction process.

Church

Following the discussion in transcript 43[1] we can observe how the church is one influence in the development of children's concepts and understanding:

- the transcript begins with Bonnie acknowledging that church is an important influence in her life because she learns about God there;

- in the ensuing discussion Maria agrees with Bonnie that learning about God is important;

- Robert then challenges the girls' claims, raising the issue of truth and proof;

- proof is offered by Stephen (who asks 'who made the world?') and Martin (who refers to the Bible's authority, asserting that 'God was there in the beginning');

- the discussion is now grounded in those who can only provide questions (Robert and Maria) and those who have answers (Stephen and Martin). Neither can satisfy the other position;

- it can be noted that the boys talk about what God looks like in different ways:

  > Martin – '**we** don't know'; '**people** think'; '**I don't think that, I** just think'.
  > Stephen – '**I reckon**'.

This lengthy discussion illustrates once again the importance of the concept of God in the children's worldviews:

- it demonstrates how the children use and respond to different influences as they explore the concept of God;

- there is an interesting relationship between what the children understand as their own opinions alongside other authoritative influences;

- the group differentiates between 'what people say' and what they themselves think;

- the children draw on common imagery such as 'children of God' to support their own ideas about God and heaven.

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 43, p.27.

The influence of the church in the construction of Bonnie's worldview, combined with what she learns from her mother, is triangulated further in comments she makes during her second interview:

> 'when he asks I tell my brother that God's kind of invisible like some of the super heroes he reads about ...I find out about God at church or my mum tells me'.

The analogy Bonnie uses when talking to her brother is intriguing: she is able to relate an image of God with a framework of meaning that her brother is already familiar with – instead of an abstract or religious metaphor she employs superheroes and their invisibility.

School and RE – Lessons and Beyond Lessons to Further Issues of Belief and Unbelief

Transcript 44[1] is a particularly lengthy section of transcript, however, to cut it shorter would, I feel, have done the children an injustice. Throughout the length of the conversation the discussion is personal, reflective and open, demonstrating how each of the boys are engaged in considering the concepts and ideas that are put forward. The interview offers an insight into how the boys confront, question and use the religious ideas communicated to them: they show no automatic assent or agreement to what they are told and reflect on what they hear, thinking for themselves and creating their own ideas. In transcript 44 we can note the following pertinent points:

- Lines 1 – 20

    A significant issue is whether God is true, whether there is any proof. Belief and disbelief are expressed simultaneously and the boys contrast their situation to that of the staff at the school; whereas teachers 'make out that it's true' and believe, the boys are less sure and even doubt that anyone really knows if God is really true or not.

- Lines 21 - 34

    The significance of God is located in the existential issue of death; the importance of God is in relation to what happens when you die. **Belief** is a crucial consideration in making sense of the narrative they construct: it provides a linchpin for the 'story' because unless you believe in God, you will not go to heaven.

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 44, p.29. The lines of this transcript are numbered so that it is easier to connect the boys' narratives with the points being made.

- Lines 35 - 53

  Matthew and Mike refer to the place of television as an authoritative expression of what happens when people die.

- Lines 86 – 104

  Here Adam begins by questioning not just the appearance of God but the name 'God' itself. Mike does not see this as reasonable; 'it's got to be God'. The group considers the image of God: it is discussed in different ways as what 'some people' think (Matthew), what 'everyone says' (Adam) and what they themselves think; 'I think' and 'I reckon'.

- Lines 105 - 122

  Mike returns to an earlier philosophical issue, whether God is 'true' or not. The philosophical debate that he has with himself begins with the proposition that God exists because people exist, there has got to be something. The problem with this is that to believe in God requires one to also believe in hell and the devil because it says so in the Bible. This is clearly a problem for Mike and he resolves the dilemma by suggesting that maybe the Bible isn't true, no one can really tell.

- Lines 123 - 174

  Perhaps encouraged by Mike's deliberations, the boys return to the issue of beginnings. This is initiated by Matthew who introduces the idea of 'us being brought up by apes' - not his idea but as something his 'brother's ex-girlfriend said'. As the boys unpack the implications of an evolutionary explanation, Matthew focuses the discussion clearly, framing the question, 'you've got to go right back to the beginning'. Mike, who has already brought in Adam and Eve, immediately directs his attention to God as a way of addressing this question. The boys try to link a narrative about God together with the idea of apes: an inquiry that leaves them with many unresolved questions.

  Mike suggests that the only way any answers could be reached would be to ask a relative in heaven. In the same breath, however, he questions this because there might not be a heaven. This launches the boys onto a further consideration, what is heaven like? Mike quickly responds with 'paradise' and Matthew says, 'the earth'. When encouraged to explore these images further Mike talks about 'what people say' rather than his own ideas. He questions people who 'say that heaven is in the clouds' by describing the way a rocket goes into space and doesn't find

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heaven there. Trying to resolve these conflicts Adam suggests that if they are in the clouds God and heaven 'must be' invisible, just like ghosts. Matthew takes the concept further, if God and heaven were in the sky why doesn't everything drop out of the sky?

In this remarkable discussion the children tackle conflicting ideas and concepts, trying to bring together a meaningful and coherent worldview. As we have seen in other conversations from St Anne's, they are clearly capable of unpacking and challenging the concepts they are presented with.

- Lines 175 - 199

The interview continues to explore the nature of God as the boys ponder whether God can change things in the world. Narrowing their thoughts to a more personal level I ask them if they ever pray and ask God for things. Mike and Adam quietly but assuredly admit that they do pray and their responses reveal a personal investment in prayer. When asked if their prayers are heard, Mike's replies show how the issues of belief and disbelief have a personal significance and that even on this level he is still grappling with the basic question, is it true or not? Mike's comments about having to 'really, really believe and always believe' raise issues about the nurture of children in religious faith and its relationship with their own personal development. This study is concerned with this very relationship and Mike's comments prompt a number of questions:

- how has Mike developed this polarity and clear cut distinction between either believing or disbelieving in God as the only options available to him?
- where does he get the opportunity to reflect and consider these personally important issues?
- how is the school's RE facilitating or empowering Mike's self-esteem and confidence in his search for meaning and construction of a worldview?

- Lines 200 - 231

These lines reinforce the dichotomy between belief and disbelief that the boys appear to be negotiating. The section begins with the boys willing to engage in a debate about good and evil. They approach the concepts in thoughtful way, working together to explore what the ideas mean and again Mike employs the principle of belief to understand the concept presented to him.

- Lines 233 - 254

These last lines contextualize the boy's situation and framework of meaning making. Regarding those who impact upon the boys' lives and construction of worldviews, 'other people' does not include the church for Adam and Mike. We might therefore presume that in this case 'other people' can be identified as the school and home environment, with some impact from the media. The conversation ends with the boys locating themselves in terms of religious identity. Rather than talking about himself directly, Matthew speaks of his parents, his father being 'the other religion' which means that Matthew goes to different churches rather than just one. When asked if he is Catholic however, Matthew identifies himself as one. Adam also describes himself as a Catholic and Mike doesn't seem to know. This uncertainty is addressed by Matthew who reminds Mike that he **must** be a Catholic to come to St Anne's.

Adam and Mike's final comments offer interesting individual reflections on religious identity. Adam's claim that 'it's up to you really' presents religious identity as a personal decision and his confidence and awareness in this seems to have been exemplified throughout the interview. Mike's comment is intriguing in a different way: recalling earlier feelings expressed about belief and disbelief it may be that in declaring 'I'm not really a Christian' Mike sees that he does not to believe enough to call himself a Christian. Having so many questions and doubts possibly negates, in his worldview, the possibility of being a Christian.

Voices of Authority and Finding Your Own Voice

What has emerged from the data from St Anne's is that the children's worldviews are constructed in two ways:

1. they recognise that they have their own independent ideas and opinions as individuals;
2. they also comprehend the way other agencies provide concepts and alternative worldviews.

These two aspects appear to inter-relate in different ways and this last section presents further examples of data that show how the children balance voices of authority with their own developing worldviews. By investigating these agencies, alongside the nature of the children's worldviews in general, we can address the concerns of this study: alongside the impact of families and faith communities how does a

denominational school and its RE contribute to the child's understanding and construction of a worldview?

Group Interview

Transcript 45[1] is similar to the previously discussed conversation with Mike, Adam and Matthew[2]. In this interview Caroline, Keiron, Nicholas, James and Paul consider concepts that are important to them, whilst also reflecting on what they learn at school about God:

- Lines 1 - 14

  In this first part of the transcript I ask the group about what they believe in as Catholics. The answers are given easily and somewhat 'off pat' by Nicholas ('one God, God's love never ends') and Keiron ('God has no beginning or end'). When asked if they are told this, they readily agree that this is what they are told in assemblies (James) and RE (Nicholas). Responding to my questions Nicholas and James say that they like learning about God, whereas Paul says he doesn't.

  Reflecting on the interview process it may be noted that although the children are engaged and answering my questions, I am nevertheless operating within a simple question and answer framework. The interview is still waiting for the children to shift the focus to themselves and concepts that have particular relevance for them.

  Nicholas' reflection that 'you should go to church and like it' raises two interesting points: firstly, he connects God's importance with church and secondly, this carries the implication that not only should 'you' go to church, but that 'you should go to church **and like it**'.

- Lines 15 - 31

  As the fourth group interview at St Anne's the themes of belief and disbelief had already begun to emerge from the data and consequently I decided to introduce a question that would hopefully encourage the group to address these issues. At this point in the discussion it can be noted that my question affects the 'process' of engagement and interaction, permitting the interview to 'take off'. The children's responses and subsequent discussion raised the following points:

  - to my starter question 'do you think people should believe in God or not?' Caroline and Nicholas respond with a simultaneous and simple 'yes';

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 45, p.36.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 44, p.29.

- Nicholas then qualifies his 'yes' with the comment 'some people don't believe in it' and it is this, rather than my question, which enlivens the interview and facilitates the children moving to a deeper level of engagement as they work together with their ideas and questions about God;

- affirming Nicholas Keiron states that 'some people don't think it's true', and in response Nicholas takes his thoughts a step further: 'cos if people didn't believe in God, if nobody believed in God, the earth would not be made because God made it'. Here Nicholas makes a connection between believing and the existence of God and the earth; the concepts are linked together in such a way as to suggest that it is only through people believing that God actually exists, that God can exist. Following his argument through Nicholas adds that if people didn't believe in God there wouldn't be an earth. This is because God wouldn't be there to make the earth if people didn't believe in him in the first place;

- until now Paul has remained disinterested in the group discussion but he enters the discussion by posing the question 'but who made God?' This is no flippant remark from Paul - despite me interrupting him Paul repeats his question to the group. Even after James contributes the evolutionary theme to the discussion Paul is intent on making his point, also asking 'and who was God's dad?';

- James joins in the discussion and his contribution is an 'I' statement; '**I know** where people come from, people came from apes'. Thus another interview becomes engaged with the issue of beginnings and God, as evolution versus 'God creating the world' is highlighted and tackled by the group of children;

- Keiron dismisses the evolutionary idea as being of any benefit by commenting, 'nah, Christians don't believe in that';

- Nicholas and Matthew defend the creator God image by asking the others how the world could have 'carried ...on from the beginning to make all of this?' (Nicholas) and 'who made that there?' (Matthew);

- evident in this group discussion, as before, is the willingness and ability of the children to develop and explore significant issues which raise philosophical, as well as spiritual, moral and religious questions for them.

- Lines 32 - 58

  As a means of exploring the children's images and use of language about God I ask 'do you think God is like a person?' Paul and Matthew give a clear 'no' whilst Nicholas says 'yes' followed with the uncertainty that 'he might be a boy or a girl'. There is little opportunity to pursue this further because Caroline, who has said only a few words so far, breaks in with re-introducing the 'who made God?' debate, or as she asks, 'when did he first start ... he must have started somewhere. what was the beginning stage?' James provides one possible answer; that in the beginning stage God was 'maybe a ghost' and Matthew tells the group '**I believe** he's **like** a magician with like a magic wand'.

  What is apparent throughout their discussion is that although acceptable answers are hard to come by, the group can raise lots of questions in order to investigate the credibility and meaning of concepts. I make this observation recognising that as adults we tend to operate in the same way; those issues that are of greater significance to us are frequently those that remain mysteries with few easy answers.

- Lines 59 – 113

  Picking up on Paul's image of God I try to investigate this further and directly ask him, 'what do you think of God?' Despite my questioning the other children take the conversation in a completely different but valuable direction and instead of considering images of God we end up returning to the theme of belief and disbelief in God, this time focussed specifically on Paul.

  I begin by asking Paul what he thinks about God but instead of getting an answer from him, Nicholas and James both tell me that Paul doesn't believe in God. I am curious to see how Paul will respond to what is presented as an accusation and his reply is a vehement 'I do, I do, I do'. I am now balancing two different feelings, on the one hand I feel quite protective and sympathetic to Paul's position in the midst of such peer pressure, whilst on the other I am fascinated even more by Paul's thinking about God. What I have seemingly discovered is a child who is dealing with the conflict of a God that he is told exists, but whose images and conceptualisation he finds difficult to build into his personal worldview. I felt very privileged to be in such a position, to be allowed right to the heart of a child's personal thoughts and understanding. I acknowledge these very subjective aspects

of the interview because they affected the rest of this interview significantly. In being sensitive and aware of what Paul may or may not be going through my questions actually allowed and, I believe, encouraged, the other children to also express some doubts they had about God.

Thus my comment, 'it doesn't matter if you don't believe in God' was intended to send a message to Paul whilst at the same time challenge the others; it worked because Caroline quickly responded with '**I think** it does'. Similarly my other efforts to reach Paul evidently touch Nicholas who remarks, '**I do believe** in him **but I don't believe** in him'. Thus the conflict concerning belief in God, which I interpreted in Paul, now appears to be expressed by Nicholas. Again I was aware of a heightened sensitivity to the children's vulnerability that was clearly tangible in the group at this point. It was a 'hair prickling on the back of the neck' feeling, and the questions which follow need to be comprehended in this context. They are posed with this subjective element very prominently exposed, whilst I also try to gently take the children further with the concepts and ideas they are discussing. Together with their conversation about judgement and heaven and hell this group interview signals once more the crucial significance of concepts such as God and judgement for the children at St Anne's. Also notable is the disparity between what they think and believe/ disbelieve versus their perceptions of the belief structure that operates amongst other people and at school.

Second Interview with Robert and Stephen

Transcript 46[1] also attends to the issues of voices of authority and the individual voices of children in the construction of worldviews. This time the context is a second interview with Robert and Stephen who demonstrate a clear ownership of their personal ideas and concepts, which they distinguish from what is external to them[2]. By storying some of Stephen and Robert's narratives separately we can see more clearly how tight and coherent their narratives are[3]. These stories accentuate the themes of inquiry and searching for understanding, an individual quest that is independent and separate from other agencies in the boys' lives. These agencies, identified by the boys as their families, the church and school, sometimes contribute

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 46, p.40.
[2] This evident, for example in lines 1-55 where both boys talk in the first person and express an interest in God. With fascinating self-awareness they are able to reflect on how their feelings and beliefs about God have changed since they were young.
[3] See appendix A, transcript 46, p.42f, lines 59-82.

to their understanding, whilst on other occasions they are recognised as not being of much use – 'I'd never ask any of the teachers about it, they wouldn't listen'. Although it is valuable to story the boy's narratives in this way it should also be remembered that significant in this conversation is the powerful way Robert and Stephen affirm each other's ideas and questions[1].

The theme of personal experience and individual reflection stands out in this transcript: as we see in the boys' discussion about heaven what is quite incredible is the way Stephen communicates his understanding of heaven by recounting a personal experience. His narrative, with Robert's comments supporting and encouraging him, is illuminated with the competency and confidence of each boy to reflect and recount aspects of their worldviews. This same level of personal reflection is expressed in Robert and Stephen's discussion about prayer where they become movingly open in speaking about their doubts, how prayer relates to their concepts of God and how this makes them feel[2]. What the boys disturbingly convey is a perception of prayer that is limited because they feel unimportant and insignificant compared to God. Neither boy thinks that God likes listening to their prayers, as Stephen comments, 'we're nothing compared to God, he's so powerful...I'm not important to him...cos I'm not! It's as simple as that, I'm not that er, because like I'm not like up there, and I'm not a saint even though I try to be good'. The same kinds of doubts are expressed by Robert; 'really you're talking to thin air, to yourself really, but you don't really realise it ... I don't think he [God] always listens to me because everyday someone's talking to him at the same time as someone else'. Despite these doubts Robert does not communicate as much low esteem as Stephen; his responses to Stephen are sensitive and affirming, as well as discreetly suggesting an alternative narrative in which the boys **are** important to God. The way Robert and Stephen talk about themselves in the context of prayer and God is very different to how they speak about cubs; being a cub appears to make them feel important, as well as giving a strong identity and sense of belonging[3]. I try to pursue what it feels like for Stephen to feel important but it is something he can not put into words.

In this transcript Robert and Stephen identify the school, church, family and cubs as the voices of authority in their lives. These influences provide conflicting and

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[1] See also appendix A, transcript 46, p.43f, lines 86-110.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 46, p.44f, lines 112-159.
[3] See appendix A, transcript 46, p.45, lines 161-203.

enabling narratives and worldviews as they combine with each boy's own experiences and individuality.

Specific Voices of Authority – Church and Religious Faith

In addition to the school, the children at St Anne's identify the church as a further voice of authority in the construction of their own worldviews. I cite these sections of transcript about being a Catholic to provide as rich a context as possible for determining the place of RE in these children's understandings. Although I have already outlined some examples of children discussing the church as where they go to mass and learn about God[1], the following conversations are included to demonstrate the variety of ways in which religious identity has a significant place in the children's worldviews.

Baptism and Belonging

Discussing why she would like to be baptised Nicola's comments can be storied in the following way:

> '[my mum didn't get me baptised] because when I was a baby, we weren't in this country, we were in Wales. I'd like to get baptised though. I'd get a party. If I was baptised I think I would feel a bit closer to God, well, a lot, because when you're a Christian, you're close to God. Cos when you're baptised, when he puts the water on your head and he makes the sign of the cross on you and it makes you part of a big happy family'.

What is interesting in Nicola's story is the distinction she makes between her situation now and what it would be like if she was baptised:

- she would have a party;
- she would be a Christian;
- being a Christian she would be closer to God;
- being baptised and becoming a Christian she would be 'part of a big happy family'.

Nicola's understanding can be compared with Bonnie and Maria's conversation about church where, in their second interview, the girls, like Nicola, also refer to church and religious identity as being part of a 'family'[2]. Maria and Nicola employ the concept of 'family' differently to Bonnie: for Bonnie going to church does not connect everything together, instead, because of her home situation it is associated with

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[1] See, for example, appendix A, transcript 10, p.8.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 47, p.47.

dealing with conflict and unconnectedness. Although she is likely to have been 'given' the concept frequently at school and church Bonnie she does not use it because it does not correlate with her own experiences of family and church together.

The second section of this transcript tackles another issue raised by Nicola; the difference between being a Christian and not being a Christian and here we see Bonnie and Maria balancing two aspects of their lives:

- both girls have a parent who is not a Catholic but this does not make that parent distinctly different to them;
- being a Catholic does make a difference to how Bonnie and Maria are; it makes them behave differently[1].

Transcript 48[2], from a second interview with Richard and Robert, provides an alternative understanding of religious identity where the boys appear to approach the issue with more indifference than the girls. That said the religious identity of both boys does appear to impinge on them in some way; Robert comments how being a Catholic means you have to do certain things and for Richard it involves occasionally going to mass. Later in the interview I ask the boys about what they learn at church and this illustrates in greater detail how going to church and religious identity is part of their worldviews. Interestingly the 'voice of authority' is specified as the Bible, not a person. It is 'Bible reading', the 'stories', which inform them about God, although both boys express doubts about how true they are.

Another Voice of Authority - The Place of the School and RE in the Children's Worldviews.

In the presentation of data from St Anne's I have outlined the different ways in which the children discussed how they understood themselves, the world and religious concepts. This has been within the context of the whole of their lives and experience as well as what they said about school and RE. The place of RE within these worldviews will be examined further in chapter 4.

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 47, p.47.
[2] See appendix A, transcript 48, p.48.

ST BEATRICE'S

Introduction to School

St Beatrice's Roman Catholic Primary School is to be found on the other side of town to St Anne's, serving a middle to upper class area just outside the town centre. At the time of my research there were 230 children on roll and I worked with the top class, year 6. Mrs Baker (the head) took the class for RE and she felt that this would be the most suitable class to interview as other staff might feel threatened by me investigating their classes.

My first conversations with Mrs Baker took place at the beginning of the academic year to arrange my coming into the school. After this I only saw her a couple times; once on leaving the school building and then for an arranged meeting in her office after school. This latter meeting functioned in a similar way to my regular, brief discussions with the class teacher: as their RE teacher she verified information about the children and spoke about what had been addressed during her RE lessons.

My relationship with St Beatrice's was very different to St Anne's. The general pattern was for me to come to the school, sign in at the office and proceed to the classroom where Miss Bailey (class teacher) had selected a group for me to interview. I then spent between half an hour to an hour with them before they went home. As the interviews took place at the end of the day I tried to 'catch' Miss Bailey after school for a brief chat and although this only allowed for a few minutes of talking it triangulated some of the children's conversations, backgrounds and characters[1].

Although friendly and co-operative I felt that I had a limited relationship with the head and class teacher at St Beatrice's; their interest did not extend to pursuing me for information or inquiring into how I was getting on. Instead I frequently felt slightly awkward and ill at ease, I sensed that they were simply 'helping me out with my studies', rather than taking any real interest in what I was doing. Qualifying these sentiments I recognise that the pressures on both members of staff were immense: year 6 were a lively group of children who required skilful handling and in addition to her role as head (which included, at the time of the research, trying to accommodate

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[1] On some occasions, however, it should be pointed out that I found I was discussing information that was new for the class teacher.

extensive building work into the school's routine), Mrs Baker regularly taught at least four times a week.

I report these feelings about my relationship with the school because they are interesting when aligned to the interviews and my relationship with the children. The first set of group interviews took place during the autumn term and two in-depth interviews were carried out in June with a pair of girls, Kate and Lucy, and a pair of boys, Arthur and Andrew.

The Teacher's Perspective – RE

In her questionnaire the head, Mrs Baker identifies the ethos at St Beatrice's School in the following way:

> 'a supportive environment that 'shows' love and respect for the uniqueness of the individual as well as recognising the 'family' of the school who work together and love each other'.[1]

Additionally she describes RE at the school as having a

> 'high priority – pervades all aspects of school life, our faith is a lived faith'.[2]

Like St Anne's School, the religious and particularly Roman Catholic character of St Beatrice's School was prominent in it's mission statement and physical environment, with religious pictures, crucifixes and prayers displayed throughout the school. In her questionnaire Miss Bailey also highlights the 'central role' of RE at the school, commenting that 'all planning starts from our RE topics'[3]. In their questionnaires both Mrs Baker and Miss Bailey expressed the opinion that they felt RE at the school to be relevant and meaningful for the children. When asked how children perceive RE Mrs Baker answers 'I hope positively. Something which relates directly to their own lives'[4]. Miss Bailey extends this to comment how RE encourages the children's ability to reflect in a personal way:

> 'our RE programme has in built quiet circle time for child's own reflections and a personal question for them to answer'.[5]

From their written responses in the questionnaires the head and class teacher communicate a distinct religious underpinning to St Beatrice's School where RE occupies a significant and meaningful role in the life of the school. Their comments,

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[1] Mrs Baker, questionnaire, q.2 – see appendix E.
[2] Mrs Baker, questionnaire, q.5 - see appendix E.
[3] Miss Bailey, questionnaire, q.5 – see appendix E.
[4] Mrs Baker, questionnaire, q.6 – see appendix E.
[5] Miss Bailey, questionnaire, q.10 – see appendix E.

as in the questionnaires from St Anne's School, contextualise my discussions with the children.

The Interviews

The group interviews with year 6 at St Beatrice's were very different from those at St Anne's where a considerable amount of joking between the children meant that my role was more often one of keeping order and taking charge. In contrast to this the second interviews were characterised by a completely different dynamic and allowed for data of greater depth, reflection and engagement from the children involved. Because of the difference between the two types of interviews I will present the results from St Beatrice's in two main parts; firstly the themes and ideas from the group interviews and then those from the second interviews.

GROUP INTERVIEWS

As I didn't enjoy having to keep the children quiet and attentive I found the group interviews at this school difficult. Finishing each interview I felt that the data could be of little use; the children did not seem to want to engage in any discussion and little, if anything was said about religious concepts and ideas. Nevertheless I worked with similar guiding aims to those I adopted in the other schools, trying to establish five different, yet interrelated, areas of the children's lives:

- the **nature** of the children's worldviews (who/what was important to them);
- how their worldview were **constructed** – key concepts, people, experiences;
- their **understanding** of religious concepts;
- the **significance** of religious concepts;
- the **place** of the school and its RE in their worldviews.

As I conducted each group interview the jovial, lively banter dominated each time and was carried by the majority of boys in the class. This element across the interviews was frustrating as it sabotaged any ground I broke with others that might have led to further in-depth discussion. In contrast to the children's degree of engagement at St Anne's my prompts and questions at St Beatrice's were received with short comments and remarks. There are perhaps two main reasons for this different interview climate that underpins the interview data:

- the older age of the children, which in turn affected the way that they related with each other, especially in girl-boy interactions;

- the class as a group seemed to have its own identity and code of conforming behaviour that was to the exclusion of any adults, including the class teacher. Such class cohesion was tangible when I arrived to collect a group of children, or when turning up at the end of the day as they were being dismissed to go home.

As I have remarked, initial group interviews seemed to produce little relevant data. As the joking manner continued I returned to the data and realised that a grounded approach transformed the interviews: instead of being an obstruction to what I was investigating the atmosphere of laughter and jokes possibly signalled an important part of the children's worldviews[1]. Such a realisation helped me in the subsequent group interviews, enabling me to feel considerably more relaxed and work with (rather than against) the children's jocular attitude. Three further key themes from the group interviews can be identified:

- themselves;
- relationships;
- Catholic identity – the role of the school and RE.

Themselves

As the children introduced themselves at the beginning of the group interviews I asked them to tell me their names and something they liked doing or something that was important to them. These introductions were useful as they built up a picture of the kinds of activities the children enjoyed. Several children mentioned horse riding, whilst others spoke of golf, archery, tennis, playing instruments and dance lessons[2]. Football was highlighted by some boys[3], but it was not extensively pursued in any group interviews, except for the mention of favourite players such as Ryan Giggs and Eric Cantona.

In transcript 2[4] Harry and Naomi introduce themselves in a different way: Harry speaks of how he 'enjoy[s] going round wrecking warehouses, abandoned ones, with my friends' as well as going into town[5]. Following on from Harry's introduction Naomi comments that something she's good at is 'being crazy, going mad'.

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[1] As well as this it was a fortunate coincidence that at the same time I came across Bakhtin's ideas of carnival, multi-voicedness and dialogue which also encouraged me to understand and appreciate the children's frivolity in a different way – see Quantz and O'Connor, 1988; Bakhtin, 1981.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 1, p.1.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 1, p.1.
[4] See appendix B, transcript 2, p.2.
[5] The freedom to go out unaccompanied was not permitted for all the children in the class; others like Jonathan did not even make their own way to school each day – see appendix B, transcript 2, p.2.

Relationships

As a way of trying to establish the nature of the children's worldviews I inquired about important people, places and things in their lives. Although their answers were characterised by short comments and lots of laughter the underlying theme of relationships was significant in many of their replies.

Significance of Extended Family

'Family' was identified by all the children as something that was important to them and this term was used in an extended way to include grandparents, uncles and aunts as well as siblings and parents[1]. Ben's comment about his grandfather[2] typifies how the atmosphere of laughing and joking was maintained even when the children made significant comments about themselves. At other times some interviews had brief moments of calm and seriousness[3], for example in transcript 3 Kate speaks about a Greek uncle, now dead, who was special to her, and Ben refers to an aunt in London whom he 'likes to be with'. These examples illustrate not just the extended nature of valued family relationships, but also the variety of places they are located in. As well as London and Greece others talked of cousins and grandparents in Florida, Cyprus and Oxfordshire[4].

Immediate Family – Parents, Brothers and Sisters

Some children in the class mentioned that they lived with only one parent[5] and others introduced their parents by identifying them through their jobs[6]. Reflecting the area in which St Beatrice's is situated many parents were from professional backgrounds, none were unemployed and in many households both parents worked full time which meant that several children had a nanny or au pair to care for them[7]. Transcript 6[8] illustrates how the children talked about their parents and other significant relationships: Alex and Ben refer to the way their mothers look after them by cooking

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 3, p.2.

[2] 'can I tell you about my grandfather? He died and I'm gonna inherit all his money *(laughs)*' – see appendix B, transcript 3, p.2.

[3] See appendix B, transcript 3, p.2.

[4] See appendix B, transcript 4, p.3.

[5] At my invitation to tell 'something special or important about yourself' Matthew speaks of living with one parent. Perhaps with a different environment he may have talked further but instead the dominant jovial atmosphere prevents this - see appendix B, transcript 5, p.4.

[6] See appendix B, transcript 1, p.1.

[7] See, for example, appendix B, transcript 1, p.1; transcript 8, p.5; transcript 50, p.76; transcript 32, p.39; transcript 35, p.44, lines 40-44.

[8] See appendix B, transcript 6, p.4.

and washing and they also mention the fact that their mothers give them money[1]. It is Theresa who picks up that neither boy says that their mothers love them and following this Alex agrees that yes, 'she gives me love'. The two themes of caring and money are triangulated towards the end of the interview when the group are invited to draw someone or something important to them[2]: Alex draws his mum 'cos she cooks all my meals for me or else I'd starve', and Matthew draws his uncle who is important 'cos he's worth a lot of money [and] I can get all the money'.

In transcript 8[3] this longer conversation highlights (1) how the children talked about their relationship with their parents and (2) how this is connected with other aspects of their lives. The following issues are raised:

- **busy parents**

   The group respond quickly to the proposition that perhaps 'people don't listen to children' by focussing on their parents[4]. Although Jonathan acknowledges that 'sometimes they do'[5] and Harry later comments that 'they usually listen' if there's something important to discuss[6], these two brief statements are made within the group's general consensus about how busy their parents are - 'too busy'[7] and 'just want to do their jobs'[8]. Both Jonathan and Isobel's parents work and there is clearly a mutual understanding of each other's experiences when Jonathan mentions how his dad spends so long reading the Sunday papers and doesn't hear anything he says[9]. He continues to express similar feelings about how busy his parents are throughout transcript 8:

   > 'I never see him [my Dad], he works all day and then when he gets in he wants to watch the news so we can't watch any cartoon network or anything like that'.[10]

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[1] Incidentally this is the same Ben who earlier linked money, specifically his inheritance, with the mention of his grandfather, who had died - see appendix B, transcript 3, p.2.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 7, p.5.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 8, p.5.
[4] See appendix B, transcript 8, p.5, line 6f.
[5] See appendix B, transcript 8, p.6, line 11.
[6] Line 30.
[7] Isobel, line 12.
[8] Jonathan, line 13.
[9] See lines 15ff.
[10] Jonathan, line 47f.

'I think its a pity cos my mum gets home at 6 every night and my dad doesn't come back until 8 ...you hardly ever get a chance to see them, apart from weekends'.[1]

- **feeling scared of parents**

  Isobel and Jonathan speak of how they're 'sometimes' scared of their parents: Isobel's mum 'has this wooden spoon that she uses when we're naughty'[2] and Jonathan talks about his father – 'no one's frightened of asking their mum that they want to watch the football or something but if you ask your dad he always goes, 'yeh' like that really loudly and he gets really angry like and he shouts while he's watching it'[3]. Later Harry talks about his dad being angry; 'my mum's alright but I do thump my sister, my dad gets quite angry and its quite frightening, he says, 'just sit, sit' and then he gets really angry but if you leave him for a long time he's alright'[4].

- **brothers and sisters**

  The group discusses relationships with siblings which, despite their moaning, appear to be important to them[5], as Harry illustrates:

  > 'I'm closer to my sister, I tell her more than I tell my mum and dad ... I tell her who I fancy, but I don't tell my mum and dad though'[6].

- **dealing with problems**

  The children also talk about dealing with problems and feeling angry. Clare and Swaati comment that they would go to their parents if they had a problem[7], whereas Isobel and Naomi state that they would go to their friends[8]. In contrast to the other members of the group Harry and Jonathan express difficulties in having someone to talk to when they have a problem. It is clear that Harry wouldn't feel able to talk to friends - 'I can't tell any of my friends cos they've got such a sense of humour they'd burst out laughing'[9] and Jonathan comments that 'I'd never have the strength to tell anybody'[10], although later he speaks about feeling angry

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[1] Jonathan, lines 124-128.
[2] Line 38f.
[3] Lines 40-42.
[4] Lines 95-97.
[5] Lines 69ff.
[6] Lines 86, 90.
[7] Line 92f.
[8] Line 100, 104.
[9] Line 110f.
[10] Line 94.

with his parents; 'I tell my mum if I'm annoyed with my dad and I tell my dad if I'm annoyed with my mum'[1].

- **do your parents know you?**

  In response to the varying degrees of detachment that the children have expressed about their parents I ask if they feel that their parents know them, know what they're like[2]. It is interesting that of the immediate replies two boys respond with 'no, not really'[3] and 'no'[4], whereas Naomi and Isobel respond with 'yes'[5]. Clare, however, does not feel that her parents understand her[6]. Both Jonathan and Harry reaffirm their feelings of detachment from their parents. For Jonathan this might be a result of his parent's long working hours which means they 'hardly ever get a chance to see them'[7]. Harry, on the other hand, gives a different explanation – a side of his life that his parents are unaware he has; 'well, my mum and dad, they know I get into trouble at school and all that, but they don't know anything else that I do, like with my friends'[8]. In spite of this Harry acknowledges that 'sometimes'[9] his parents understand him and Swaati responds to this her own perceptive comment about the relationship she has with her parents, 'they don't understand when I get angry but they know I do'[10].

The themes and issues about family relationships, expressed here are also highlighted in transcript 9[11]. Here the laughing and joking is not so prominent and although not discussing the issues at great length, the group makes revealing comments about themselves and their relationships.

Friends, Peer Pressure and Boyfriends/ Girlfriends

Whilst the importance of friends to the children at St Beatrice's was confirmed across the group interviews two additional themes emerge in connection with this:

1. peer pressure

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[1] Line 108f.
[2] Line 116f.
[3] Harry, line 118.
[4] Jonathan, line 119.
[5] Line 120f.
[6] Line 123.
[7] Line 127f.
[8] Line 135f.
[9] Line 140.
[10] Line 141.
[11] See appendix B, transcript 9, p.10.

2. the significance of identifying boyfriends/ girlfriends within the class group[1].

Peer Pressure

We have already noted the culture of playfulness particularly evident among the boys at St Beatrice's, and Harry's comments about peer pressure that does not allow him to speak of personal problems or worries with friends[2]. This same culture was apparent during my short visits to year 6's classroom and throughout all the group interviews. Within this context introductory comments such as those made by Jonathan and Harry, can be viewed in a different light[3]: for instance, Jonathan introduces himself by saying that he's 'got a sense of humour' and Harry, after giving his name and age. talks about wrecking warehouses. Explaining why he does this Jonathan mentions that Harry has made new friends, Harry takes this further commenting, 'I like changed groups to like the naughty group ...cos they're fun'[4]. Later in the same group interview I try to encourage the group to talk about friends (a topic recently covered in RE)[5]. Whereas the girls describe their friends in a positive way as special, helping, sharing and telling secrets, the words contributed by Jonathan and Harry are interestingly alternative - 'risky' and a 'risky business'.

  This difference between boy/ girl friendship groups is signalled again when the children are asked what they do with their friends. The girls mention 'playing instruments', 'work' and 'reading magazines', whilst the boys offer alternative pastimes: 'games, football, sport games ...computer games...start fights ... going into town, watching videos of football...laughing...and wrecking'. Additionally, and in contrast to the girls, Jonathan and Harry also mention 'problems' and that 'you can be under pressure'.

Boyfriends/Girlfriends

The girlfriend/boyfriend framework permeated all group interviews at St Beatrice's and most frequently the accusation of 'fancying' someone in the class was used as a way of teasing other children within the group interview situation. At other times the children spoke personally, if not also in a giggly manner, about their own boyfriend/girlfriend. In transcript 12[6], for example, Ben claims that the special thing

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[1] I feel sure that these two themes of peer pressure and boy-girl relationships also influenced the majority of interactions and results in the group interviews.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 8, p.10, line 110f.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 10, p.11.
[4] See appendix B, transcript 10, p.11.
[5] See appendix B, transcript 11, p.11.
[6] See appendix B, transcript 12, p.13.

about him is that he has 'loads of girlfriends' and when Arthur introduces himself at the same interview I am told 'he fancies Kate', which Arthur counters with 'I fancy someone in my class, but I'm not telling who'. In another interview Samuel's phrasing of 'getting all the girls' and 'getting all the foxy girls' demonstrates how many of the boys spoke about girls generally and in particular the girls in their class[1]. Unlike the issue of peer pressure the girlfriend/ boyfriend theme appeared to be significant for girls as well as boys: as we can see when Kate introduces herself and she is teased about whom she likes by both a boy and girl[2].

Pets

Relationships with pets and animals figured prominently in several group interviews, as Jamie illustrates when introducing himself: 'my name's Jamie and I'm 10 and I've got a dog called Harvey that means the best to me'[3]. Transcript 14[4] reflects how the children revealed other aspects of their lives as they considered what they liked about their pets:

- Christian clearly states that his cat is important to him: 'my cat's important to me, he always licks my ear and puts its paws on me. I like that and I give him cuddles'[5];

- when asked what makes animals special Andrew says its because 'they're cuddly'[6] and Jamie attempts expand on this although he obviously finds it hard to express himself: 'they're not just like a bunch of fur or anything ... they're just like us, but like, they're, they're'[7];

- others try and find the right words to finish Jamie's sentence - Christian comments that 'they're humanoids'[8] and, together with Sarah and Michelle, he highlights human characteristics that animals don't share: 'they can't answer back ...and like they don't argue ...they don't go on at you ...[and] they're not spiteful'[9];

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 13, p.14.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 12, p.13.
[3] Group interview 3.
[4] See appendix B, transcript 14, p.14.
[5] See appendix B, transcript 14, p.14, lines 1-13.
[6] Line 18.
[7] Lines 19f.
[8] Line 21.
[9] Lines 22-26.

- being able to care for and look after pets was also identified as making them special[1].

At St Anne's conversations about pets always led onto thoughts about what happens when pets die and heaven and hell. At St Beatrice's none of the group interviews progressed in this way. In transcript 14[2], for example, the children mention feeling sad when their pets die but they are not keen to pursue the idea any further.

Catholic Identity

In addition to the theme of relationships the children's responses also addressed aspects of Catholic identity. Within this broader topic the children incorporated elements of their experiences at school and RE.

Context of Data

Within the group interviews the children's conversations about Catholic identity covered the five areas of:

- Church
- School
- RE
- Collective worship
- Religious concepts.

Church

Attendance at Church

The majority of children at St Beatrice's were familiar with going to church, some attending regularly and others less frequently[3]. Drawing a comparison between RE and going to church Jonathan comments that he 'prefer[s] mass actually'. Later however, he also says, 'I hate mass but um, I know everyone thinks they hate it as a child but well, our priest has got a sense of humour so its a good laugh, but I'm always reading a book'. Christian describes feeling obligated to go to mass, even though he doesn't go every week, 'I have to go tomorrow cos I've put it off for something like two months' and it is interesting the way in which Naomi and Isobel explain why they don't go 'every Sunday':

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[1] Lines 35-45.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 14, p.14, lines 46-66.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 15, p.17.

'I go every Sunday except when I visit my granddad' - Naomi;

'I don't really go every Sunday because my mum's usually out on appointments ...she's an interior designer' - Isobel.

It may be noted that in their justifications neither mentions that they find it boring or that they don't like it. Although it might be argued that they really enjoy going to church this is not conveyed in the interview: instead I would suggest that an alternative explanation is more probable – not liking church or finding it boring are not good enough reasons!

Why People Go To Church

With a similar combination of differing levels of church attendance transcript 16[1] considers why people go to church. Picking up Michelle's theme I ask why people 'get afraid of missing church', Michelle is unable to offer an answer but Jamie remarks 'cos, they probably think that God will know, will think that he's like turned against them or something'. With this the discussion turns to consider aspects of God such as forgiveness and whether God gets unhappy or angry. Although the children continue to respond with short sentence answers their conversation touches on similar themes to those raised at St Anne's; for example, speaking about forgiveness Michelle draws on the authority of the head[2]. After employing the authority of the head to speak about forgiveness and judgement I ask Michelle if she thinks it's true and she answers, 'I don't know, I'm not sure', to which Jonathan comes in with 'but how do we know? No one has proved it'. Here we find another connection between the two Roman Catholic schools in this study: the issue of personal belief and truth as well as judgement.

School and RE

The Rosary

Transcript 17[3] demonstrates the way in which St Beatrice's contributes to a very traditional sense of Catholic identity through learning about the rosary. Discussing their homework the children say that they find the rosary to be 'boring' and 'long'. The conversation here is similar to other discussions about going to church; there is a familiarity (in that the children know the different mysteries and themes of the

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 16, p.17.
[2] 'Mrs Baker says he welcomes everyone when they die unless they actually turn their back on him...[then] they go to hell' – Michelle, appendix B, transcript 16, p.17.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 19, p.20.

rosary), whilst at the same time the children are distinctly unengaged in how they talk.

During my chat with the head, which took place after the third group interview, Mrs Baker recognises this distancing or un-engaged manner of the children in relation to RE:

> 'we were discussing something the other day in RE and Christian said, 'how did Jesus die again?' and the class were gobsmacked ...Christian was quite serious, he was saying, 'did he die of old age?' so there you go Cathy, the boy's been in a Catholic school for seven years and he couldn't work out how Jesus died!'[1]

Negative Comments on RE

In the group interviews two common issues arose: (1) the large amount of homework and (2) that RE was 'boring'[2] and with further discussion about this many children continued to express negative feelings[3].

Positive Comments on RE

The children were positive about the opportunity for discussion in RE[4]. The recent topic of friends in RE lessons was mentioned with enthusiasm by many children and from their comments it would seem that in engaging with the children's own experiences the teacher had created more agreeable lessons[5].

Linking Concepts From RE with Personal Experience and Worldviews

As most of their recent RE work had been about friends I decided to try and determine whether the children linked their own experiences and ideas with what they'd learnt. To this end it was an interesting exercise posing the question 'why do 'friends' in RE?' Many children had no idea[6] or else they expressed difficulty in matching their own personal experience with what they had learnt[7]. In transcript 20[8] Michelle makes some connection between her experience of friendship and what she has been told in RE. Conveyed in her response however, is the suggestion that her answer is something she has been told, not what she feels personally; 'if you're being nice to

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[1] Discussion with Mrs Baker, 9/11/94.

[2] See appendix B, transcript 18, p.20; transcript 19, p.20.

[3] 'I don't listen to all the current lecture stuff and that sort of stuff' – Harry; 'I know it's a bit rude but I don't really like RE that much' – Jonathan. See appendix B, transcript 19, p.20

[4] 'I like it when we sometimes pull all our chairs into the middle of the room and have discussions over our topic of work'.– Andrew, appendix B, transcript 20, p.21.

[5] See appendix B, transcript 20, p.21; transcript 21, p.22.

[6] See appendix B, transcript 22, p.22.

[7] See appendix B, transcript 20, p.21; transcript 22, p.22.

[8] See appendix B, transcript 20, p.21.

friends then you're being nice to God *(said in repetitive way)*'. I respond by asking if she believes this and she replies, 'yeh, well, sort of' and Sarah explains this further saying, 'well, Mrs Baker says it is'.

Tackling the same question another group present a similar response: Paul, for example, suggests that 'friends' is a topic in RE because people 'have to be friends' and Jonathan says that it includes Jesus because 'Jesus was friends with everyone'[1]. Although the children can provide answers that demonstrate a rationale for why friends were discussed in RE, their comments about Jesus and living together like brother and sister[2] illustrate that such religious teaching does not really have any significant impact on their lives and worldviews.

Authority and Truth

Instead of revealing any personal significance the children's discussions at St Beatrice's frequently refer to the authority of their teachers and the 'truth' they convey. Some children appear to accept this authoritative voice, although most express disbelief and disagreement with what they have been told[3]. Paul and Samuel, exemplify this at the end of transcript 24[4] in their conversation about how they receive what they are told in school. Paul comments, 'I know I'm a Catholic and everything but er, I think it's a legend …a fake' and Samuel supports this by depicting religious belief and understanding as 'like a made up story'. In marking out their positions Paul and Samuel set themselves apart from 'everybody' else who they perceive as 'believing'.

Collective Worship, The Presentation of Religious Concepts

The children's comments about collective worship reiterate a general attitude of disbelief and boredom with religion and religious ideas[5], as Maria illustrates:

> 'in assembly we're told that when we pray it's the most important thing we do in the day but it isn't really, we come to school to learn stuff, not to pray, you go to a convent to do all that stuff'.[6]

Transcript 25 also shows how some children moved from talking about collective worship to exploring ideas about God and what happens when people die[7].

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 22, p.22.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 23, p.23.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 23, p.23; transcript 24, p.24.
[4] See appendix B, transcript 24, p.24.
[5] See appendix B, transcript 25, p.25.
[6] See appendix B, transcript 25, p.25.
[7] See appendix B, transcript 25, p.25.

Responding to Jonathan's comments about praying at school Maria asks the others how what they have been told can be true:

> 'they tell us that God's in the room with us …but how come? …They say like God's in the room with us but if say there's another school that's saying that, how can he be in there with them as well?'

Paul and Jonathan try to answer Maria's query by replying 'because he's in everywhere, cos God's in every school …it's God's spirit isn't it?' Samuel then takes the conversation beyond their immediate environment to consider people who have died: 'if his spirit's all over the place, what happens to the people that have died? …People who have died they all say like their spirit's left behind and they're watching us all the time'.

Delighted that the group might begin to address particularly relevant areas I ask what happens to people when they die: again, there is no extensive discussion but the group do offer some religious ideas[1] as they reply to Maria's challenges. Later in the same interview I ask the children to reconsider religious concepts associated with death and this leads to interesting comments not just about the children's concepts but also how those concepts are formulated[2]. In considering whether heaven exists[3] Maria refers to 'the clouds' and challenging Maria's explanation Samuel points out that 'when you go on an aeroplane and if you're going on a long journey you go above the clouds and you can't see anything except for clear sky'. Alternatively Jonathan introduces a different idea of 'spirits down on the earth' which can't be seen, and Paul declares that 'I think you just stay in the coffin and rot'. Concerned with discerning the 'truth' between these alternatives Laura comments that 'you never find out if it's true or not'.

In locating the role of the school and their teachers to inform them about such ideas the children seem to feel that they are left to work it out for themselves, Jonathan elaborates on this saying,

> 'they just kind of like just tell us stories, which we just have to figure out, but it's useless cos if we don't get taught anything about it then …it's a guess really cos we don't usually get to talk about what really happens'.[4]

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[1] This is apart from Michelle who states that 'they just rot in the coffin' - appendix B, transcript 25, p.25.

[2] See appendix B, transcript 26, p.27.

[3] See appendix B, transcript 26, p.27, lines 1-9.

[4] See appendix B, transcript 26, p.27 lines 14f,17f - a view that is endorsed by Samuel who comments, 'we can believe what we think is right' (line 16).

Lines 19-75 of transcript 26 show the group returning to explore and play with the concepts of heaven and hell. I describe this discussion as playing because although they enjoy offering ideas Laura and Samuel ultimately admit that they don't really believe hell exists[1]. The group also tentatively articulate more individual, personal beliefs and this is illustrated in comments like 'it's just like when you're asleep really, you think of nothing'[2]; 'I don't believe in life after death'[3] and 'if you're all bones you can't come back and be human again like with skin and that, can you?'[4]

Religious Concepts

God and The Role of Catholic Identity

Transcript 27[5] shows how a discussion about religious identity and going to church prompts a discussion of religious concepts. In this group three children identify themselves as Catholic, one as Church of England and the two as of no religion or 'I don't really know'. There is a mixed reaction as to whether God is important to them, none of which contains much enthusiasm and when asked if they think about God at all Christian says 'no', whereas Michelle and Andrew reply that they do. Christian refers to the common theme of authority and truth versus his own beliefs when he replies, '**everybody says** God will come down, but he never comes down'. He continues to challenge the group about their ideas of God and heaven as the conversation leads onto what God is like and where God might be – 'in heaven' (Jamie), 'all around us' (Andrew), 'like a ghost …but we can't see him' (Jamie). At this point of the interview Christian interjects with, 'but we don't know if there's a heaven'. Although any discussion about God or other religious concepts does not appear to interest Christian the rest of the group return to this theme later in the interview when asked to draw something important to them. I ask if they want to draw God and this is greeted with varying responses:

- 'you can't cos you can't see him …how do we know what God looks like?' (Jamie)
- 'we don't know' (Sarah)
- 'but we don't know what God looks like' (Amy)
- 'we don't [know] but we can imagine it' (Michelle).

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[1] Lines 73f.
[2] Samuel, line 53.
[3] Laura, line 55.
[4] Maria, line 57f.
[5] See appendix B, transcript 27, p.30.

Jamie is the only one who is prepared to take this any further and even here he talks in terms of what he used to think, rather than what he believes now – 'what I used to think was that he was like on white clouds and Jesus sitting on a big chair'.

Jesus and God

The religious concepts raised in the third group interview – the nature of God and creation - also emerge in the fourth group interview[1] and within the context of forgiveness these children debate the connection between God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit and whether each is the same thing[2]. In the conversation Jenni reintroduces the theme of authority and truth; '**people say** 'the Father, Son and Holy Spirit' are the same one, it's confusing' and Maria replies to this by also referring to the authority of other people; '**they say** like Jesus is the Son of God, so they can't be the same people'.

Creation

A later discussion about creation[3] is characterised by the expression of a personal viewpoint and also evident is how the group is keen to raise fundamental theological, ontological and scientific questions in an effort to produce an integrated framework of understanding:

- Laura initially leads this inquiry by posing the question 'if God created us then who created God?'

- This is greeted with an enthusiastic 'yeh' from Paul as Jeni and Jonathan try to answer by saying that 'the spirit just came down'.

- Not satisfied Laura responds with a further question, 'but who created the spirit?'

- Instead of any specific answer to her question Paul comments, with conviction, 'Adam and Eve, they were made by God'.

- Jonathan and Samuel then raise further questions which, through the way they are presented, clearly have a significance for them beyond a mild curiosity and playfulness:

      'but who created the universe?' (Jonathan);

      'yeh, who created the universe, how did it become the universe? How did it get there?' (Samuel).

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 28, p.31; transcript 29, p.32.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 28, p.31.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 29, p.32.

- Alerted to the way the group appear to be addressing issues and concepts that have an importance in their own lives I ask what questions they would like to ask God.
- This exercise is immediately met with a spontaneous barage of questions:

  'who made you? Who made the universe ...and, why can't we see you?' (Samuel)

  'what's heaven like?' (Jonathan)

  'and why can't we go to heaven and back?' (Jenni).

- Samuel, falling off his chair and then contributing the question 'are you single?', produces lots of laughter in the group. Unfortunately the thread and focus of the discussion is lost as the group return to their jovial atmosphere.

The Combining of Themes – Group Interview 2: Church, School, RE, Collective Worship, Religious Concepts and Personal Experience.

So far I have isolated a number of themes from the group interviews. These have illustrated the children's perceptions of religious education at school and church, as well as their understanding and regard for religious concepts within their own personal worldviews. I now refer to a longer section of transcript where the children combine these issues[1].

Transcript 30 highlights the complexity of connections and understanding as the children reveal and develop their worldviews. What is apparent in this data is how the children are able to utilise religious concepts even though, for most, religion doesn't relate to their own experiences and remains external to them. In these instances the children appear to think about the concepts even though they are irrelevant to their lives. The transcript encompasses a number of topics:

- **RE lessons**
- learning about Jesus is located at school by Jonathan and Harry[2];
- the group can describe and explain when they pray at school and the significance of lighting a candle[3];
- there is some confusion about why they light a candle in RE[4] and it is Naomi who is able to provide an explanation:

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 30, p.33.
[2] Lines 2, 4ff.
[3] Lines 6-23.
[4] Line 15.

'to show that it, that God is the light and the light is there ...and the light is Jesus ...[and] God is the light of the world'[1];

- considering ways in which RE could be improved Harry suggests that
  'it would be better if we did much more different religions cos we just go over and over the same stuff'[2]

- other members of the group also approve of learning about other religions[3], commenting how they would like to find out about 'like who's their God'[4] and that 'if you find out more, it does show you that they do different things'[5].

• **Religious Identity and Belief**

- speaking about different religions triggers me to ask if the group are Catholic and apart from Swaati, who is Hindu, all say they are Catholic;

- Jonathan states he is Catholic with the comment 'I wish I wasn't though, I don't believe in God'[6] and this prompts a discussion about belief and the nurturing of a Catholic identity and belief system through home and school life[7];

- Harry also states that he doesn't believe in God[8];

- Clare cautiously expresses conflict between her personal feelings about religion and belief, which are in contrast to what she experiences at home and school[9];

- as I probe their feelings about religious identity Harry comments how it isn't important to him to be a Catholic[10] and he talks about challenging his dad when he wants to take him to church:
  'when my dad's just about to take me out to church or something I say, 'I don't believe in it, so I don't see why I have to go' and things like that...I say I like I don't believe in all these stories, like when Adam and Eve ate the apple, I don't think there is such a thing as the Garden of Eden'[11];

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[1] Lines 19, 21, 23.
[2] Lines 28f.
[3] See Clare and Swaati's suggestions, lines 30, 33.
[4] Naomi, line 37.
[5] Swaati, line 39.
[6] Line 45.
[7] Lines 46-75.
[8] 'I don't believe in God either, I don't believe God exists ...I don't believe in heaven, but I believe in reincarnation' – Harry, lines 46, 48.
[9] 'I know its suppose to be the most important part of school but its not my favourite but I have to be a Catholic cos all my family's Catholic' – Clare, Line 51f.
[10] Lines 53-59.
[11] Lines 74f, 78f.

expressing different feelings Naomi and Isobel both assert that being a Catholic is important to them[1];

- discussing Adam and Eve Jonathan and Harry are clear that they don't believe it 'actually happened'[2] and Swaati tries to reflect on this, describing it as 'a bit like a fable kind of thing though'[3], which Naomi and Isobel agree with;

- the children also speak about their feelings regarding authority figures, specifically the school and church[4]:

'they say that Jesus takes you up to heaven and he's your friend but people find it completely boring and don't want to know'[5];

'[I don't like] church, I don't like how everybody goes on about it …they just go, 'this is the gospel of St Mark', but I haven't got a clue what they're on about, you know'[6];

'I don't like in church they say it and then they keep repeating it …even at every mass…all you do is stand up and kneel'[7];

'well it's the same message anyway…believe in God'[8].

- **Religious Concepts**

Responding to Naomi's comments the group progresses on to consider the issues of truth, belief and concepts of the devil and judgement[9]. Jonathan is perhaps the most eloquent in articulating how he feels;

'Jesus might have just been another bloke who was pretending he was the Son of God *(girls giggle)* … he's just like us, I think Mary just said it to someone so that everyone would think, 'aah!' …the Word of God had been around for ages, before Jesus had come, so I just think that like Jesus was just like some kind of holy person who really believed'[10].

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[1] As Naomi explains: 'well like all my family really are Catholic so if I was to say to them I don't believe in being a Catholic then it would be hard … I've really been brought up so I believe in it, I don't really want to deny it' - lines 62f, 69f.
[2] Line 81f.
[3] Line 83.
[4] Lines 86-106.
[5] Swaati, line 87ff.
[6] Harry, lines 92, 97f.
[7] Isobel, lines 99, 101, 103.
[8] Naomi, lines 104, 106.
[9] Lines 110-134.
[10] Lines 120-132.

- **Religion and Experience**

All the group agree that religion causes problems and Clare brings in her own experience of relations living in Ireland to illustrate this[1].

- **A Detatched Belief**

In the last section of the transcript[2] I ask the group about their RE lessons and how they feel about God. It has been mentioned that Mrs Baker read the Beatitudes in a RE lesson and I ask what the connection is between this and friends. Amongst the answers Swaati refers to 'the friendship of God'[3] but when I rephrase this and ask if they think of God as a friend no one in the group appears to relate to the concept.

Underlying Issues

As we have observed, the group interviews at St Beatrice's broach a number of themes both pertaining to the children's wider experience of life and their understanding of religion. In addition I would suggest that a further underlying theme is also present: the need for the children to be really listened to and taken seriously. These perceptions of mine are vocalised in transcript 31[4]:

> 'no one really [listens], teachers don't much, well, they say things to you but we're not really kind of like listened to' (Jonathan);
>
> 'if we know something they never kind of like believe us cos they think, I mean I know we are immature and all that but some children aren't and they're really clever and if teachers make mistakes and children correct them they don't listen' (Paul);
>
> 'children don't have rights really, compared to adults' (Samuel);
>
> 'it's the way adults talk to children' (Jenni).

Comments made at the end of the group interviews also signal this theme of wanting to be listened to, as well as reiterating the value of opportunities for discussion together[5]. Despite my reservations and difficulties during the interviews it is interesting that remarks such as 'I found that rather fun' (Isobel) and 'it was really good, we had about half an hour of talking and about five minutes of like writing' (Harry) were common[6].

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[1] Lines 138, 141, 143, 145, 150, 152.
[2] Lines 166-182.
[3] Line 171.
[4] See appendix B, transcript 31, p.39.
[5] A point also made by the children in relation to enjoyable RE lessons.
[6] End of second group interview.

SECOND INTERVIEWS

The second round of interviews at Beatrice's took place in June, after the group interviews were completed. These later interviews were with children who had appeared engaged and talkative in the group interviews and whom the class teacher believed would be comfortable talking together. Again I conducted the interviews bearing in mind the same guiding principles as before:

- the **nature** of the children's worldviews (who/what was important to them);
- how their worldview was **constructed** – key concepts, people, experiences;
- their **understanding** of religious concepts;
- the **significance** of religious concepts;
- the **place** of the school and it's RE in their worldviews.

After interviewing two girls, Kate and Lucy, I spent the same amount of time (approximately an hour) with two boys, Andrew and Arthur. Each of these second interviews were characterised by an openness and readiness to discuss what was personally significant and explore the issues and concepts raised.

KATE AND LUCY

1. the nature of the children's worldviews (who/what is important to them):

Activities

Introducing themselves both girls outlined the many activities they enjoyed: Lucy spoke of guides, ballet and playing on her brother's computer and Kate highlighted a number of pastimes including tennis, drama, playing the violin, flute and piano and involvement in a local youth orchestra. Football was stressed as Kate's favourite hobby as she modestly admitted to being 'quite good', playing for the school team and a local Sunday club.

Parents

Kate and Lucy's parents reflect the location of St Beatrice's in the town: both of Kate's parents are professionals - 'my mum's a doctor, and my dad's got a computer business and he works hard' and Lucy's dad works in the antiques business[1]. Lucy's mother doesn't work - 'mum was thinking of getting a job, but then she said like it wasn't as if we needed the money or anything'.

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 32, p.39.

Pets and Bedrooms

Animals and pets were discussed by the girls in detail[1]. Reflecting on why they liked their pets, Kate explains 'cos they don't worry about anything...cos I really worry'. I pursue this personal comment and ask what she does if she is worried; she replies that she asks God to help her and 'just sort of go[es] quiet'. In the light of this both girls acknowledge the value of having their own bedrooms where they can be on their own, relax and listen to music. As Lucy explains,

> 'I just shut the door and like nobody comes in, cos most of the time I have my door open, so then they know they can come in if its open, but if it's closed they just leave me alone'.

Later in the interview the girls return to the importance of their pets and sharing worries with them[2]. Bearing in mind the peer pressure and banter in the class group at the school, Lucy's comments carry even more impact - 'I tell mine everything cos you know they're not going to mock you or anything or laugh at you...its good just to tell somebody'.

Ambitions for the future

The data from Kate and Lucy's interview also reveals their ambitions and images associated with growing up. Throughout this topic of conversation, as in most of the interview, the girls were very relaxed and chatty about their thoughts. Transcript 35[3] presents how this issue was discussed and it raises a number of key themes that are re-emphasised and triangulated at different points of the interview. Focusing on marriage and families the girls raise a number of themes:

- **the role of women and having children**

Kate and Lucy both describe a very traditional stereotyped image of how they think their lives will be when older: Lucy appears to embrace the concept of housewife and mother[4], whereas Kate comments that rather than looking after a home 'I'd rather be out playing football or something'[5].

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 33, p.40.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 34, p.43.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 35, p.44.
[4] Appendix B, transcript 35, p.48f, lines 161f; 184-192.
[5] Appendix B, transcript 35, p.48, line 167.

- **children**

Both girls speak of looking forward to growing up and wanting to have children[1]. Lucy's extensive discussion about having children and giving birth shows that this is an area she has given considerable thought; it is personally significant, structuring her identity and perceptions about herself in the present and future[2].

- **images of men**

Kate and Lucy's conversation stresses that neither of them likes the idea of living with a man when older. Their images of men emerge at different points during the interview and it appears to be characterised by distrust and wariness:

> 'I just don't like men, no, I think that would be scary'[3].

> 'It would be good if you could have the children without the men'[4].

Kate and Lucy's discussion reveals the influence of media and personal family experience in their conceptualisations of men. The girls portray men as violent, dangerous and drunk, an image they construct from films and soap operas like *EastEnders* and *Neighbours*[5]. Strangely this contrasts with how the girls' speak about their own fathers who are described in terms of helping out with the washing up, cooking and not going to the pub very often[6].

- **more personal experience and family breakdown**

If we probe this apparent contradiction in the girls' concepts of men the data suggests that they seem to make a connection between (1) violence and marriage breakdown in the media with (2) the girls' personal experiences of parents arguing, as Kate demonstrates in this passage:

> 'it can be quite upsetting when they argue, when it's your mum and dad ... my mum and dad are always arguing ...well, sometimes...I like murder films and things like that, I just don't like watching films which show the divorce or when marriages go wrong, cos I don't think they're only acting, I think its true and it just gets to me. Cos when my mum and dad go out, the au pair lets me watch tv and so I watch all these films I shouldn't watch, which means its horrible when I go to bed *(laughs nervously)*.[7]

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[1] Appendix B, transcript 35, p.44, line 3f.
[2] Appendix B, transcript 35, p.49, lines 187-230 and for a storied account see transcript 36, p.51.
[3] Kate, line 10.
[4] Lucy, line 11.
[5] Lines 13–18; 110-115; 121-133.
[6] Lines 29-37; 116, 118f; 173-180.
[7] Appendix B, transcript 35, p.44f, lines 20, 23, 25, 40-44.

Comments such as these also indicate that fear of their own parent's separation carries implications for how Kate and Lucy understand what they want for themselves as they grow older, as Lucy illustrates:

> 'like sometimes when you hear mum and dad fight you sort think, 'oh, I don't want that to happen when I'm married' or 'should I get married?'...mum says it's like healthy but, to argue in a relationship, but like not all the time'.[1]

Summary of Themes

The themes identified here highlight the broader context of the girls' lives and what is important to them. The next section of data from Kate and Lucy's interview points to the key concepts, relationships, people and experiences that contribute to the construction of the girls' worldviews.

2. how Kate and Lucy's worldview is constructed;

The importance of relationships for Kate

In the interview Kate speaks at length about her relationship with her parents, in particular her mother who is presented as a dominant character in Kate's family[2]. Football is clearly important to Kate and in acknowledging the support and encouragement she receives from her Dad and her coach she also refers to conflict this produces in the relationship with her mother:

> 'she doesn't cheer me or anything *(laughs)*...she likes me playing tennis so I play tennis and that keeps her happy!'[3]

Later in the interview Kate talks at greater length about the way she feels and how she negotiates her relationship with her mother[4]. The following issues are raised:

- **she worries what her mother thinks of her**

Kate describes herself as a worrier, especially in terms of what her mother thinks of her[5] and this graphically illustrated when Kate relates a recent experience of auditioning for an orchestra:

> 'like last Wednesday I was just so worried because I was going in for this orchestra with my violin and I was just so worried what my mum would think of me if I didn't get in or something, oh, it was just horrible. And then when I got in, I

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[1] Appendix B, transcript 35, p.44f, lines 21f, 26f.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 37, p.51; transcript 38, p.52.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 37, p.51.
[4] See appendix B, transcript 38, p.52.
[5] See appendix B, transcript 38, p.52, lines 24-29; 38-42.

got a phone call from my teacher and then all my worries seemed to go ...[but then] another burden comes along'.[1]

- **pleasing herself, pleasing her mother**

Linked with worrying about what her mum thinks Kate also talks about the conflict she sometimes experiences between wanting to please her mum and wanting to do what she wants[2] and football, as I have highlighted, is an example of this. To pursue how important it is for Kate to please her mum I pose the hypothetical question as to whether it would matter if her mum didn't like whoever she wanted to marry. Kate's immediate response is 'tough' although this is qualified with the telling comment, 'no, but I would like her to be happy'[3].

- **contrast with other relationships - father, brothers and sisters**

As well as discussing her mother, Kate also refers to her father, younger brother and sister[4]. In contrast to her mother, Kate's father is characterised as more easy going and 'soft' who 'doesn't mind what I'm like or that'[5]. Despite the difficulties Kate experiences in her relationship with her mother it is evident that it is nevertheless a very close and important relationship for her[6].

- **appreciates mother**

Kate obviously appreciates her mother. Although she jokes about sometimes wanting to swap her mum for another she clearly values her[7].

- **learns from mother**

It is interesting that Kate introduces the term 'teach' when talking about her mother, and exploring this Kate reveals that her mother teaches her about 'God and that'[8].

- **riding a bike and leaving worries behind**

Kate's relationship with her mother appears to shape Kate's worldview directly and indirectly, for example:

- her mother teaches her about God, thereby contributing to Kate's construction of religious concepts;

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[1] Appendix B, transcript 38, p.52, lines 24-29, 31.
[2] Appendix B, transcript 38, p.52f, lines 41-52.
[3] Appendix B, transcript 38, p.52f, lines 50, 52.
[4] Appendix B, transcript 38, p.52f, lines 125-129.
[5] Appendix B, transcript 38, p.52f, lines 35f, 82-87.
[6] She mentions, for example, that she would go to her mum rather than her dad if she needed to discuss a problem – see appendix B, transcript 38, p.52f, lines 72-80, 91.
[7] See appendix B, transcript 38, p.52f, lines 62, 64, 72-80, 91.
[8] See appendix B, transcript 38, p.52f, line 69.

- Kate perceives certain expectations her mother has of her and this creates conflict and feelings that have a significant role in Kate's own sense of identity and self-esteem.

Acknowledging this Kate discusses the sense of freedom she feels when riding her bike. In the midst of a life with so many constraints and structures Kate describes how riding her bike provides the opportunity to escape her worries:

> 'I ride my bike as well and its good like its as if I can leave all my worries behind...I've joined this tennis club...and I ride over there, its really good...its like all your worries behind you, pushed back...its really peaceful'.[1]

The Place of the Church and Catholic Identity in Constructing a Worldview

In identifying themselves as a Catholic[2] this line of conversation raises a number of pertinent issues in connection to the place of the church and Catholic identity in the worldview constructions of Kate and Lucy:

- **Kate** remarks that she's not really bothered about going to church but explains that she is taken by her mother who 'really is a strong believer'. Confirming earlier comments Kate reiterates that her mother teaches her about religion and she refers to her dad as not as religious as her mother.

- **Lucy** comments that she finds church 'boring' and doesn't go to church very often. Explaining why she does go occasionally she says,

> 'because we never went to church, we had to start going otherwise [priest] would never sign the forms for us to get into [secondary school] ...but then he must think that, he must know that because we don't go anymore'.

> Instead of learning about religion from her parents Lucy cites the school as the place where she learns about religion[3].

3. understanding of religious concepts

Both Kate and Lucy were happy to discuss their thoughts on God and other religious concepts at length and transcript 40[4] illustrates how they talked about God, heaven and hell. At times it can be noted that their conversation is dependent upon their interactions as they explore imagery together, sometimes disagreeing with each

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[1] Appendix B, transcript 38, p.52f, lines 7-20.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 39, p.57.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 39, p.57.
[4] See appendix B, transcript 40, p.58.

other's ideas[1]. The imagery presented features a variety of aspects which they try to integrate together as they talk:

Kate

Kate describes an anthropomorphic God, 'like a big fat man' and she locates Jesus, 'a man with brown sandals', as being with God. Communicating her ideas about heaven Kate comments that it is a person's 'spirit' that goes to heaven when they die. As she talks Kate draws on her experiences and the world around her:

- heaven is 'beautiful...a big world like this but not polluted, it's a perfect one...like there's no hatred';
- Kate uses the example of her Nan (now dead) to explain that in heaven you can see 'all the people that had died before you';
- instead of dwelling on the familiar imagery of horns, fire and redness Kate talks of the devil as something that helps 'you get all annoyed and stuff'.

Lucy

Lucy also describes God anthropomorphically, this time as 'a man with a beard'. Her imagery is more flexible because she checks her comments stating that God 'can be the wind or a man with a beard'. Lucy, like Kate, also places Jesus near God, describes heaven as paradise with no pollution, and agrees that there isn't 'a devil with horns' but instead is 'the sort of bad side of you'. In general, however, Lucy's narrative stands out as being more playful:

- she mentions God and Jesus 'playing in the clouds';
- she describes at great length how people who have died climb either up or down ladders, which act as bridges, to either heaven or hell[2].

4. the significance of religious concepts

Kate and Lucy's manner of engagement with religious concepts suggests that not only are the girls willing and able to talk about this subject, but that these ideas include personal investment and significance.

Reconciliation

The girls' conversation about reconciliation demonstrates, across the context of church, school and home, how certain religious concepts may have a particular

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[1] Transcript 41 (p.61) presents the same piece of transcript in a storied version, thereby outlining each girl's individual understanding of God, heaven and hell.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 40, p.58; transcript 41, p.61.

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significance within a worldview[1]. Initially Lucy is not as serious as Kate, although their laughter may be seen as a way of communicating deeply personal, yet awkward feelings about confessing sins.

Prayer

Kate and Lucy's discussion about prayer reveals further facets of religious understanding that have personal significance. This is evidenced in transcript 43[2] where the girls convey not only their personal investment in prayer[3], but also how other religious concepts, such as God and life after death, are important issues within their worldviews. Building on this discussion the girls offer their images of God, images which they both agree gives them a 'nice feeling' - 'well, he can heal ...you're not by yourself ...and someone cares'[4]; 'if you ask him something, he always listens ... he always there'[5]. Such a comforting image and belief in God does not always come easy for the girls and they draw on experience to illustrate this[6]. Responding to Kate's narrative about her experiences of death and loss Lucy presents a concept of life after death that refers to the authority of her teacher:

> 'Mrs Baker says that death is like the beginning sort of, life is like the, say like you went to a theatre production and like you'd have the um, bit before it say starts and then when the play starts, it's like when you die'.[7]

Understanding death in this way appears to help the girls confront the very real personal concerns they have about death and the future:

> 'like a lot of old people want to die, they feel okay about it and they just feel that their time has come ... I was scared of dying, what happens if somebody, how will it happen, will someone come up and stab me or will I just pass away?' (Lucy)
>
> I used to [be scared] when I was younger, I used to think 'I don't want to die'...but now I understand (Kate)[8]

This meaning construction also influences how they think and act in the present. As Kate and Lucy reflect about this life being a preparation for heaven the idea appears

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 42, p.62.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 43, p.63.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 43, p.63, lines 6, 10, 14, 16, 21.
[4] Kate - appendix B, transcript 43, p.63, lines 25, 30, 32.
[5] Lucy – appendix B, transcript 43, p.63, lines 29, 31.
[6] Kate – appendix B, transcript 43, p.63, lines 40f, 46-48, 50; Lucy – appendix B, transcript 43, p.63, line 43f.
[7] Appendix B, transcript 43, p.63, lines 52ff.
[8] Appendix B, transcript 43, p.63f, lines 77-88.

to affect them morally, as well as spiritually, religiously and emotionally - you have to be good...try and make everybody kinder, tell them more about God and to love and care for people...[then if people knew more about God] it would be a different place... definitely, because there wouldn't be wars and stuff...and people wouldn't be so afraid of dying'[1].

Animals

Returning to the theme of animals and why people are justified in eating meat, Kate in particular reiterates the personal significance of God in her worldview, as well as the many unanswered questions she has:

> 'well, that's why he put them there [animals], well, no, not really, but I don't think he minds...I think there's other reasons too [why we're here on earth] ...he put us there so we can tell more people about God and that we can learn more about God as we go on...reading the Bible, praying that makes you learn ...that's another reason. [I wonder] what he looks like and...like there's one thing I can't understand, like when you go to heaven, how can it last for ever and ever? I can't imagine that...There's so much I don't understand ...what does the Bible mean ...and when's the earth, cos everyone's saying that sometime the earth's ...going to explode and we're all going to die and we'll all go to heaven and I want to know when that's going to happen'.[2]

5. the place of the school and its RE in their worldviews

The data so far has established the nature of different aspects of Kate and Lucy's worldviews; what their lives are like, who and what is important to them, who helps them construct their worldview and the way religious understanding and concepts function within their understanding. This last selection of data specifically illustrates the place of the school and its RE within the girls' worldview.

Transcript 45[3] is an interesting passage of conversation as it depicts Kate and Lucy questioning the religious character of their secondary school. Talking about their Hindu classmate, who has been refused entry into the local Catholic secondary school because of her religion, Kate is forthright in her criticism of this situation:

> 'well, I was a bit put off by [school] because Swaati, she's from India, she's Indian, and they wouldn't let her in the school ...and I think that they should

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[1] Appendix B, transcript 43, p.63f, lines 61-75.
[2] Appendix B, transcript 44, p.66.
[3] Appendix B, transcript 45, p.68.

have let her in cos we're all the same ... I think its wrong ... it would have
been better if Henry VIII wasn't born! [Its] like, 'my belief's better than yours'
- Kate.

'its meant to be like caring for each other ... I tend to think that that's the
important thing ... I think like people all believe different things so we should
all like respect each other's beliefs [otherwise its] like, 'oh I believe something
better than yours, your God doesn't exist, my God does' and stuff like that'[1]
- Lucy.

In transcript 46[2] Kate and Lucy speak again of learning about God at school. Once
more the girls show that they do not automatically assimilate whatever they are told
and although Lucy still refers back to the authority of the school, both girls express
critical comments, talking about how what they are told at school negatively affects
their own thoughts and beliefs:

'Mrs Baker tells us about the things she believes and the things she imagines
and like it sort of confuses you because you've got your own beliefs and like
your own vision of heaven ... [and] she'll tell you hers ... and you might not
like her idea of it, you might think well, I don't want to go to heaven if its like
that ... [It's important to use you own imagination] because then that teaches
you to sort of decide whether you want to go somewhere or what you want to
think ... and like whether you think heaven's a bad place or whether you think
its somewhere you might like'.
- Lucy.

'Mrs Baker goes on about hers ... and so that makes the younger children
believe it ... its nicer to imagine your own, to have your own ideas ... and what
you believe in ... but like they don't imagine their own ideas. [If you have your
own imagination] like it let's you do more things'.[3]
- Kate.

These strong feelings about the importance of imagination and freedom to develop
individual concepts and thoughts are backed up with further illustration from the girls'
experiences. For example, Kate talks about the book *The BFG* and the

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[1] Kate – appendix B, transcript 45, p.68.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 46, p.69.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 46, p.69.

disappointment she felt when watching the video compared to her own ideas about the imagery of the story:

> '[its] like when I read books ...I was really interested to see what their imagination was compared to mine and it was completely different, I think mine was better! ... Its better, I like that you can imagine'.[1]

And Lucy supports Kate's argument with her own thoughts:

> 'when you read books, like even if there's no pictures at all in the books you've got [your imagination]... because ..they're just like black and white, but your pictures in your head, you can colour them any colour you like and nobody will be able to see them ...but like also if I try to draw my like imaginations its like really, really difficult'.[2]

The conversation is now concerned with personal autonomy and individual decision making and the girls' comments contextualize their vehement arguments for using one's own imagination for religious concepts and ideas. As the interview draws to a close both girls speak about how they value making their own decisions and having independence. In contrast to the group interviews, Kate's concept of what being older means for her is perceptive and incredibly mature:

> 'when you're older and you're not being told what to do all the time ...[I won't be so worried] probably, cos you're not bogged down by what others think. I get bogged down with what other people think of me, and I don't think about what I think of, I don't mind what I think about myself, which is what I should do! I think like, say I like my freckles and somebody else says, 'I hate your freckles', and you tend to think that what they say is true, but its not like that, its what **you** think that counts'.[3]

ARTHUR AND ANDREW

As with Kate and Lucy, Andrew and Arthur's interview was also very different to the dynamics and atmosphere of the initial interviews. Both were relaxed and open to discuss issues that were personally important, as well as being happy to consider questions and ideas that were presented to them. Encouraging Arthur and Andrew to talk about their lives and explore religious concepts facilitated a conversation where the family environment and relationships were consistently highlighted as fundamentally significant. Other data from the interview focuses on the boys'

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 46, p.69.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 46, p.69.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 46, p.69.

perceptions of the school and its RE. Upholding this study's grounded theory approach I have decided to work with this distinction and present Andrew and Arthur's discussion within these three areas:

1. the place of the family environment and relationships
   - activities
   - father – son relationships
   - family relationships and absent parents
   - ambitions and growing up
2. perceptions of the school and its RE
   - peer culture and pressures
   - ethos
   - religious identity
   - religious education lessons, collective worship, reconciliation.
3. religious concepts – their nature and construction
   - thinking about God
   - what happens when people die.

1.The family environment and relationships

Activities and Father – Son Relationships

In transcript 47 both Andrew and Arthur highlight sport (for Arthur this is football) and walking with their fathers as something they enjoy[1]. The significance of family relationships and environment for both Andrew and Arthur is reaffirmed at a later stage of the interview when they are invited to talk about what they are good at[2]:

- Arthur describes building with lego and languages as his talents;

- Andrew speaks about being able to drive cars and he explains that living on a farm enables this;

- Andrew also talks about riding his bike. Unlike Kate's feelings this is not about being on his own but instead represents time with his family who all go out on their bikes together. The importance of 'doing things together' is re-emphasised by Andrew with the further example of family holidays in Cornwall.

Noting the way in which Andrew and Arthur mention their families and fathers I pursue the theme of father – son relationships with the aim of trying to discover how

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 47, p.71.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 48, p.73.

close the boys feel to their fathers and how they would describe this[1]. Transcript 49[2] details Andrew's response to my query about him having a close relationship with his father: although accepting that this relationship could be described as close he qualifies this with the explanation that his father does spend a lot of time 'out in the fields'.

Family Relationships and Absent Parents

Transcript 50[3] shows me still pursuing the theme of relationships as I ask whom the boys would refer to if they had a problem. Their responses provide an insight into their relationships, as well as other significant issues in their lives:

- whilst both agree that the nature of the problem would affect who they would go to[4] Arthur remarks that it would 'probably [be] my mum but if it was something I didn't want to tell my mum then …I might tell my friends at school'[5] and Andrew states that 'I suppose I'd tell my dad'[6].

- following these ideas about who would be the better the parent to go to Arthur explains that his mum is 'good at calming my dad if I'm just about to get into big trouble'. However, this does not appear to correlate with Andrew's experience who comments 'no, my mum's not very good at that at all, she usually makes him flare up!'[7]

- Andrew then explains why he thinks both his sister and himself would go to his dad because his mum is different to his dad and is very busy[8].

- Arthur also remarks about how busy his parents are, bringing in at the same time how he dislikes the nanny who looks after him and his brother[9].

There are two issues from this section of transcript which provide a striking contrast to the culture of 'us versus them' apparently operating and manifested within the group interviews. Arthur and Andrew describe a very close link with their parents; it

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 49, p.75.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 49, p.75.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 50, p.76.
[4] See appendix B, transcript 50, p.76, lines 2f.
[5] See appendix B, transcript 50, p.76, lines 7f, 10.
[6] See appendix B, transcript 50, p.76, line 9.
[7] See appendix B, transcript 50, p.76, lines 15-18.
[8] See appendix B, transcript 50, p.76, lines 24f, 27ff, 31ff.
[9] '[mum works] only part-time, she does three days a week …I like it when my mum isn't at work cos we've got a nanny now and she's really cruel …she doesn't let us watch tv ever, she blames everything on me when its my brother as well, she's really horrible …I like it when its my mum there, she'll tell Louis off as well and like she'll let us watch tv, its my mum's day off today actually …Thursday is my mum's day' – see appendix B, transcript 50, p.76, lines 35-49.

is them whom they would consult about a problem and any parental absence is keenly felt.

Ambitions and Growing up

Bearing in mind the themes of independence, freedom and autonomy raised in the group interviews I asked Arthur and Andrew how they felt being the age they were. I had not expected either boys' response to my question, for rather than embracing the idea of growing up, both Andrew and Arthur expressed worries and anxieties about being older, comparing this to the 'easiness' of being young[1]. In the light of these negative sentiments I ask if they feel there is anything good about being their age. Although the conversation is not so animated as before both boys admit to like having time on their own and Arthur recognises that 'you've got more advantages…like you get to go to the cinemas when you want', whilst Andrew refers enthusiastically to the adventure holiday that year 6 will be going on[2].

At another time in the interview Arthur and Andrew speak seriously about growing up and employing traditional images of what it means to be an adult they discuss money, getting a job and settling down with a wife and family[3]. For Andrew this image does not resides sometime in the distant future and he mentions his savings account that he and his sister have, specifically for when they are adults[4].

The family framework can be identified as a significant agency throughout Andrew and Arthur's conversations about being older. One exceptional departure from this is Andrew's discussion about what he would like to do as a job. In place of the family it is television that provides the motivation and meaning for him wanting to be a policeman[5]. Apart from this the data we have considered here generally demonstrates how Andrew and Arthur point to the fundamental role of their families in their lives and worldviews, an issue that emerges again in the boys discussions about religion and religious concepts[6].

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 51, p.78; transcript 52, p.80; transcript 53, p.81.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 51, p.78f.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 53, p.81.
[4] 'so we've thought about that really, for when we grow up, so it should be okay' – Andrew, appendix B, transcript 53, p.81.
[5] 'I like *The Bill* and that kind of influenced me to go to be a policeman, I'm quite interested in doing that …there was a joy ride programme which they keep showing, which was quite good and I might enjoy doing that sort of thing, being in the police car' - Andrew, appendix B, transcript 53, p.81.
[6] See, for example, appendix B, transcript 59, p.88.

2. Perceptions of the school and its RE

Place of the school and Catholic identity - creating a culture

In the construction and understanding of the cultures they inhabit in different areas of their lives, the boys speak about the variety of cultures at school. These can be identified as explicit and formal as well as informal and hidden.

Peer Culture and Pressures

Using Andrew and Arthur's interview to follow up the group interview theme of boyfriends and girlfriends I asked about the school in a very general way. As well as endorsing the prevalence of a 'who fancies who' culture among their classmates Andrew and Arthur also expose a complex and tight network of relationships and communication among peers[1]. The theme of peer pressure is also raised within a conversation about pollution, detailing this conversation transcript 56[2] presents Andrew's and Arthur's interpretations of peer pressure among boys:

- speaking of graffiti Andrew states that boys do it 'to show that they're clever …but I don't think that's true cos its not clever';

- Arthur reasons 'sometimes it's to show that they're hard and like they're brave and things …well sometimes when there's __ and things and they get really worked up, especially when they get bullied, probably'[3].

Other issues pertaining to the character, influence and perceptions of the school are also raised at this point of the interview:

- the boys' concerns about pollution and recycling is linked, by them, with a recent environment week at school;

- when I ask about boy peer pressure at their own school, moving from the general to the personal, Andrew and Arthur portray the school as being more friendly – 'like everyone's friends'(Arthur). Andrew agrees that peer pressure isn't so much of a problem at their school and he attributes the friendly atmosphere to its Catholic identity – 'it's like quite friendly cos it's Catholic, that's why I suppose'[4].

Ethos

The boys support Kate's and Lucy's opinions about the caring and friendly quality of

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 53, p.81
[2] See appendix B, transcript 56, p.84.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 56, p.84.
[4] See appendix B, transcript 56, p.84.

the school's ethos and, like the girls, Andrew and Arthur relate this to the religious or 'Catholic' character of the school[1], as we have seen in transcript 56. Further in the interview I asked Andrew and Arthur again about the character of their school and the same sentiments about a 'nice and quiet atmosphere', a 'nice', 'friendlier sort of place' emerge to encompass teachers and children[2].

Religious Identity

The boys were open to talk further about the religious identity of the school and transcript 58 shows how else they described the characteristics of a Catholic school[3]. From this data the following observations can be made:

- Arthur discusses how a Catholic school is special because 'you learn all these things about Christ …[and] Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit and that …its good …and its good to know more about your faith';

- Andrew focuses on RE lessons as the defining character of a Catholic school – 'we do RE lessons all the time with the head teacher';

- both boys state their belief that it is important to know about 'your faith' (Arthur). Arthur reasons that 'its stupid saying you're not a Catholic and you don't know anything about it …like you don't know what's going on' and Andrew also contributes to the discussion 'if you don't know anything about the Catholic faith you're not a Catholic are you?'

- only at the end of this section of conversation do we discover that Arthur is Catholic and Andrew is Church of England[4].

Arthur's and Andrew's perceptions appear to be that the school provides important knowledge about God, Jesus and other religious ideas and that without this knowledge a person couldn't call themselves a Catholic. At another point in the interview Andrew and Arthur offer different opinions as they discuss how the school and family relationships combine as a crucial source of knowledge and understanding for religious ideas and identity[5]. Recognising that he learns 'about his faith' at school Arthur details different ways in which he learns about religious ideas outside of school - the Bible, his mother's books about 'the Jewish Bible' and his grandfather, who, despite living in France, is frequently in contact with him on the phone and often

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[1] As we have seen in appendix B, transcript 56, p.84.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 57, p.85.
[3] See appendix B, transcript 58, p.87.
[4] See appendix B, transcript 58, p.87.
[5] See appendix B, transcript 59, p.88.

talks about religion[1]. In contrast Andrew simply cites 'RE lessons in school' as the environment where he 'finds out about God'[2].

RE Lessons

Picking up on the way the boys attach so much importance to RE lessons as a way of learning about God and establishing an identity, I ask them what they like finding out about God. The ensuing conversation[3] confirms (1) Andrew's and Arthur's earlier remarks about the significance of family relationships, as well as (2) comments made in previous interviews about what makes for enjoyable RE at school.

- Arthur and Andrew speak enthusiastically about how they enjoy discussions and the opportunity to consider personal experiences and relationships in RE[4];
- discussing the topic of 'special people' facilitated another space in the interview where the boys could mention people who were important to them: Andrew introduces his cousin to the conversation[5] and Arthur also brings in a different person, his godmother[6].

<u>Collective Worship and Reconciliation</u>

In encouraging the boys to talk about different aspects of RE I attempt to ask about collective worship, or mass, at school. As is evident in transcript 61[7] there is little comment about their feelings or understanding of collective worship because the discussion is swiftly moved on by Andrew who talks about the sacrament of reconciliation that also takes place within the school environment. This conversation reveals two main areas for consideration:

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[1] 'My grandpa tells me a lot …I always phone him up for a while and have a chat …he's in the North of France, near me …He's really religious and he goes to mass every Sunday, every special, like um, Pentecost and everything he goes to mass and he knows a lot about it, so he's always talking about it …Say, well like when I um, like I ask him, 'do you know like where um, Jesus died, like what do you know?' and like he knows all about it' – Arthur, appendix B, transcript 59, p.88.

[2] See appendix B, transcript 59, p.88.

[3] See appendix B, transcript 60, p.89.

[4] 'I like all of it really, sometimes we have like big sessions where we all go in a group and we all talk about what we've written and what we've done for homework …I like the discussion'- Arthur, appendix B, transcript 60, p.89.

[5] 'I've got an older cousin who's 30 …he spends quite a lot of time at our house …he's got this jeep and um, and we've got this hill which has chalk on it and um before my dad flattened it all out, it was all heaps and he took the jeep up it and it got stuck *(laughs)*…dad towed it off so that was quite lucky' – Andrew, appendix B, transcript 60, p.89.

[6] 'I don't see her a lot …[she lives] down in the south of France and I come from the north…[I don't get to see her much so] it's really special when we get to see her …she gives me money and we go to the park, we go shopping…[We talk about] life …and how it is in England. She's got a restaurant, I've never been to it but like sometimes we talk about that and how it's going …I'm not sure [if she's Catholic], I think she is, yeh … all my family's Catholic' – Arthur, appendix B, transcript 60, p.89.

[7] See appendix B, transcript 61, p.91.

- Andrew's and Arthur's personal feelings and understanding about the experience of the sacrament of reconciliation[1];

- how the influence of the school affects the boys' lives: the boys appear to be happy with the concepts of doing a penance which is given them by the priest and when I ask if they ever make anything up because they don't know what to say Andrew replies with 'no, Mrs Baker told us not to do that'.

Thus school and family are repeatedly cited by Andrew and Arthur as points of influence, information and authority and each is recognised as providing identity and safety, as well as knowledge.

Religious Concepts – their nature and construction

Despite the way the boys emphasise the need for knowledge to create and sustain a religious identity[2] they do not engage in any extensive discussion about their understanding of religious ideas. Throughout their interview there were only two points at which they enter into a debate about religious concepts:

(1) Thinking about God

Transcript 62 shows how Andrew and Arthur spoke about God and the images they employed[3]:

- Arthur easily slips into a description of what he used to think God was like, and how he thinks of God now: 'sometimes, like when I was younger I used to think Jesus was a man with a long beard and white clothes …I think he's kind of like a sort of spirit really …that's all around …I can't really picture God, its just like there'.

- Andrew is not quite so forthcoming, simply describing God as 'up in heaven'.

- Both boys firmly assert a belief that there is a God and Andrew supports his assertion by referring to what he has learnt from school[4].

- Exploring their ideas about heaven Andrew describes it as 'just above the galaxy I suppose …You go into space and God's above space…I think its just like fields of

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[1] **Andrew** describes his first experience 'like a great big weight had been lifted off my shoulders but this time I went it wasn't quite that way, it just felt like normal …its strange cos you'd think that the second time it would be easier but it wasn't'. **Arthur** also contributes how he feels beforehand – 'like you forget all the things that you've done and you think, 'agh! I need something!'' – see appendix B, transcript 61, p.91.

[2] See appendix B, transcript 58, p.87.

[3] See appendix B, transcript 62, p.92.

[4] 'yes really from going to school, going to this school really, its taught me that there is a God. We've been doing wind and fire and as our homework we had to draw a personification of wind and fire, so that's really saying like that's a picture of God' – Andrew, appendix B, transcript 62, p.92.

countryside rather than cities and towns with pollution and things like that, like the opposite to pollution really'.

- Arthur offers an alternative image describing heaven as 'maybe in our hearts'.
- Both boys say that they pray and that they think it's important to.

In their different narratives the school can again be seen to figure prominently in providing imagery and concepts for the boys to use and develop within their own worldviews.

(2) When People Die

Transcript 63[1] illustrates Andrew and Arthur developing their ideas about God and heaven as they consider what happens when people die. The following issues are raised by them:

- Judgement

The common theme of judgement is returned to several times throughout this passage and it is Arthur who structures his comments and ideas around the concept. This can be seen at the very beginning in Arthur's initial response to my query about what happens when people die – 'it depends if they've been good or not ...er are they going to be with God or not'.

- Arthur's concept of life after death

Probing whether Arthur would link images of God as spirit and 'in your heart' I repeat my question about death to him. His reply incorporates an image of new life after death – 'if people die, then they'd still be alive but in your heart, also that they won't be dead, they would just be like, it'll just be the start of a new life'.

- Andrew's concept of life after death - heaven

In his reflections Andrew also build up a narrative around the theme of life after death. His imagery is more traditional, using the concepts of heaven and hell, and when encouraged to expand on this Andrew refers to his own experience - '[in heaven you could] spend more time with your hamster, I like doing that after school, and like all the time its free and you can do what you like ...I think it's just really free ...I think God is in the heart of living people and heaven is just ruled by God, he's not actually there'. At the end of his considerations Andrew links in the abstract notion of heaven with his experiences and knowledge of learning about God – 'you learn about

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 63, p.94.

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God in your life so you practise everything and the reason for that is for when you go to heaven'.

- **Arthur's concept of hell**

Arthur maintains the existence of something like hell, although in keeping with his other abstract imagery he does not describe it in a concrete way[1].

- **Andrew's concept of hell**

Rather than indulging in the more familiar narratives of fire, pain and the devil Andrew also typifies hell as being a 'really lonely place'.

- **The need to seek God's forgiveness for doing wrong**

Both boys highlight the importance of seeking forgiveness when you have done something wrong. Arthur appears to be particularly concerned with this concept and cites 'not just bothering to be forgiven' as a reason why someone might not go to heaven when they die. This is re-emphasised again shortly afterwards when I ask what three questions they might like to put to God if they had the chance. The personal context of their answers is especially striking:

Andrew is able to respond quickly with 'what are you like? What do you look like? And why did you create us?'

Arthur also swiftly produces three questions, two of which are concerned with the theme of forgiveness and judgement – 'am I good enough to go to heaven or do I need to improve? What do you look like? And er, can you forgive us?…Because we've done so much wrong'.

- **Learning about forgiveness at school**

Arthur highlights the pivotal role of the family in, among other things, providing knowledge about God, throughout his second interview. Alongside this the concept of forgiveness and judgement emerges as a dominating theme in his discussion of religious ideas. Bearing in mind the boys' conversations about reconciliation at school[2] it is very likely that the school must somehow be affecting the boys' developing worldviews and religious concepts. This conclusion is confirmed towards the end of the interview when Andrew and Arthur both agree that they learn about this at school.

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[1] 'well, I wouldn't say like hell was a place where like the devil lives, I'd say its like um, an emptiness …like you're not with God and …you'd just be on your own' – Arthur, appendix B, transcript 63, p.94.
[2] See appendix B, transcript 61, p.91.

- **Stewardship on earth – the need to look after the world and animals**

Reflecting on the implications of judgement and life after death Arthur and Andrew suggest that a necessary implication of this is that life should be lived in a certain way. These aspects of their worldviews appear to affect them morally as well as spiritually, for example Arthur describes it as needing to 'spread the word, be kind, don't hurt people'. When asked if God created us for a reason he replies that God made people to 'rule on earth, look after his animals, he gave them to us to look after', something he feels people don't do. Andrew, on the other hand, is more positive, drawing on his own life experience for illustration he comments that 'some people do, it depends where you live, if you live in the country I think God would think you do do that, you're looking after the animals and the countryside. But I'm not sure like if you live in [town] or something like that with all the pollution and rubbish and that'[1].

Concluding Comments Regarding Andrew and Arthur's Interview

My interview with Andrew and Arthur reveals the importance of family and school within each of their worldviews and their narratives draw heavily on personal experience within these environments. The complexity and interrelationship of concepts, experiences and influences is indicated in the way the boys confront different religious concepts, weaving together their own narratives.

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 63, p.94.

ST CHRISTOPHER'S

Introduction to School

St Christopher's CE Aided Primary School is a large newly built school located in a leafy middle to upper-middle class suburb on the west side of town. At the time of my research there were 255 children on roll and my interviews were conducted with year 6. An initial meeting with the head, Mr Cartwright, went very well. I found him to be interested in my work and keen to help: speaking at length about the school and its pupils, as well as providing copies of the school prospectus, a religious education policy and scheme of work. Despite such a promising beginning this was to be the only time I managed to talk with the head, apart from a brief telephone conversation once I all the interviews were finished. My relationship with the class teacher at St Christopher's was just as limited. It is a reflection of my general relationship with the school to remark that I only knew the class teacher as Mr Chapman - I never did find out what his first name was!

A softly spoken, tall, thin man in his early forties Mr Chapman expressed no interest in my work, I do not know whether this was because he was a shy person or that he had simply been told by the head to provide me with groups of children. As the interviews were arranged to be immediately after lunch I often arrived before the end of the lunch break, hoping to have the chance for a few minutes to talk. However, this did not seem to facilitate much conversation and even the lightest of comments did not appear to encourage him to talk about the children. Admittedly Mr Chapman was often finishing his sandwiches or placing work on desks before the children returned, perhaps my intrusion on his lunch was not appreciated. Returning the children to class after interviews was even less fruitful: other children were busy working and the afternoon session was well under way, any conversation with Mr Chapman tended to be restricted to a few sentences in order to arrange my next visit.

My arrangement with St Christopher's was to use a slot after the lunch break when the class had twenty minutes or so of settling down and quiet reading time. Using this time for the group interviews meant that the interviews were shorter than at the other schools. The interviews were held just outside the classroom in a communal area with large tables. On two occasions this space was already being used and so for one group interview, as well as my longer interview with Liz and Sarah, I ended up in the

cloakroom area amongst coats and lunchboxes. Fortunately it was an open space so the children could do their drawings sitting on the floor! During the autumn term I interviewed the whole class in small groups ranging from four to seven children. Mr Chapman provided mixed groups: girls and boys and a combination of ability and background. I returned after Christmas to interview a pair of girls, Liz and Sarah, and two boys, Oliver and Stephen.

The Teacher's Perspective – RE

Instead of returning two independently completed questionnaires I received one completed by the head (Mr Cartwright) and a second one filled in by Mr Cartwright and Mr Chapman together[1]. In their answers they describe the ethos of their school as:

> 'a Christian school in which each individual is treated as important and in which an atmosphere of trust and understanding is encouraged to enable the children to enjoy a sense of security and gain self-discipline and a personal responsibility'.[2]

A focus on scripture and the figure of Jesus is also highlighted as the context of Christian faith passed on to children at the school:

> 'the Christian faith including an awareness of God as he reveals himself in Scripture and in Jesus Christ; an appreciation of prayer and an understanding of the Bible whilst encouraging a respect for other religions, races and ways of life'.[3]

It should be noted that the questionnaire refers to 'other religions, races and ways of life' and the movement out beyond the Christian faith tradition is mentioned again in response to a question about the role of RE in year 6:

> 'climax in school of planned scheme of work which, in year 6, draws together much of what has been learnt as they study other faiths and begin to understand and appreciate other ways of religious life'.[4]

When asked about the children's perceptions of RE the response is realistic, whilst continuing to specify the place of religious traditions which are non-Christian:

> 'for some just something they have to 'endure'! – but for many a real interest is shown in the practices of other faiths'.[5]

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[1] See appendix E.
[2] Mr Cartwright (head), St Christopher's questionnaire, q.2 – see appendix E.
[3] Mr Cartwright (head), St Christopher's questionnaire, q.3 – see appendix E.
[4] Mr Cartwright (head), St Christopher's questionnaire, q.5 – see appendix E.
[5] Mr Cartwright (head), St Christopher's questionnaire, q.6 – see appendix E.

Mr Cartwright's comments signal an emphasis on a particularly Christian identity and character in their school and in connection to this they point to the significance of 'parental choice and interest', especially church and Sunday School, as important influences in the children's lives. As for the concerns of the children themselves, they cite two main issues:

> 'at this time of year – moving to a new school, making new friends and being happy and accepted. On a deeper level - concern about death and meaning of life'.[1]

The last question posed in the questionnaire asks 'where in their lives do you see the children as having space/ time and encouragement to develop their own ideas and thoughts?' St Christopher's responds by outlining aspects of school life that make such provision:

> 'we attempt to provide time in assemblies, curriculum areas e.g. art, sport to reflect on their achievements as well as providing opportunities through PSE e.g. circle time'.[2]

These responses present comments and issues that can be placed alongside the data from the children's interviews.

The Interviews

The group interviews at St Christopher's raise a number of issues pertaining to the children's broader worldviews as well as the place of religious identity and belief in their lives. These areas were explored in greater detail during the second interviews. Reflecting the nature of the data collected the results from this school will be presented in three sections:

1. themes from the group interviews;
2. Liz and Sarah's second interview;
3. Oliver and Stephen's second interview.

GROUP INTERVIEWS

Although aware of the constraints on interview time I tried to maintain the same open technique as employed in the other schools, presenting key questions to facilitate discussion. I hoped these would encourage the children to talk about aspects of their lives that were important to them, as well as indicating the significance of any religious belief.

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[1] Mr Cartwright (head), St Christopher's questionnaire, q.9 – see appendix E.
[2] Mr Cartwright (head), St Christopher's questionnaire, q.10 – see appendix E.

Character of the Interviews

Similar to the group interviews at St Beatrice's, the boys at St Christopher's tended to be a fairly disruptive influence, making jokes and giggling a lot of the time. Although I still had to assume an adult/ teacher role - maintaining order and keeping the interview focussed – I found the interviews easier than at St Beatrice's. I believe there were four main reasons for this:

1. the boys were not as noisy or disruptive as those at St Beatrice's;
2. there were very little boyfriend/girlfriend dynamics;
3. the girls were generally mature and treated the boys, who spent a lot of time giggling, with disdain;
4. the children at St Christopher's were, on the whole, happy to engage in conversation, consider my questions and talk together about concepts and ideas.

Edmund

At St Christopher's I encountered the one child who did not appear to co-operate at all with my research. I shall call this boy Edmund because this is how he introduced himself. I only later discovered that he was really called Jonathan, Edmund was simply the name of the character he was playing in the school's production of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Edmund was an articulate boy and rather than not talking, his non-co-operation took the form of being extremely disruptive. His condescending and ridiculing manner to me was very difficult to cope with. After giving him the option to leave if he wasn't interested in participating in his group's interview he became considerably quieter. However, because of my negative feelings to him (I was amazed at myself for taking quite a dislike to him) and irritation, I found it almost impossible to listen and be attentive to any later comments he made[1]. I recognise now that his manner and comments illustrate a particular worldview and complexity of character that would have been interesting to pursue further[2], although even now I do not have the inclination for that. Throughout my visits to St Christopher's Edmund persistently hounded me - whenever I came into the main classroom he would make comments and during interviews he would frequently walk past loudly, distracting and talking to whoever was with me. This was especially frustrating as it usually occurred just as I had managed to engage the children in a

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 1, p.1.
[2] See appendix C, transcript 1, p.1.

serious or personal discussion. Edmund would then come along and boys in particular would respond to his jokes and comments by reverting to their giggly, detached attitude. Suffice to say that Edmund was an aspect of my research that affected me on different levels. Through the experience I was challenged both personally and professionally. Since then I have continued to reflect on and re-evaluate how I see myself and how I relate to children.

Other Children and the Areas of Discussion

Apart from Edmund the other children at St Christopher's were, as I have indicated, happy to engage in conversation about their lives and what they thought about. Their different topics of discussion can be set out as follows:

- **listening**
- **the broader context of the children's lives:**

    pastimes and hobbies, attitude to money, animals and pets, family breakdown;

- **Christian identity:**

    family, church, Sunday School;

- **School:**

    ethos and Christian identity, RE lessons, assembly and collective worship;

- **the Bible**
- **religious concepts and images:**

    God, heaven, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Devil, judgement;

- **prayer**
- **questions for God**
- **Christian belief; concerns and behaviour**
- **anti-religious sentiments.**

Listening

I mentioned the theme of listening to children as a way of introducing myself at the beginning of the interview. I did not originally plan for this to invite comments yet as with St Beatrice's I soon found that the children frequently responded with their own experiences of feeling not listened to[1].

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 2, p.2.

The Broader Context of the Children's Lives

Pastimes and Hobbies

As they introduced themselves the children at St Christopher's spoke about their families and 'something they liked doing'. Football was highlighted by many of the boys and a few girls[1] and as well as this ballet lessons, swimming, water sports, rugby, horse riding and music lessons were also included in their activities[2].

Attitude to Money

At St Christopher's there was some discussion about money, generally in terms of parent's work and how much they earned. In the fourth group interview the children were very keen to find out how much I earned and their persistent questions were, I feel, fuelled by a real interest, as well as needing to know how to judge the status of what I did and who I was[3]. Another interesting conversation about money took place when Edward spoke about the financial position of the school: his comprehension and communication of a considerably complex situation being quite amazing[4].

Animals and Pets

In their introductions many children referred to pets and other animals as being important to them[5] and this was endorsed again when children were invited to draw something that was important to them[6]. Transcript 7[7] demonstrates how one group talked about their pets in this way and a number of observations may be made:

- John introduces the theme of pets as something that is important to him;
- the experience of a pet dying is mentioned by Laura and Sarah;
- rather than focussing on what happens to a pet when it dies the group move on to discuss talking to their pets when they're upset;
- Sarah mentions that she also prays when upset, she contrasts this to when she's '**really** upset [then] I find it easier to talk to my rabbit'.

Family Breakdown

Further data from all the group interviews emphasises the distinctive role of prayer in many of the children's lives: for example, prayer is mentioned when Victoria and

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[1] For examples see appendix C, transcript 3, p.3ff; transcript 4, p.5.
[2] See appendix C, transcript 3, p.3ff; transcript 4, p.5.
[3] See appendix C, transcript 5, p.6.
[4] See appendix C, transcript 6, p.7f.
[5] See appendix C, transcript 3, p.3ff.
[6] See appendix C, transcript 7, p.8.
[7] See appendix C, transcript 7, p.8.

Richard talk about coping with their experiences of parental separation[1]. Several children in the class commented that their parents were divorced and transcript 8[2] illustrates how many referred to the fear created through parents arguing.

Christian Identity

As the group interviews progressed a very strong and clearly defined sense of Christian identity emerged. As well as frequently highlighting the place of prayer in their lives the children were happy to talk about their own Christian identity and the Christian framework that they felt was provided by their families, church and school.

Family

The children did not spend a significant amount of time talking about their families although transcript 9[3] shows how some children used their families for illustration of an idea - in this case what happens when people die, near death experiences and seeing angels. In this Jonathan and Sarah's comments seem to indicate the key role of family members in nurturing and providing a Christian framework.

Church

Transcripts 10 and 11[4] exemplify how many children at St Christopher's identified themselves as Christian and described their regular attendance at local evangelical churches as a positive and enjoyable aspect of their lives[5]. Considering the children's comments in transcript 11 several other pertinent observations may be made[6]:

- Katherine refers to a Bible club as the place where she learns about Jesus;

- there are strong overtones of ownership and community within Edward, Katherine and Jessica's conversation about church, for example in the frequent use of 'we';

- Jessica contrasts her experience of church with school, locating school as the place where she learns about God[7].

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 8, p.9.
[2] See appendix C, transcript 8, p.9.
[3] See appendix C, transcript 9, p.9.
[4] See appendix C, transcript 10, p.10; transcript 11, p.11.
[5] As, for example, Jane illustrates, 'well, for one thing you don't have lots of other people and the adults talk to you more like and there's drama and there's puppets and you can do whatever you like, and sometimes you have to help like with the creche and the younger ones and sometimes you can be in dramas and you have to help pack up and clear away and its all really good fun' – appendix C, transcript 10, p.10.
[6] See appendix C, transcript 11, p.11.
[7] See, for example, 'we have people speaking ... and we do songs ... [we learn about God] not so much really in church though, its more in school we do that' – Jessica, appendix C, transcript 11, p.11.

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Sunday School

Unlike Jessica other children isolated Sunday School and the home as specific learning environments for finding out about God[1] and the vicar is also identified as someone who tells them about God[2]. Jessica's comments at the end of transcript 12 emphasise the significance of the Bible for many children as a key source of learning and authority in their lives. In addition she also demonstrates her attitude to non-Christian religious belief, a common view from St Christopher's:

> 'I don't like learning about other religions though ... cos I think its just something what they just made up ... [being a Christian is not like that] no! Cos its all in the Bible and it says everything what happened'.[3]

School

The data from St Christopher's evidences a distinctive, strong Christian identity and this same Christian identity emerges when the children speak about the school and RE.

Ethos

Transcript 13[4] exemplifies how children in three group interviews communicated the Christian character of their school, referring to aspects of school life that they believe contribute to its Christian ethos and nature:

- going to church and belief in Jesus are described as the criteria for being allowed to come to their school;
- prayer - 'you pray a lot' (Katherine);
- the teachers - 'I think it means that we like Jesus, cos I like Jesus, and so do other Christians and I feel that its really good ...I think its just nicer cos if you think, the teachers are Christian and they um, I don't know really, but the teachers are sort of Christians, I mean the teachers don't have to be Christians to come and work at a Christian school. I just think its better' (Edward);
- assemblies - 'you learn about Jesus in assemblies' (Edward); 'we do talk a lot about Jesus in the assemblies' (Jessica).
- in group interview 4 the children talk about their concepts of God. In relation to their perceptions of the school it may be noted how members of the group

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 12, p.12.
[2] See appendix C, transcript 12, p.12.
[3] See appendix C, transcript 12, p.12.
[4] See appendix C, transcript 13, p.12.

introduce the head as someone who is close to God and whom God speaks to (Richard and Liz). This can be contrasted to the way that three of the group admit to **not** feeling close to God and God **not** speaking to them (Justin, Richard and Lucy). This difference in closeness to God is emphasised further by Liz speaking about her experiences of 'falling over in the spirit', something which not all members in the group have experienced.

RE Lessons

The children at St Christopher's were keen to talk about their RE lessons and the key issues, which arose repeatedly throughout the group interviews, mainly focussed on the children's attitude to studying other religions.

A Negative Response

Group Interview 2

Transcript 14[1] illustrates how some children expressed negativity to both RE and understanding other religions, in this case the Muslim faith. Matthew and Hayley's immediate response to my asking about RE is the familiar complaint that they find it boring. Matthew then expands this with the comment 'all we've been doing about is these Muslims'. I follow up the introduction of another religious faith and other members of the group (Christopher, Ben and Jessica) are more positive. Following on from this Mark and Matthew agree with the others, admitting that they like learning about other religions.

Later in the interview I pursue the group's attitude to other religions again, trying to probe further their understanding of people who do not share their strong Christian identity and belief system. The group all join in the ensuing discussion which results in the shared view that the God of the Islamic tradition 'is a different one' (Mark). Alternative explanations are offered, for example that 'they make their own God' (Ben) and that 'their God doesn't live, he's not alive' (Christopher).

Group Interview 4

A much stronger, dismissive attitude towards other faiths is expressed in group interview 4 as the children embark on a discussion about Hinduism. On this occasion the children's language appears to be characterised by disregard and aggression[2]. Later the same children talk about moving on to secondary school and again the issue

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 14, p.15.
[2] See appendix C, transcript 15, p.17.

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of a different religious tradition is brought up (this time the Catholic faith) as views are exchanged about the difference between a being Catholic and being a Christian[1].

Positive Comments

Group Interview 1

The boys and girls in group interview 1 offer a more positive response to learning about other religious faiths[2]:

- they agree that it is interesting to learn about other religions;
- they agree that it makes them question what they believe and how they think about God[3];
- Holly, supported by other members in the group, communicates views that are contrary to those expressed in other groups[4].

Teachers and RE

In their conversations about RE children in the first group interview highlight how the approach of different teachers to the subject has an important affect as to whether they enjoy RE: 'he makes things more, you know (Victoria) ...just better (Laura) ...more understandable (Stephen)'. 'Mr Chapman always makes it fun for us, like we watch the videos (Holly) ... [and] he showed us all these Muslim things, didn't he? (Victoria)'[5]. It may also be noted that at this point of their interview the children endorse earlier comments about other religions, their reflections triangulating their previously articulated outward looking worldviews, whilst at the same time upholding a firm Christian identity[6].

Opportunity for discussion

As with all the schools in this study St Christopher's was no different in that the children highlighted the opportunity for discussion as an enjoyable aspect of RE[7].

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 16, p.18.

[2] See appendix C, transcript 17, p.19.

[3] See, for example, Sarah - 'yeh, very much ... you don't feel so sort of crouched up inside or anything, you can move out like sideways, you just feel more sort of relaxed' - appendix C, transcript 17, p.19.

[4] 'it's really confusing like people must think like we're weird because we believe in all this stuff about Jesus and we think they're weird (Holly)... because they don't (Steven) ... I don't think it's quite strange [not to believe in Jesus] (Laura) ...Well, it's not weird, but, I mean, you just let them get on with their lives if they don't believe in Jesus ... like my cousin doesn't and I don't hassle her about it (Holly) ... they just believe in what they believe in (Richard) ... I don't mind (Holly)' - appendix C, transcript 17, p.19.

[5] See appendix C, transcript 18, p.20.

[6] For example see Holly, '[in RE I would like to] learn more about the world really...about different people's um, religion, and that um, the stories that have gone around and I like learning about things like people seeing Jesus – appendix C, transcript 18, p.20.

[7] See appendix C, transcript 19, p.22.

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Supporting similar comments from St Anne's and St Beatrice's, children from St Christopher's also mentioned that such an opportunity for discussion was particularly valued when conversations grew out of the concerns and experiences of the children themselves[1].

Assembly and Collective Worship

Although children in the group interviews briefly remarked upon assembly and going to church there was no detailed discussion about these aspects of RE at St Christopher's.

The Bible

I have already alluded to the significance of the Bible for many of the children at St Christopher's and transcript 20 is a further illustration of the place of the Bible in the children's worldviews and their Christian faith[2]. In this conversation Liz cites the Bible as the place where you can find out about God. Also interesting in this transcript is the conflict expressed in the group: on the one hand they recognise the Bible as a special book containing true stories, whereas they also remark that they 'don't read it anymore...[and] some of the words I don't know' (Justin and Richard), 'that it does get a bit boring...they're boring [the stories] and they have these long words' (Lucy). What appears to be communicated is a tension between accepting the authority of the Bible and understanding and connecting it within their lives.

<u>**Religious Concepts and Images**</u>

God

Transcript 21[3] illustrates how children in one interview played with the concept of God, describing God in a variety of different ways:

- as a 'big ghost' (Edmund);
- in a very specific human male image; for example, with 'a brown moustache, a brown jumper and grey trousers with shiny shoes and grey hair with a bald patch (Thomas) or with 'a beard and...hair coming down like that, and its very white' (Jessica);
- as 'big and up' (Jonathan).

In addition to this imagery Matthew refers to a more judgmental image – 'I think he's up in the sky standing on the world going 'tut, tut''.

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 19, p.22.
[2] See appendix C, transcript 20, p.23.
[3] See appendix C, transcript 21, p.24.

God and heaven

Transcript 22[1] is a longer and more serious consideration of the concepts of God and heaven. Katherine and Edward's narratives are particularly interesting, especially in view of how their pondering is facilitated through their interactions with each other[2]. A further observation is that Jessica's comments, over a fairly lengthy period of the conversation, are minimal: she only really comes in at two points, describing God as 'brown and tanned'[3] and 'like a bunny rabbit'[4]. At each of these instances Jessica appears to be playing with images of God rather than engaging in the same way as Edward and Katherine.

Edward and Katherine's reflections are, as I have indicated, fascinating, incorporating distinctive themes and images. Katherine's story[5] depicts an image of God within the context of sexism and sexist language and discussing what she used to think she admits that at present she doesn't have an image of God to replace her earlier sexist one[6]. Although the issue of sexist language arises at different times with other children, Katherine's discussion is unique in its depth and elaboration. Within the boundaries of St Christopher's Katherine's comments about going to church also single her out from other children: unlike the prominence given by many children to attending church, Katherine talks about not needing to go to church. Here she brings in the authority of her mother to support her position that nothing bad will happen to her if she doesn't go. This reference to her mother appears to be a way of meeting the opposition of friends, and even teachers, whom it would seem claim that she should go to church.

Instead of God, Edward's story focuses on his concepts of heaven, although like Katherine, he too stresses that this is something he used to think[7]. What Edward appears to convey through this is his perceived inadequacy of an earlier concrete image of heaven, combined with his struggle to find a satisfactory, more abstract

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 22, p.25.
[2] Because of their extensive contribution to the discussion I have storied their comments (see appendix C, transcript 23, p.29 and transcript 24, p.30) as well as providing the transcript (appendix C, transcript 22, p.25). I feel that this reasserts the coherence and sophistication of Katherine and Edward's conceptualisation.
[3] Line 8.
[4] Line 22.
[5] See appendix C, transcript 23, p.30.
[6] 'But I changed my ideas because I then realised about the sexist world, because if that was a picture of God and I was like sexist that would be like a man wouldn't it? I just sort of thought about it myself and now I think, I don't know, I really don't know' – Katherine, appendix C, transcript 23, p.30.
[7] See appendix C, transcript 24, p.31.

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conceptualisation. The language of 'what I used to believe' occurs not just for Edward and Katherine but also arises in data from St Anne's School and St Beatrice's School: it might be that by describing concepts in this way such children put a safe space between the image and their personal investment, a safety measure to insure against their inner thoughts being laid open for criticism or ridicule.

God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

Transcript 25[1] presents other ways in which children from St Christopher's School conceptualised God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. In the conversation the group consider my question about the difference between God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit and engaging with each other in a serious rather than playful way, Liz and Lucy try to answer my query:

- 'they're all the same' - Liz;

- 'Jesus is God's son...and [the Holy Spirit] is the thing inside Jesus ...and when God does something good his body lights up because of the Holy Spirit ...when God or Jesus does something good the body lights up with the Holy Spirit' - Lucy.

Judgement – heaven and hell

Discussing heaven and hell with the children in group interview three combine a concept playtime with the communication of more serious, fundamental imagery that has real significance[1]. Expressing a firm belief in heaven and hell, the group respond to each other's comments and work together to offer a variety of ideas, whilst at the same time revealing their own concerns and desires:

- **Heaven**

- 'heaven's a lovely place' – Jane;

- 'its boring because all it is is some gold gates and it's a big room with a gold floor with all these little monks running around' – Edmund;

- 'heaven's just like this but no fighting' – Jonathan;

- 'there's food everywhere and you can do whatever you like and if you fall over or have an accident it won't hurt because you just fall over and it doesn't even hurt and you can have whatever you want and it's got lots of sweets and lots of things like that' – Sally;

- 'I think you can eat anything and you don't get fat, you can eat everything and you don't get fat' – Sarah.

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 25, p.31.

- **When You Go To Heaven**
  - 'no, you're like a monk...well, I think that you might come out like Ryan Giggs, if you go to heaven, that would be my heaven...cos Ryan is very good at football' – Jonathan;
  - 'you're yourself' – Matthew;
  - 'you're like a little green monster...my Sunday School teacher, Bridget, and she said that you don't know what you look like, you might be a little green monster, no one knows' – Sally.
- **Hell**
  - 'there's a big ball of fire' – Thomas;
  - 'there's a man standing on a platform with his big spiky thing'- Jane;
  - 'I think there's like aliens and some are in chains and they can't move and they're like that forever and every day they get thrown in some fire and then they come back' – Sally;
  - 'they're in hell and there's a big pool of fire, they're just there, they haven't any life, but they haven't any life in hell, they're just there...and they can't get out' - Jonathan and Thomas;
  - 'I think you can get out from hell' – Sarah;
  - 'they can if you're really good...cos God would feel sorry for them, I don't believe in hell, its all wrong' – Jane;
  - 'you have to be a Christian to go to heaven' – Jonathan;
  - 'no, you have to be kind' - Sarah and Jane;
  - 'lots of people have died and aren't Christians and they probably went to heaven' – Matthew;
  - 'if you want to go to heaven you have to believe in Jesus' – Thomas.

In this group's conversation the notion of a distinct Christian identity appears to be a crucial underlying issue. Exploring the concepts the children confront the implications of whether only people who believe in Jesus can go to heaven and the contradictions involved, such as the image of a caring, loving God and a person having to go to hell, are clearly unresolved conflicts within some children's worldviews.

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 26, p.32.

God, the Holy Spirit and the devil

Children in group interview 2 exhibit a similar grappling with conflicting images in their discussion about God, the Holy Spirit and the devil[1]. There is a general consensus when the group discuss their ideas, much of it biblically based, about the end of the world[2], Jesus[3] and the Holy Spirit[4] and neither is there a difference of opinion regarding the fundamental place of God in each of their lives - God is described as everywhere[5] and 'special and unique...nothing else like it'[6]. The importance of God is something they all agree on 'because he made us'(Ben) and 'because otherwise I wouldn't be alive'(Mark)[7]. Other ideas produce some conflict: notably those concerned with the beginning of the world and the devil. Oliver introduces a non-biblical and non-religious conceptualisation of the beginning of the world by suggesting that the world began with two planets crashing together[8] and this view is challenged by the rest of the group as they enter into a heated debate about the role of God in creation. There is further difficulty when the group try to make sense of where the devil fits in the broader concepts of God and heaven: for example, Christopher comments that 'if you're bad you have the devil inside you as well'[9] and this is met with a mixed reaction[10].

As the group pursue these ideas Christopher develops the concept of personal freedom and in doing so reasserts other images and issues:

- a distinctive Christian identity re-emerges as a way of defining boundaries, this time in terms of who can go to heaven and who can't;

- to be a Christian is good, to be anything else is to be bad[11].

Importance of Prayer

The children's discussions about religious concepts reveal a Christian identity and understanding that has a real significance in their lives and experiences and this strong

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 27, p.35.
[2] Lines 12-29.
[3] Line 50f.
[4] Lines 53-60.
[5] Lines 110, 112, 122.
[6] Lines 146f.
[7] Lines 184f.
[8] Lines 91f.
[9] Line 155.
[10] 'no you haven't!...I mean that somewhere is inside your heart and you believe in God and somewhere you believe in the devil, no, half the heart, well, three quarters of the heart' (Ben); 'yeh, you do' (Mark); 'you have a choice' (Jessica) – lines 155ff.
[11] Lines 187-195.

religious foundation to their worldviews is also emphasised when they talk about prayer. Prayer clearly occupies a vital role in the children's lives and is identified as important for help, support, direction and identity[1]. When faced with a problem prayer would appear to function in a similar way to talking to pets, close relations or cuddly toys[2]. In addition, and bearing in mind the concerns of this study, transcript 30 also alludes to the prominence of prayer at school: in assembly, class assemblies and when trying to get out of a detention[3].

Questions for God

Responding to the religious tone of much of their conversations I repeated my technique of asking what questions the children would like to put to God if they could and, as before, this proved to be a valuable way of allowing children to reveal their own concerns and personal reflections.

Existential Concerns

We have already noted how children at St Christopher's addressed the conflict between religious and non-religious ideas about the beginning of the world[4] and among the same group of children this argument crops up again as they articulate their own questions about who they are and why they are alive[5]:

- Matthew, Oliver and Ben encourage a discussion about questions they would like answered by asking 'why did God make us?...I want to know that ...why are we here on earth? Why do we live?' (Matthew); 'yeh, why are we here? There's no need for us to be here?' (Oliver); 'why do we live?'(Ben).

- With no apparent connection to what is being discussed Matthew then poses another question, 'how did Cain have kids?' and reflecting on this the conversation moves on to consider the place and authority of the Bible.

- The general feeling is that not everything in the Bible is true. Some suggest that its cut short (Matthew and Mark) and Oliver simply states that 'I can't believe it's all true'.

- Referring back to the earlier discussion about the beginning of the world, Oliver re-asserts his idea about two planets crashing together. This non-religious stance is not accepted by the others and the ensuing argument is fairly heated.

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 28, p.41; transcript 29, p.42; transcript 30, p.42.
[2] See appendix C, transcript 30, p.42.
[3] See appendix C, transcript 30, p.42.
[4] See appendix C, transcript 27, p.35.
[5] See appendix C, transcript 31, p.43.

Throughout this Oliver maintains his position and as the others rely on the authority of the Bible he offers an interesting defence contending 'it's just what I think ...my next door neighbour, he doesn't believe in God and he thinks the same as me'.

As well as highlighting individual existential concerns, this section of transcript[1] reaffirms the solid Christian framework of most children's worldviews at St Christopher's, although it may be noted that children who do not subscribe to this same strong belief are treated with incredulity and the stigma of someone who 'doesn't believe' is attached to them.

As transcript 32 illustrates[2], other children presented similar questions to those cited above[3] and in group interview 5 the children's reflections also focus on the authority of the Bible rather than their own lives[4].

Christian Belief - Concerns and Behaviour

Environmental Concerns

As well referring to existential and ontological issues, the common theme of environmental concerns was also raised by the children[5]. As they comment upon their worries about the world - for example pollution and endangered species – it is interesting how the children take on board a personal responsibility for caring for the world and how God is also brought into the construction of their narratives[6]. As the group's discussion progresses they can be seen to work together, integrating their concept of God into what they see as the problems in the world:

> Holly: people like that say, 'oh go away if you really believe in God you're stupid enough to do that, sometimes people just don't believe in God, like they think like there's all these children starving in Romania, so they think, God wouldn't do that, so they don't believe in God

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 31, p.43.

[2] See appendix C, transcript 32, p.45.

[3] 'why was the world invented?' (Lucy) and 'how was God invented?...God was a piece of dust but who made that dust? That's what they all say' (Richard) - see appendix C, transcript 32, p.45.

[4] 'I would ask him like if he did all those miracles a long time ago, how come he doesn't do as many now?...Its not fair!' (Katherine); 'will he die?... And how did he make people?' (Jessica); 'well, what I wonder is um, before he made the world, I just wondered how there could be nothing, what would it be like?' (Edward); 'yeh, and how did he make the sea when he, he, suddenly so quickly thought of words and things" (Katherine); 'but how come, but like as Katherine said, how can it just be nothing, and how come there came to be actual sand?' (Edward) – see appendix C, transcript 32, p.45.

[5] See appendix C, transcript 33, p.47.

[6] See, for example, Holly and Richard 'I'd tell people more about God ...like they would understand to change their lives so that they think, 'why are we doing this? We've got a beautiful world. Why are we spoiling the world?'' - appendix C, transcript 33, p.47.

> Laura: but that's not God -
>
> John: we're doing it ourselves, we're destroying it
>
> Richard: yeh, we're the ones wasting our food
>
> Holly: we've got a beautiful world and we're just wasting it all away forever.[1]

Justice

I have already detailed Katherine's discussion about sexist concepts of God[2] and later in her interview, when asked what she thought was wrong in the world, she draws on the theme of sexism again, this time to discuss sexism and ageism:

> 'I don't like this one cos it's so sexist and racist and its very ageist as well... cos like, all the adults are like always in charge, I know that's okay but, its like everyone **owns** their children and its not really fair...And I would change the world from being so sexist...like all the boys are always ...the big people and like that makes the girls sound like the girls are all wimpy and stupid [and they're not] There's just something different about it'.[3]

Judging from the frustration and feeling conveyed in her words, on a number of different instances, these issues are obviously of real significance for Katherine and her worldview.

Being a Christian - how you should behave and changing the world

The data from St Christopher's School points to the fundamental place of Christian identity and belief for most of the children at the school and transcript 35[4] shows how this belief translates into how they should behave and treat others. This is illustrated in group interview 1's discussion about David (a boy in the school) and whether he is a Christian or not. They all appear to express bewilderment at the disparity between how David acts[5] and the fact that he goes to church. The same theme of Christian belief and morality emerges in group interview 5 where being kind and obeying the ten commandments is suggested as a way of improving the world and making people nicer, because, as Edward points out, 'nobody obeys the ten commandments do they, really?'[6].

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 33, p.47.

[2] See appendix C, transcript 23, p.30.

[3] See appendix C, transcript 34, p.48.

[4] See appendix C, transcript 35, p.49.

[5] 'he swears and he beats everybody up and he listens to loud music that's got swearing in it' – Holly, appendix C, transcript 35, p.49.

[6] See appendix C, transcript 35, p.49.

Anti-religious Sentiments

The Christian worldview presented by the children at St Christopher's School is, on some occasions, exposed as exclusivist[1], although in other instances, as we have already seen[2], other children hold this in tension with other feelings and thoughts[3]. In order that my results convey an accurate representation of the children's comments and narratives, I have included transcripts 36 and 37 which show how some children expressed anti-religious feelings[4] and disinterest in the religious input provided by the school[5]. As a way of pursuing these ideas I asked the children concerned if they would tell their own children about God when they were older; their replies possibly reveal their own conflicts and experiences:

> 'I suppose, but I wouldn't say like, 'God's up there listening to you' its too heavy, if they don't want to be Christians when they're older then I won't make them be ...its okay when they're younger ...yeh, but I wouldn't talk about him all the time'.[6]

In spite of this conflict the crucial issue of belief remains an unquestioned aspect of life:

> Q: do people expect you to believe in God?
>
> Liz: they know I believe in God
>
> Justin: yeh, they know I believe in God.[7]

SECOND INTERVIEWS

The second interviews at St Christopher's School went well with the children talking easily and openly about their own thoughts and perceptions. Much of this might be due to Mr Chapman, who, responding to my request for two children who would talk well together, provided children that were close friends. There is a difference between the views expressed by the boys (Oliver and Stephen) and the attitudes of the girls (Liz and Sarah); although despite this, both interviews support the existence of a strong Christian identity within the children's worldviews at this school.

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[1] See, for example, appendix C, transcript 14, p.15; transcript 15, p.17; transcript 16, p.18; transcript 26, p.32.

[2] See, for example, appendix C, transcript 14, p.15; transcript 17, p.19; transcript 26, p.32.

[3] See for example, Oliver who comments, 'I find it really boring because I'm not too keen on God...I don't like him...he's boring' – appendix C, transcript 36, p.50.

[4] See appendix C, transcript 36, p.50; transcript 37, p.51.

[5] See, for example, Justin and Richard's comments; 'its boring cos I've heard them all ...cos they say the same things all the time ...they just repeat the same stories...our headmaster goes on a bit ...he's [God] not that important' – appendix C, transcript 37, p.51.

[6] Lucy, Richard and Justin - appendix C, transcript 37, p.51.

[7] Appendix C, transcript 37, p.51.

Liz and Sarah

Liz and Sarah were close friends in and out of school, staying over at each other's houses, going swimming and attending dance lessons together[1]. Apart from providing some background information Liz and Sarah's interview was spent discussing their Christian identity and belief - clearly an important aspect of their lives.

Learning about God – Church and School

In their conversation Liz and Sarah locate learning about God at church and at home rather than at school[2]. Nevertheless the girls still comment extensively about the Christian character of the school[3], emphasising a strong Christian ethos and identity that extends beyond the Christian belief of the children to the teachers as well[4]. In discussing the Christian nature of the school Liz brings her church in, explaining why the school's firm Christian character can produce its own problems:

> 'well, I quite like going to this school, sometimes I wish I didn't go here because at my church where I go they're always talking about like 'try and tell everybody in your school about becoming a Christian' and I sort of keep thinking, 'but practically everyone in my school is a Christian, so what can I do about it?' ...They just say 'try and get as many of your friends to become Christians as you can' and I sort of think, 'all my friends are Christians, they all go to church regularly' '.[5]

Here Liz's church can be seen to nurture a particularly evangelical Christian worldview: one that involves converting other people to becoming a Christian.

RE Lessons

Such an exclusivist perception of religious belief, as expounded here by Liz, may go some way to explaining the attitudes revealed when the girls talk about their RE lessons. At the time of the interview, these lessons were concerned with the study of other world religions and Liz and Sarah contrast these with RE classes in previous years that had been about Christianity. Triangulating and endorsing the comments and opinions expressed in the group interviews, the girls exhibit disinterest, ridicule and

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 38, p.52. Liz's discussion about horse riding and her Gran's stables, also found in this transcript, emphasises once more the affluent background of the children at St Christopher's.

[2] See appendix C, transcript 39, p.54; transcript 41, p.56. For example – 'in school we remember things and focus on tiny little bits ...but in church we do more' (Sarah); 'in assemblies we sing Christian songs, I mean 'Shine Jesus Shine' isn't a non-Christian song or anything, you can tell that they're Christian songs, but its not as if you learn about God' (Liz) – appendix C, transcript 39, p.54.

[3] See, for example, appendix C, transcript 39, p.54; transcript 40, p.54; transcript 41, p.56.

[4] See appendix C, transcript 40, p.54.

[5] See appendix C, transcript 40, p.54.

complete disregard for other faiths and religious belief[1]. In some group interviews a few children had talked about how interesting they had found the study of other religions. Liz and Sarah, however, did not seem to share this interest, commenting that some boys in the class 'are just getting the idea that we're looking at the other religions ...cos they want us to change our religion and become one of these religions'[2]. They offer two possible reasons to explain why they have to study other religions: the National Curriculum and 'because if we see somebody going down the street wearing a turban we'll know why'[3].

More Attitudes to Other Religions and Moving onto Secondary School

Later in the interview, as the girls talk about moving onto secondary school, the theme of other religions features in the conversation again and this time they contrast their own Christian belief with Catholicism, specifically the Catholic identity of the local secondary school which they will be attending[4]. Distinguishing between their own beliefs and Catholic understanding Sarah refers to the wariness people from her church are treated with at the Catholic school:

> 'someone who helps my granddad, his friend works there and they said that they didn't like the [evangelical Christian group] people, so I told Liz that, I said just try and mention things about you want it because its a Christian school and because they don't normally let [evangelical Christian group] people in'.[5]

A Personal Faith

As well as declaring a strong Christian belief and commitment, Liz and Sarah's interview repeatedly illustrates the girls' personal investment in a Christian faith that impinges on all areas of their lives, selves, understandings and worldviews. Four specific subject areas within the interview explicitly demonstrate this: prayer[6],

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[1] Liz, for example, discusses the studying of Sikhism in the following way: 'I mean now we've done the Sikhs and every time I had to write down Sikh I didn't write down 'Sikh', I wrote 'sick', *(giggles)* only in rough though ...I don't know [why] really, I just found them really, really boring, so I just wrote down sick ...[and] they are sick! *(laughing)*...I don't know why, but they grow their hair, its so long and they don't cut it ever, its supposed to be a sign of loyalty to their God or whatever they call it' – appendix C, transcript 43, p.57. See also appendix C, transcript 42, p.56.
[2] Appendix C, transcript 42, p.56.
[3] Liz – appendix C, transcript 42, p.56.
[4] See appendix C, transcript 44, p.58.
[5] Sarah, appendix C, transcript 44, p.58.
[6] See appendix C, transcript 45, p.59.

morality[1], choosing friends[2] and ambitions for the future[3].

Prayer

In their discussion Liz and Sarah reveal their personal attitudes and feelings about prayer, as well as its importance in their lives[4]:

- they pray at church - on Sundays, and at school - during a lunchtime prayer group and at the end of assembly;

- they pray in groups; at school and sometimes with friends at home;

- they also pray by themselves, for example at night (Sarah).

- God is identified as someone who takes charge and is in charge (Sarah), knowing what's going to happen even before it happens (Liz), although this can be a problem, as Liz comments 'when I go wrong in my prayers or something ...or like if I'm saying something and I sort of describe it wrongly or something and I change my mind ... if it doesn't make sense or if I change my mind or something, then I don't really like knowing that God knew';

- there are good prayers and bad prayers[5].

This would seem to demonstrate that prayer occupies a variety of roles for Liz and Sarah - socially and personally- and its significance and meaning is something that has been carefully considered by them.

Morality

The same conclusions may be drawn in relation to how Liz and Sarah believe Christians should behave and treat other people[6]. Liz discusses this by talking about anger and trying to control it:

> 'well I do try and not really get angry inside, like if someone's done something to upset me, I try and stop bursting out and getting really angry and I think

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 46, p.62.
[2] See appendix C, transcript 47, p.64.
[3] See appendix C, transcript 48, p.64.
[4] See appendix C, transcript 45, p.59.
[5] For example, Sarah speaks about just praying when she needs to rather than all the time, 'because I think that's sort of saying, 'oh I'm gonna pray so I'm good'' and Liz provides the example of night-time prayers recited when she stays with her grandparents as another bad way of praying. For both girls a good prayer is not concerned with 'saying oh I'm brilliant cos I'm praying, I needn't do anything else' (Sarah), instead it should be 'something straight from the heart ... not just thought up in your brain and let out from your mouth' (Liz and Sarah). A good prayer requires feeling; 'if it's the sort of thing you say everyday, you don't put any feeling in it and it doesn't really mean anything, its just words' – appendix C, transcript 45, p.59.
[6] See appendix C, transcript 46, p.62.

that if I wasn't a Christian I'd just get really angry and not really care how I feel or not have a guilty conscience afterwards'.[1]

The girls distinguish between their efforts to behave like a Christian and the swearing and uncaring attitude of others in their class, particularly the boys. From their comments it is obvious that Liz and Sarah's behaviour is moderated by how they believe a Christian should act.

Choosing Friends

Liz and Sarah's Christian outlook apparently also has a bearing on their choice of friends, as transcript 47 illustrates:

'I think that some of my friends I wouldn't have chosen to be friends if I wasn't a Christian. But now I'm really glad I've chosen them, I mean cos I think that if Sarah was a Christian and I wasn't, I don't think I would have chosen Sarah as a friend'.[2]

The common ground of being a Christian, going to Youth Club together and feeling comfortable about talking about church are presented by the girls as reasons why they would only choose other Christians as friends.

Ambitions

In their conversations neither Liz or Sarah refer to any definite ideas about their future, although once again Liz signals the importance of her religious faith and identity by speaking about the possibility of becoming a missionary[3]. Stating that this is not something she particularly wants to do, Liz remarks that if she felt God was **telling** her to (note: not **asking** her), then she would.

<u>**Religious Images and Concepts**</u>

God

To explain how she would know that God was asking her to do something Liz draws the example of receiving a picture from God[4] and the authority and experience of this is mentioned again when Liz and Sarah are asked what they think God might be like[5]. Liz's imagery stresses the enormity of God and the insignificance of herself[6] and

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 46, p.62.
[2] Liz – appendix C, transcript 47, p.64.
[3] See appendix C, transcript 48, p.64.
[4] See appendix C, transcript 48, p.64.
[5] See appendix C, transcript 49, p.65.
[6] Liz – 'when I was about 8…I was given a picture and my picture was of this globe with loads of lego and God standing beside it and you know how small lego people are, then I sort of thought like God is bigger than me and these little like lego people, I was one of them, God was bigger than my real size and I was one of these little people…This globe was the size that a lego person could easily have lived

Sarah describes God as an all-seeing being. Like Edward and Katherine in the group interviews Sarah situates this imagery within the realm of what she used to think about God[1].

Heaven and Hell

Transcript 50 presents a section of interview where Liz discusses at length her own religious concepts and images[2]. Evident in Liz's comments is how, negotiating between authority and personal feelings and fears, she draws on her faith and belief system for answers and a way of resolving conflict and contradictions in her life. This conversation develops at my invitation to talk about God and what happens when people die. Liz immediately responds to this with a narrative about her grandfather's death. This incorporates a number of elements:

- whilst storying her own particular experience she appears to be also making sense, in a more general way, of her own mortality;

- Liz states what she sees as the accepted doctrine of Christians generally and her family: that Christian belief is necessary to go to heaven, otherwise a person will go to hell;

- she then describes the contradiction and conflict produced through the experience of her grandfather's death: portraying understanding and sympathy Liz recognises the need for her Gran to tell people her granddad became a Christian, nonetheless Liz does not appear to accept her Gran's claims and the issue remains an unresolved conflict in Liz's life.

The conversation quickly moves on to a discussion of the concept of heaven and again Liz responds swiftly, constructing a further narrative that is characterised by several references to personal experience – her own fear of flying and her feelings associated with what it is like to try a new ice-cream[3]. Re-emphasising the important role of the family in Liz's Christian identity and belief, Liz's narrative highlights the authority

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on and I sort of imagined it like I was God or something and I was just holding this globe and I was so big...I think God sent [the picture] to me, I was at Sunday School at the time, it was just like I was holding this globe and I was God and all these little people were like humans, us' – see appendix C, transcript 49, p.65.

[1] Sarah - 'when I was younger I used to think it was like this volcano and God was looking out of it and he was sort of watching everyone doing things and then, well, that was when I was about 6, and now I sort of don't know' – appendix C, transcript 49, p.65.

[2] See appendix C, transcript 50, p.66 and her comments are storied into one narrative in transcript 51, p.68.

[3] See appendix C, transcript 50, p.66.

she ascribes to her mother and how this enables and facilitates Liz's understanding of different concepts such as heaven[1].

The Role of Family and Experience in the Construction of a Worldview

During the interview Liz points to the crucial role her family plays in nurturing her Christian belief and worldview and this is examined in more detail when Liz and Sarah remark upon the differing levels of Christian belief within each other's homes and between themselves[2]:

- Sarah comments that she doesn't think about religious matters as much Liz[3];
- Liz cites her mother as the main person who fosters a Christian way of living[4];
- Liz comments on the contrast between her mother and father, where religious belief is not so important for her dad[5];
- Liz stresses commitment as a fundamental aspect of being a Christian and living a good life, it is this commitment that she feels her father does not possess[6];
- what emerges in Liz's situation is two competing attitudes within her home environment and from her comments it would seem that she has chosen to side with her mother's understanding and worldview[7].

Christian Belief and Worldviews – Liz and Sarah

Liz and Sarah's interview explores the role of a strong Christian identity and belief within a two children's worldviews. It can be seen to provide the girls with a clear identity and sense of who they are and what they think. At other times it creates conflict in their life when they are confronted with contradictions between belief which is passed onto them through other people and their own life experiences. In

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 50, p.66.

[2] See appendix C, transcript 52, p.69.

[3] Sarah – 'I don't really think about it as much as her, but when I do think about it I think about it a lot' – appendix C, transcript 52, p.69.

[4] Liz – 'I can't really help thinking about it cos of my mum...whenever my brother or my sister are naughty she starts saying things like, 'if you were a proper Christian you wouldn't have done that' and things like that and I don't really get to hear the end of it' – appendix C, transcript 52, p.69.

[5] Liz – 'my dad was Catholic but he's not really that committed ...Catholics believe in God but they believe that different things will happen at different times' – appendix C, transcript 52, p.69.

[6] Liz – 'he is a Christian, but he's just not as committed as we are ... cos whenever me, my brother or my sister are ill and can't go to church, then its my dad who stays behind, they don't take it in turns or anything, he's not that bothered about not going ... he does go sometimes but he says its boring and he just walks out' - appendix C, transcript 52, p.69.

[7] Liz – 'I think occasionally my mum gets a bit, 'I wish you would be a bit better Christian'. I think that I wish he was a better Christian because my mum has said that I can get baptised when my dad agrees to it. And my dad says that I've got to be the most perfect Christian ever before I can be baptised and he's been baptised himself and he's not a Christian!' – appendix C, transcript 52, p.69.

contrast to this my second interview with Oliver and Stephen exposes a very different approach and perception of Christian identity and belief.

Oliver and Stephen

Oliver and Stephen's interview conveys a more individualistic attitude to being a Christian and although interested in religious belief and understanding their discussions do not focus exclusively around a Christian framework.

The Importance of Sport for Oliver and Stephen

My initial questions for the boys were about school and instead of introducing any religious aspects the boys talk about sports, notably football and rugby, which they are interested in both in and out of school[1]. The theme of sports, this time tennis and rugby emerges again in the interview when the boys talk about rugby and playing tennis on Saturday mornings[2].

Belief versus Commitment - Sport and Church

As evidenced in transcript 54[3] Stephen, although unconvinced as to whether he likes it or not, goes to church. Oliver, on the other hand doesn't go because he plays rugby[4] and when pushed Oliver admits that he wouldn't want to go to church even if he could. Here both boys present a very different attitude to church compared to the enthusiasm exhibited by Liz and Sarah. Noting this during the course of the interview I ask the boys if it is important to go to church[5]: their responses raise the issues of belief and commitment as criteria for defining a Christian. Drawing on his personal feelings and the authority of his mother Stephen presents a rather confused reply that appears to arise out of the mixed messages he receives from his mother[6]:

- being a Christian is characterised by belief and making a commitment;
- going to church is identified by his mother as making such a commitment;
- his family frequently sleep in late and do not get to church.

Instead of emphasising commitment Oliver firmly states that being a Christian is about believing in God and this comment encourages a discussion between both boys

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 53, p.70.
[2] See appendix C, transcript 55, p.72.
[3] see appendix C, transcript 54, p.71.
[4] See appendix C, transcript 55, p.72.
[5] See appendix C, transcript 55, p.72.
[6] Stephen – 'going to church doesn't make you like a Christian, you don't really have to go to church …believing in God and making a commitment [makes a person a Christian]…My mum has always told me to go to church. I'm not sure [what sort of commitment you have to make] really, but what my mum always tells me is that, well, my mum always says to go to church, we're going to the early

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as they describe and explain how difficult it can be to believe[1]. Assessing the data outlined from Oliver and Stephen so far the following observations can be made:

- neither expresses any keen interest or personal commitment to going to church;
- the issue of belief has personal impact and significance for both boys;
- some framework of religious understanding and meaning making is important to the boys, even though it is very different to the group identity and shared beliefs articulated by the girls.

Attitude to School and Its Christian identity – Assembly, Lessons and Ethos

Oliver and Stephen concur with Liz and Sarah's appraisal of St Christopher's surmising that their school is different to other schools because 'mostly Christians really come here'[2]. The Christian character of St Christopher's is also signalled by the boys in the way God is frequently talked about, particularly during assembly[3]. In addition to this Oliver and Stephen also cite RE lessons as another learning environment for religious matters[4] and this is something else which they feel sets their school apart from others – 'it makes the school different, an individual really'(Stephen).

Personal Opinion

As with their comments about church, Oliver and Stephen demonstrate an interest in religion that is tempered with detachment and individuality. This is particularly evident in transcript 58 when the boys compare their own thoughts with what they are told at school[5]:

- both boys mention that they think about God - things like 'is God really alive?' (Oliver).

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service. And then when I say we're going to go to the early service she sleeps in and we don't go at all' – appendix C, transcript 55, p.72.

[1] Oliver - 'well, nothing can prove that God's alive'; Stephen – 'or that he isn't alive…there's proof that Jesus was alive though …a long time ago like everyone saw him and saw the things he did'; Oliver – 'but people could be lying, like on films'; Stephen – 'yeh, I mean like um, its like the Greek myths cos they found like the minotaur in the maze, they found the maze'; Oliver – 'yeh, but you never know the truth' – appendix C, transcript 55, p.72.

[2] Oliver - see appendix C, transcript 57, p.72. See also appendix C, transcript 56, p.73.

[3] 'They're always saying God loves you and that sort of stuff (Stephen). We always get assemblies and things and we have assembly every single day (Oliver) or hymn practice or something. Well, its good actually cos it then you don't have to do so much work in school (Stephen) but then you've got Mr Cartwright going on about (Oliver) stuff you already know about (Stephen). He talks about things you already know about and then other days he's going on about nothing and you don't really know what he's talking about (Stephen) its a bit boring (Oliver). When you can understand him its good but I mean when you can't understand him you just think he's on about gibberish (Stephen)' – see appendix C, transcript 56, p.73.

[4] See appendix C, transcript 57, p.74.

[5] See appendix C, transcript 58, p.75.

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- they do not always agree with what they are told at school - 'after Mr Cartwright has like given us a big lecture I just keep thinking about it afterwards and thinking that half the things Mr Cartwright has said don't seem right'(Stephen).

- they seem at ease with disagreeing with what they are told – 'like he walked through [a] great big furnace and I don't think so!' (Oliver).

- sometimes what they are told at school serves merely to confuse rather than enlighten or help them – 'what I disagree with is that you know the story and then Mr Cartwright comes along and tells the same story but different and you think I don't really understand it, and you think I knew more before than I do now!' (Stephen).

- rather than being told information by teachers both boys claim that they would 'prefer to think about it myself' (Stephen).

School and Personal Thoughts - Prayer and what Happens when People Die

Oliver and Stephen's worldview can be described as an interested but detached individual religious worldview and this is exhibited again in a discussion about death, a conversation that emerges from my asking about prayer at school[1]:

- **prayer**
- the boys describe how they pray everyday at school, usually in assembly, covering 'just the sort of things we talked about in assembly'(Stephen);
- Oliver's detachment communicates a detached and different attitude to prayer at school[2];
- prayer itself is not difficult (Stephen and Oliver).

- **personal concerns about death**
- responding to the ambivalent attitude shown by the boys to prayer at school I ask if there was anything they might worry about enough so that they would pray about it;
- Oliver introduces the theme of death, which is quickly picked up by Stephen, its inevitability and comprehension is clearly a significant issue for both boys – 'I mean you're gonna die someday aren't you?' (Stephen) – and Oliver re-

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 59, p.76.
[2] Oliver -'sometimes you're thinking if someone walked in through the door and they didn't know nothing about Jesus, they'd think that we were a load of nutters or something ... I mean we bow our heads and we think and we sit up like this' – appendix C, transcript 59, p.76.

emphasises this as an important issue later when he mentions that he talks to his parents about it.

- **concepts of life after death**
  - the conversation between the boys is punctuated by their interactions and ponderings together. These encourage further discussion and reflection;
  - in exploring understandings about death and what happens when people die they draw on a variety of concepts using television, church, school and home. It may also be noted that their ideas are not restricted to a Christian viewpoint;
  - **no proof:** Oliver and Stephen's considerations dwell on the fact that there is no proof about God or what happens when people die[1];
  - **reincarnation** is discussed by the boys as one possibility of what happens when people die. They acknowledge it is a Hindu belief but with further discussion discount its likelihood because the population is growing all the time[2];
  - **heaven:** Stephen brings in the concept of heaven and when asked what it might be like he refers to what other people say[3];
  - **belief:** in pursuing the boys' concepts of heaven I ask them if everyone goes to there. Rising to the challenge of my query the boys examine the issue of belief and its necessity for going to heaven.

- **belief**
- **to get to heaven:** Oliver states convincingly that belief is not required to go to heaven but Stephen appears to be uncertain, wavering towards the fact that belief is necessary. In his reflections Stephen draws on the authority of his mother who has told him about soldiers in the war becoming believers on their deathbeds so that they could go to heaven.
- **believing in God:** in an attempt to verify the boys' feelings and comments I tackle the issues from a different angle, asking them why people believe in God and why they believe in God: Stephen responds with 'I don't know' for both questions and Oliver replies succinctly 'cos everybody else tells you to'.

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[1] 'We don't know anything' (Stephen), 'no one knows' (Oliver).

[2] Stephen – 'I just can't believe that because like if 5 people died then their spirit's gonna have to double for all the people being born'.

[3] Stephen – 'well, people say its got streets of gold but you never know until you get there and then its too late to come back and tell everyone'.

- **belief in God and death:** reflecting further on my questions about belief, Stephen entwines the two themes of belief and death, revealing a personal engagement with the concepts[1].

A Perspective on the Future

Although a generally religious framework is evident in Oliver and Stephen's addressing of existential issues in the interview[2], other topics of conversation did not include a religious context. An example of this is the contrast between the way the boys and girls spoke about the future. Whereas Liz and Sarah incorporate comments about what God might tell them to do in the future, Oliver and Stephen give no mention of God or religion in relation to their future ambitions[3]. Instead their focus is on the importance studying hard for good job in the future and even when asked about why it might be important to be good the boys explain how a bad reputation at school can affect a career when you're older. These attitudes do not seem to preclude the boys' dreams to also become rugby players in the future.

The Importance of Family and Friends

Christian belief and identity were a dominant feature of the girls' worldviews and relationships with family and friends. The boys' comments about family and friends contrast strongly with the girls' experiences and opinions[4]: throughout their discussions Oliver and Stephen often include parents or other family members when discussing beliefs, concepts or experiences. Although apparently made in passing these comments seem to indicate that relatives are generally recognised and accepted by the boys as important aspects of their lives[5]. Oliver and Stephen's remarks about friends display a similar appreciation. Together with family members, both boys cite friends as the people they would turn to with a problem. Rather than focussing on Christian belief or religious discussions about prayer and church the Oliver and Stephen describe their relationships with friends in terms of 'playing and talking about life'(Oliver) 'and rugby and football and stuff'(Stephen).

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[1] Stephen – 'I don't know, its just that, I don't know, well, they say like when you die you go to heaven and you don't really want to go to somewhere horrible so like maybe if you don't believe in God and if it is true then you will go there. You don't know that but you don't really want to like take the chance either'.
[2] See appendix C, transcript 59, p.76.
[3] See appendix C, transcript 60, p.78.
[4] see appendix C, transcript 61, p.79.
[5] see appendix C, transcript 61, p.79.

The Interviews at St Christopher's

The interviews at St Christopher's present data that supports a prominent Christian worldview for the majority of children and Liz and Sarah's second interview explores several aspects of nurture in relation to such a worldview. The ideas and concepts presented by Oliver and Stephen diverges from Liz and Sarah's worldviews, providing data that explores the importance and relevance of religious ideas and belief within the context of an alternative Christian identity and worldview.

ST DOMINIC'S

Introduction to School

St Dominic's CE Aided Primary School is an old building next to the church in the town centre. During my time with the school there were 180 children on roll and my interviews were with the children in year 6, a small class of 22. As with the other schools in this study, my relationship with the head and class teacher had its own distinctive character.

The Head

My first contact with the school was the head, Mr Dennis, and throughout our first meeting he seemed relaxed and happy to allow me to come into the school, even though he did not appear to be particularly interested in the research itself. It was unfortunate that at our initial meeting that the head could not provide me with either the school's RE Policy or a curriculum framework - both of which, he explained, were due to be written and implemented the following year. As my association with the school progressed my relationship with the head at St Dominic's paralleled my experiences at St Beatrice's and St Christopher's. As with Mrs Baker and Mr Cartwright (heads) I did not have any regular contact with Mr Dennis: after our first meeting the only other time I saw him was by chance when I turned up for my third group interview at the school. The record of this meeting in my log illustrates my perceptions and feelings about my relationship with him[1].

Despite the interest expressed by Mr Dennis during this conversation I never saw him again. Although I frequently tried to talk with him, either before or after interviews, my efforts never met with any success and instead my only subsequent contact was two brief telephone conversations. Any correspondence remained unanswered, as did my repeated requests for him to return the questionnaire I had asked him to fill in. My impression at St Dominic's was the same as my feeling about St Beatrice's: they were happy to help out a student with their work but did not really want to be involved any further with the process and its developments.

The Class Teacher

Mr Dennis suggested year 6 and their teacher Miss Daniels to be a suitable class to work with and in contrast to my distant, formal relationship with Mr Dennis my

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 1, p.1.

relationship with Miss Daniels was very different. Denise Daniels was a young teacher who had been teaching for three years and she was very keen to help in whatever way she could. We got on well and it was easy to talk. As most of my interviews took place after lunch I often arrived at school during the break and this provided an opportunity to discuss interviews and triangulate information and themes that had emerged.

The Teacher's Perspective – RE

Before beginning any interviews I arranged to meet up with Miss Daniels to discuss suitable times and arrangements. She was very chatty and enthusiastic about me coming in to talk with the children and during our first meeting I hoped to discuss her plans for RE over the coming terms. Our conversation, which lasted no more than ten minutes, was recorded on tape, and a section of the interview is presented in transcript 2[1], which indicates Denise's key comments:

- the children went to the church next door for a service every week. A new vicar had recently been appointed and he was involving the boys as altar servers;
- even though it was on the timetable Denise herself didn't teach RE because it was a weak area for her and she wasn't really interested in it;
- instead of RE she engaged the class in discussions about behaviour and moral issues as and when appropriate;
- in the previous year the class had done some work on world religions - Judaism and Hinduism were cited.

As a researcher trying to discover the place of RE in children's worldviews this discussion came as a bit of a shock, particularly as it was a church school! After some consideration I decided to continue my research with the school. A number of reasons encouraged this decision:

- some RE had clearly been taught to the children in earlier years;
- it was obvious that the school had close links with the church next door;
- St Dominic's would provide an interesting comparison with the other three schools which all had a strong religious input.

Although we had a good rapport together I felt that Denise's interest did not really extend beyond wanting to know what the children talked about[2]. At the end of the

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 2, p.2.
[2] Log 9/6/95.

school year, in June, I took my questionnaire to the school and asked Mr Dennis and Miss Daniels to fill it in for me. Their reactions to this request, each appearing to be puzzled by my request and reluctant to fill it in, are recorded in my log and seem to support my earlier gut feelings about their (dis)interest and involvement[1]. Ultimately I never did receive Mr Dennis' completed questionnaire, despite my repeated requests for it. Unwillingly, and after several embarrassing queries to chase it up with her, Miss Daniels filled in hers and passed it back commenting, 'I hope its okay, I wasn't sure what to put down'[2].

The completed questionnaire had only brief answers. The school is described as having children from a 'mixed background – a lot of 'middle class' and a few poorer background'[3]. The school's ethos is depicted as 'very caring and consideration for others. Family orientated' and the role of RE is defined as 'circle time to discuss feelings/ values/ playground issues'[4]. Responding to a question about aspects religious nurture at the school Denise replies: 'Christian principles and awareness of other religions. Moral/ circle time'[5], and the concept of God conveyed by the school is identified as 'that God made the world and all the animals'[6]. As for the children's perceptions of RE, Denise reiterates the importance of circle time for the class, answering that RE is perceived as 'boring, tho' love circle time'[7].

In the course of the Autumn term I interviewed the whole class in small groups. The groups were of six children, apart from one group of four. Although sometimes resorting to the technique of whoever had finished that morning's work, Denise took care to provide a combination of children for the group interviews. The mixture of gender in each group was limited because there were significantly more girls than boys in the class: 15 girls and 7 boys. After the group interviews I interviewed the boys again, this time all seven of them together in the church. I returned after Christmas to conduct second interviews with two girls, Rosie and Jenna, and two boys, Alvin and Jay.

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 3, p.3.
[2] See appendix E.
[3] St Dominic's questionnaire, q.2 – see appendix E.
[4] St Dominic's questionnaire, q.5 – see appendix E.
[5] St Dominic's questionnaire, q.3 – see appendix E.
[6] St Dominic's questionnaire, q.4 – see appendix E.
[7] St Dominic's questionnaire, q.6 – see appendix E.

The Interviews

The interviews at St Bartholomew's were not very long, ranging from thirty to forty minutes. Despite this the children settled fairly quickly into conversation, talking well together and apparently enjoying the opportunity to speak about themselves. Unlike St Beatrice's and St Christopher's there was not such a sharp distinction between the boys and girls and although some banter and laughing occurred this did not seem to detract from the level of engagement or the seriousness of some topics. The children in the class all spoke with confidence and self-assurance. In appearance and communication, they all seemed older than their ten or eleven years. Instead of boyfriend/ girlfriend comments or teasing there was a sense of acceptance, understanding and familiarity. Getting the children to talk about themselves in such an environment was not a problem. As the interviews progressed my concerns were to make sure everyone had a fair chance to talk as leads and comments emerged.

Reflecting the nature of the data from St Dominic's, and in keeping with my grounded theory approach, the results from this school will be set out in the following sections:

- **introductions and pastimes;**
- **important aspects of the children's lives - animals, family, friends, growing up and racism;**
- **school - general character and ethos, RE lessons;**
- **place of church in school life - the building, serving, personal significance;**
- **religious concepts - images of God and dealing with death;**
- **religious identity - prayer, nurture at home.**

I have not distinguished between group and second interviews because similar issues and concerns were raised in all of them. My interview with the boys in the church focussed almost exclusively on their experiences of serving although, once again, their discussion presents a considerable overlap and triangulation of data from the other interviews. Because of this I will incorporate their comments within the rest of the data.

INTRODUCTIONS AND PASTIMES

Transcript 4 shows how one group at St Dominic's introduced themselves and talked about the activities they enjoyed[1]. As well as mentioning brothers and sisters the

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 4, p.3.

children discuss hobbies and pastimes: sports: swimming, football, netball, running and fishing; pop music and dancing; television and cinema; shopping; pets and computers. Other groups also referred to siblings and different sports - adding rounders, rugby, cricket and cycling to the list.

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF LIFE

As with the other schools in the study I was keen to build up a general picture of the children's worldviews. Maintaining my open questioning I encouraged the children to talk about what was important in their lives and five key areas were consistently highlighted in each interview: animals, family, friends, growing up and racism.

Animals

Animals and pets figured prominently in many of the children's lives[1] and transcripts 6 and 7[2] confirm the important role of pets in many children's lives:

- the children agree that they like animals;

- a range of pets are kept - centipedes, cockroaches, stick insects, cats, frogs, snakes, fish and hamsters;

- pets are to be relied on, just like friends and parents;

- pets are someone to talk to;

- pets provide comfort, affection and security when you are scared (Jenny and Sasha).

The experience of a pet dying is also discussed by a number of children in the interviews[3], for example in transcript 7[4] Sasha briefly mentions how she buried her dead fish in the garden. More detailed narratives about dealing with the death of a pet are presented by Kelly, Clare and Rachel[5] and whereas Clare speaks about her cat being cremated, Kelly, in the same way as Sasha, talks about burying her dead hamster[6].

Family and Friends

Whilst friends and family are frequently referred to as important aspects of the children's lives it may be noted how the significance of these relationships remains

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[1] See appendix C, transcript 5, p.4.
[2] See appendix D, transcript 6, p.5; transcript 7, p.7.
[3] See appendix D, transcript 6, p.5; transcript 7, p.7; transcript 8, p.8.
[4] See appendix D, transcript 7, p.7.
[5] See appendix D, transcript 8, p.8.
[6] Kelly – 'I had this big blue box with silk in it and I took all the stuff out of the box where he sleeps and I put it into the box with him and we tied ribbon round the box and wrote how old he was and

underpinned by an awareness of growing up and wanting more freedom and independence.

Family

An example of this tension in parent-child relationships can be seen in transcripts 9 and 10[1] where the groups identify their parents as key people in their lives whilst at the same time expressing dissatisfaction in the way that they are treated like little children and not listened to. This theme of valuing family relations, but also wanting to be treated in a more grown up way is reiterated in my second interview with Rosie and Jenna[2]:

- the girls' hostility appears to be mainly directed at their grandparents for treating them as young children[3];

- in contrast the girls describe other relations – parents, aunts and cousins - in a more positive light[4];

- nonetheless, and triangulating other children's comments from the group interviews, Rosie and Jenna point to their relationship with their parents as being important to them, mentioning, for example, that they would feel able to go to their mum or dad if they had a problem.

Friends

Friends clearly have a prominent place in the lives of the children at St Dominic's and in Rosie and Jenna's interview the girls speak enthusiastically, and at length, about free time spent with friends: shopping in town together; going to the cinema; camping and slumber parties[5]. This is re-emphasised by the girls again when talking about growing older; in discussing their desire to stay young, they reflect that this would be of no value unless they also had friends around them[6]. The support offered by friends is acknowledged across the interviews at St Dominic's, as Rosie remarks – 'if

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things like that and then we buried it in our garden. But now when we move house I'm gonna unbury it so the people who move in won't find it' - appendix D, transcript 8, p.8.

[1] See appendix D, transcript 9, p.10; transcript 10, p.10.

[2] See appendix D, transcript 11, p.12.

[3] Rosie – 'they order me about and they say, 'come on, chop, chop, get in the shower, your dinner's gonna get cold' and all that sort of old fashioned stuff...my mum and dad [don't, they] just let me do what I want really...I just have my dinner when I want'; Jenna - 'and grandparents send you to bed really early' – appendix D, transcript 11, p.12.

[4] Rosie – 'the rest of my family is okay' - appendix D, transcript 11, p.12.

[5] See appendix D, transcript 12, p.14.

[6] Rosie - 'I wouldn't want to die, but I just thought, like the age limit for me to get is 50 and then I should have like this little button on my arm and when I want to be younger again, just see what its like to be a child, whenever it is, I'd just press the button and then I'm a child. But like I don't want to be

someone's got a problem or they're upset about somebody ...we just sort of help them'[1]. An appreciation of the way friends support one another is also commented on in transcript 13[2] where the group highlight how friends are seen to help in making difficult decisions, for example in deciding what secondary school to move on to.

Growing Up

Media

In all the interviews favourite films and television programmes were enthusiastically discussed, with soap operas such *Eastenders* and *Neighbours* being especially popular. One illustration of this is offered in transcript 15[3] where Jay's and Alvin's conversation combines the two themes of media and growing older[4]:

- the boys are familiar with the intricacies of plot and characters in the soap operas which they follow;

- when reflecting upon the influence of television the boys differentiate between themselves and younger children[5];

- although the boys speak out against young children watching violent programmes they admit to watching horror films which are classified for a much older audience than themselves[6].

The Future

Briefly mentioned in the group interviews the children's ambitions and thoughts about the future were discussed in more detail in each of the second interviews, although as

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huddled in the corner with no friends, I'll make it so that I've got loads of friends around me' – see appendix D, transcript 13, p.17.

[1] See appendix D, transcript 12, p.14.

[2] See appendix D, transcript 13, p.17.

[3] See appendix D, transcript 15, p.18.

[4] The children's narratives from St Dominic's highlight the media, especially television, as an aspect of their lives that is important to them and informs their meaning construction and worldviews. To a lesser degree data from the other three schools also confirms the significant role of the media in the children's lives and culture. The influence of television on children's narratives is also recognised, for example, in the work of Silverstone (1994) and Hilton (1996) and the data from the four schools supports their observations about television and children's meaning construction.

[5] Jay – 'most of us know its only acting, its not real...the mums, like if they know its got karate in it, they shouldn't really like let them [younger children] watch it'; Alvin – 'There's this bloke...at the end...he says you shouldn't copy it but what good is that gonna do?...You don't understand it' - appendix D, transcript 15, p.18.

[6] Alvin – 'I couldn't sleep for about a whole year once, I watched this film called *Childsplay* and it was really scary and I couldn't go upstairs by myself and all that for ages'; Jay – 'I've been on the Robocop simulator, on the studio tours...you have to be over 15 and you have to have ids with you and I really wanted to go on, so when the man said, 'how old are you?' I goes, '15' and he goes 'what's your date of birth?' and I had it like in my mind ready and he let me through ...[it was] terrible ...and like that really freaked me out ...you couldn't get out, there was no seatbelts, you had to just hold on...it was horrible' - appendix D, transcript 15, p.18.

transcripts 16 and 17 illustrate the conversations were very different in each case[1]:

- **the boys**[2]

- Jay and Alvin present very clear ideas about what they want in the future - a job and money;

- Jay explains that he wants to save his money so that he can build up his own sports business;

- this ambition is linked with the important place of sport in his life, in particular football and rugby. Confirming this fundamental role of sport Jay describes his support for the local football team and the significant role of sport in his relationship with his dad;

- Alvin also recounts his love of football, it is a common interest for him and his father, even though his dad is too busy to play at the park with him any more;

- Alvin talks about wanting to become a lawyer and a chef. He draws on the television programme *Perry Mason* as an example of what he wants to do as a lawyer and explains how his ambitions to become a chef is linked with his experiences at his parents' restaurant, where he already earns money cooking on Saturday nights.

- **the girls**[3]

- talking about going on holiday and travelling round the world the girls' thoughts on the future are more vague and concerned with freedom and independence instead of settling down and getting a job;

- Rosie and Jenna mention college, university and jobs, but this is only in passing - more emphasis is placed on having fun[4];

- there does not appear to be any firm idea of family life in the future, when I ask about them having children this is laughed off, 'I'll see what happens' replies Rosie;

- there is a sense in which the girls are more concerned with the immediate future and imminent changes in their lives, identifying growing taller and moving on to secondary school as exciting forthcoming events in their lives[5].

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 16, p.20; transcript 17, p.24.

[2] See appendix D, transcript 16, p.20.

[3] See appendix D, transcript 17, p.24.

[4] Rosie – 'I don't want to get a job, you know, straight after secondary school, I want to have a bit of fun first, before I tie myself down' – appendix D, transcript 17, p.24.

[5] Again the significance of friends is highlighted once more - Jenna – '[it's exciting] but I really wish all my friends could come'; Rosie - 'its just like if all our friends could come but we'd also make

Moving onto Secondary School

As the children were moving onto secondary schools the following year this was understandably an important event that a lot of children wanted to talk about. Unlike the Roman Catholic schools in this study, where the children generally all moved on to the same secondary school, the children at St Dominic's were considering a number of different schools in the local area. Transcript 18 illustrates how two groups discussed the impact of this[1]:

- in group interview 4 the girls set the discussion within the context of friends, as Clare comments, 'you might go to a new school and you might not see any of your friends there and be nervous about all the new people who you haven't seen before';

- in contrast the boys in group interview 1 speak in anticipation of looking forward to exciting lessons in a newer, bigger school with its array of facilities;

- a third of the children in the class were of Chinese, Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin. Racial issues cropped up in several interviews[2] and transcript 19 illustrates how Alvin expresses concern about racism at secondary school[3].

Racism

As well as speaking about racism in connection with secondary school[4] the significance of racial identity and racism in Alvin's life is also evident in his comments made in the group interviews. In transcript 20, for example, Alvin recounts his experiences of racism in and out of school:

> 'when I was in year 5 he kept on calling me racist names ...and when I was in the choir there was this girl and um (she called you mud face so I hit her – Charlie) ... [and] when I'm just walking along the street with my mum, everyone just goes 'oh look, there's' and then they make fun of my colour'.[5]

Throughout Alvin's narrative the contribution and involvement of others in the group is noticeable.

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friends with others as well cos like I suppose if all our friends went, we probably wouldn't make friends, we'd stick together' - appendix D, transcript 17, p.24.

[1] See appendix D, transcript 18, p.25.

[2] See, for example, appendix D, transcript 19, p.26; transcript 20, p.27.

[3] Alvin - 'it is a bit scary, like if I get beaten up or something like that ...cos like its all right for Jay cos like he's English but some people take the mick out of me cos I'm Chinese and they might beat me up` - appendix D, transcript 19, p.26.

[4] See appendix D, transcript 19, p.26.

[5] Alvin, see appendix D, transcript 20, p.27.

SCHOOL

Character and Ethos

When asked about school the children generally spoke positively about their teachers, lessons and environment[1], although here again the girls were especially vocal about wanting to be treated in a more grown up way[2]. These comments, expressed within the context of school, triangulate the significance of the themes associated with growing older, for example greater freedom and independence. Regarding the religious character of their school the children had little to say in any of the interviews. Even though I specifically queried this[3] no children brought in the school's Christian foundation in any group interview.

During my interview with the boys, which focussed especially on the church and serving, I inquired about the connection between the school and church[4]: although the boys could identify the school and church as both being Christian, or Church of England, they could not speak beyond this to describe, for example, how such a religious foundation determined the character of their school. The exception to this was Richard who commented that they were not allowed to swear, however this aspect of school life was disputed by others in the group who pointed out that swearing was not permitted in any school, religious or not[5]. In my second interview with Jay and Alvin I pursue the issue of religious identity in the school and their conversation reiterates the relative unimportance of the school's religious identity and religion for most of the children[6]:

- Jay associates the religious status of the school with the church next door;

- the head is referred to as the person teaches them and identifies the school as Christian;

- there is some confusion over the terms 'Christian' and 'Church of England';

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 21, p.28.
[2] See appendix D, transcript 22, p.29 – for example: 'school's okay but sometimes they treat us like babies, they can't deal with children like our age' (Jenny); 'we can't even walk round to the church on our own...[they should] give us some space ...and if you're naughty they make you sit down on the floor and sometimes if you're not quiet they make you go like that (puts fingers on lips) or put your hands on your head ...and in sports we're not allowed to do anything rough' (Jenna).
[3] See appendix D, transcript 21, p.28, group interview 4.
[4] See appendix D, transcript 23, p.30.
[5] See appendix D, transcript 23, p.30.
[6] See appendix D, transcript 24, p.31.

- Jay mentions that his dad is 'sort of Christian ...I don't think he is any more, he used to when he was little small kid cos he used to take communion, but now he's doesn't;

- rather than religion, football and sports are perceived as something which is important for both Jay or Alvin.

RE lessons

Embarking on my interviews at St Dominic's I was already aware that Miss Daniels didn't do any RE lessons with her class[1] and across the group interviews the children confirmed that they had no RE, recalling only one lesson in which they had written prayers for the Harvest Festival[2].

Church and Serving

The topic of RE did not stimulate much discussion in any of the interviews. In striking contrast the children, and in particular the boys, were eager to talk about their weekly church services and how they enjoyed serving[3]. It became apparent that serving was a recent initiative by the new vicar, Fr Dave, a person whom the children clearly found it easy to relate to[4]. In the group interviews there was extensive discussion about Fr Dave, serving at church and the impact of this on the children's lives and worldviews. My additional interview with the boys arose out of the unique place of the church in their lives; of particular interest to me was the way this sat alongside very little other religious input at school, as well the fact that most children had no religious nurture at home.

My interview with the boys was an hour long and took place in the sacristy of the church. The conversation focussed almost exclusively on the church and how they felt about serving, their enthusiastic and reflective discussions supporting ideas and comments voiced by boys and girls in other interviews. A diverse range of areas were addressed in connection with serving – the church as a building; feeling involved; having responsibility and the significance of ritual. Furthermore some boys expressed how their experiences of serving held a deep personal significance for them.

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 2, p.2.
[2] See appendix D, transcript 25, p.31.
[3] See appendix D, transcript 26, p.32.
[4] See appendix D, transcript 26, p.32; transcript 27, p.33.

Fascination with the Church as a Building

The children's fascination and knowledge of the church as a building is highlighted in transcript 27[1]. Part of my interview with the boys consisted of them showing me around the church: its dark passages, the organ loft and the altar itself. Not only did this reveal a familiarity and enthusiasm for the building but in doing so I became aware of their sense of ownership[2].

Involvement, Ownership and Responsibility

In transcript 27[3] children from different group interviews can be seen to emphasise their feelings of involvement in the church. On a number of occasions during the boys' interview, for instance in the course of relating how they became servers, the boys reaffirm these feelings of involvement, as well as highlighting how it binds them together as a group[4]. In addition to serving the boys were also keen to talk about their breakfast club[5]. These different facets of serving would suggest that they understood and appreciated how their position incorporated more than serving at the altar during services and that their being involved endowed them with ownership and responsibility.

This theme is also alluded to in group interview 1 where the boys discuss how they help the vicar, 'like with the candles' (Jay). According to the boys' comments the responsibility of being a server is obviously not taken lightly, for as Sean points out, their movements had to be conducted in the proper way; 'you've got to walk around like this with your face serious and your feet right'[6].

Ritual

A further notable aspect of the boys serving is their respect for ritual in the church and the importance they attach to observing the correct rituals in different situations. Transcript 30 demonstrates this within the context of serving at the altar (for example how to move around and the need to genuflect[7]) and transcript 31[8] reveals the extent to which the boys respect the rituals within the church:

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 27, p.33.
[2] See appendix D, transcript 28, p.36.
[3] See appendix D, transcript 27, p.33.
[4] See appendix D, transcript 29, p.36.
[5] See appendix D, transcript 29, p.36.
[6] See appendix D, transcript 30, p.38.
[7] See appendix D, transcript 30, p.38.
[8] See appendix D, transcript 31, p.39.

- on taking me round the church the boys are careful to observe the appropriate behaviour, for example on entering the church Richard reminds everyone to bow and 'put water on';

- when standing before the altar all boys show an acknowledgement and consideration of it being a sacred space: none of them will go and stand on the sanctuary because they aren't wearing their cassocks and cottas – as Charlie explains, 'you can go on with your cassock …[but we can't go on now] because we haven't got the clothes of the God on'.

Bearing in mind the little religious understanding and nurture experienced by most of the children at St Dominic's, the boys' sensitivity to the ritual practices of the church is interesting. One of my responses to the situation was to ask myself if these were empty rituals for the boys. However, Charlie's unsolicited comments later in the interview suggests that rather than empty rituals the boys' involvement with serving promotes greater appreciation and understanding - 'once you know what's going on you know when to do it and stuff, like communion and all that you can appreciate it a bit'[1].

My second interview with Rosie and Jenna took place in the summer term and by then they too had had a chance to serve at the church. Like the boys they were very positive about the experience and appeared to enjoy the opportunity to be more involved and take on extra responsibilities[2]. As evidenced by Rosie this involvement enabled the girls to develop a better understanding and appreciation of the church services they attended with the school[3].

Personal Investment

Although the children enjoyed the opportunity to have a more active role in the church not many admitted any strong belief in God[4] and transcript 34 shows how within one group interview children describe differing levels of belief:

- Lisa states that she believes in God and that if you serve 'you have to';

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 32, p.41.
[2] See appendix D, transcript 33, p.41.
[3] Rosie – 'like when we're watching you just have to stand up, sit down, talk or sing, we're not allowed to do anything what we want, just what they tell us, but like it just makes a lot more sense about why they're doing it cos like when the boys were serving, we wondered why they were doing all the incense thing and holding candles round the gospel and we wondered why but now it makes more sense' - see appendix D, transcript 33, p.41.
[4] See transcript 34, p.42.

- others in the group are more uncertain, cautiously responding with 'well I kind of believe in God'(Charlie and Hannah) and 'sort of'(Rosie).

After my interview with the boys I managed to have a brief chat with the class teacher. Mentioning how the boys clearly enjoyed serving Denise commented how they certainly gained self-esteem and a group identity through the experience. As I recounted the boys' explanation of different rituals and how they felt about serving Denise added the rejoinder 'there's not a religious element is there?' This, I must admit, had been my assumption following the group interviews, however, my conversations with the boys in the church challenged these views[1]. Transcript 35 follows on from the boys explaining why they can't go closer to the altar because they aren't dressed properly[2] and their comments suggest that there is a personal significance and religious awareness associated with their experiences in the church:

- I pick up on the boys' assertion that they cannot go up on the altar, probing their comments I ask why this is so:
  - Jay describes the altar as a 'special place';
  - this is expanded upon by Sean who points out the tabernacle to me - 'all the cupboards and that are up there, do you see it?';
- following the boys' use of language I push them further and ask why it is special:
  - Charlie replies with 'cos you're in the presence of God' and this is supported by Tim, 'yeh, God's here';
- I have now been given the opportunity to directly pursue their concepts of God and the boys, with some encouragement, describe their thoughts:
  - that God is in the church (Charlie);
  - that it feels special in the church;
  - that it 'feels like part of us'(Jay);
- reflecting on how it feels to serve they comment 'it feels like we own it, you know, cos we're doing all the jobs, feel like we're running it, don't it? (Sean) ...its really good (Charlie) ...you feel like really proud of it (Jay)';
- through their serving the boys identify themselves as feeling valued and important;

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 35, p.43.
[2] See appendix D, transcript 31, p.39.

- their comments imply a range of levels of personal investment, for example Rory is fairly indifferent to the discussion whereas Alvin and Jay appear to be considerably more engaged, communicating much stronger feelings.

Later Reflections on Serving

My second interview with Jay and Alvin, in the summer term, took place several months after my earlier interviews with them and this was a valuable opportunity to listen to them reflect, with hindsight, on their experiences of serving[1]:

- neither boy was regularly serving anymore, instead it was the girls' turn to be at the altar and consequently the boys' level of participation was obviously far less than before;

- the boys didn't seem too bothered about not being able to serve and were similarly indifferent about whether they went to church or not;

- even though they had been serving they both admitted that they still didn't understand what was happening when they were at church[2];

- the boys discuss how others in their class have decided to be confirmed;

- Jay and Alvin are not among this group and they contrast themselves with the others who they believe did so 'for fun' (Jay);

- Jay has clearly considered confirmation carefully and he explains how they had been told, by the vicar, that if confirmed his godparents would no longer have to take responsibility for him if his parents died – 'I could [get confirmed] but I dropped after a little bit cos they were saying like saying like, he was saying like when you get confirmed you have to look after yourself, like if your mum and dad died you wouldn't have like no godparents and you'd still have godparents but they wouldn't have to look after you, so I dropped out';

- Alvin's reason for not being confirmed is different and he refers to his Chinese background – 'I couldn't do it [be confirmed] because my mum and dad, first of all I told my mum and dad and they said its all right but then I started doing this Chinese stuff thing and I didn't do it any more ... [its] kind of like this karate thing, not karate but Chinese thing and the religions and stuff ...like they don't worship God they worship rivers and stuff like that'.

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 36, p.45.
[2] Jay – 'I still don't understand half of it really'.

At this point in the discussion I pick up on the opportunity to pursue the issue of finding out about God. Fr Dave and the head, Mr Dennis, are identified by Jay as people who tell him about God, however, these people's comments at church and in assembly do not appear to relate to what Jay and Alvin think about[1]:

- when I ask if they 'ever wonder about things like God and that?' the boys' response is interesting as Jay immediately answers 'I want to know what's gonna happen when you die' and Alvin replies 'like if its true if there's a heaven and hell';

- Jay continues by recounting how Mr Dennis' talks have little impact on his own life and concerns[2];

- It is Mr Dennis, Jay recounts, who tells them about heaven, but when it comes to religious matters both Jay and Alvin are fairly dismissive about what he offers them, describing it as 'old things';

- Jay appears to have little regard for what they are told[3] and Alvin has a similar opinion[4].

These later thoughts and reflections from Jay and Alvin point to how their experiences of serving and what they are told at school relate (or fail to relate) to their own lives and worldviews.

The results from St Dominic's School have so far illustrated what the children describe as important in their lives, as well as how they perceive the school and church. The final two sections of data from this school will present transcript that specifically addresses the children's personal investment in the areas of religious concepts and religious identity.

Religious Concepts

Images of God

Although my guiding principle was to remain as open as possible throughout the interviews, I frequently found myself balancing this with having to ask specific, direct questions. Such questions were posed when I felt a need to stimulate discussion or

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 36, p.45.
[2] Jay - 'like when we did about the war he always end up by saying things like, 'oh when I was a little boy I used to' *(Alvin laughs)* he does it all the time, like 'when I was a little boy we never used to do things like take drugs and stuff like that''.
[3] Jay – '[he tells us] old things but sometimes things like about sharing and being a friend …he thinks it is [religious] but we don't …I just think its a load of rubbish personally'.
[4] Alvin – 'he's okay really, but it just gets a bit much'.

bring the conversation round to consider religious concepts. This situation arose more at St Dominic's because the children did not tend to offer any religious concepts or language. As a consequence I frequently asked open, yet direct questions that I hoped would get them talking[1]. In all the interviews at St Dominic's I was able to facilitate a discussion about God and common themes and issues emerged from them:

- **Belief**

Although a variety of images are considered the majority of children do not express any strong belief in God. To substantiate their lack of belief some children refer to the way God never seems to help people in need[2] and where belief is expressed different levels of believing are evident[3]; a cautious belief sometimes being tempered with a rejection of what other people believe in[4].

- **Images**

playful

Some of the children's considerations are playful, suggesting, for example, God to be like 'a big hairy man'[5]. The conversations frequently move on to explore the concepts of heaven and hell and this is another area where the children play with different images[6].

serious images and working together

Although most children at St Dominic's do not articulate a firm belief they work well together discussing and challenging different ideas about God. This is clearly apparent in transcript 38[7] as the group investigate whether God is male, female or half

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[1] An example of this can be found in appendix D, transcript 37, p.47, which begins with me asking what the group thinks God looks like: the group can be seen to respond enthusiastically to my question, engaging together in an animated discussion that presents a variety of ideas and opinions.

[2] Jenna - 'they're always praying for people to help them and no one helps them except for just people like us ...everyone says that God helps you but I don't think he does'; Sasha – 'he doesn't seem to do much...I think he's only there for people who believe in him and he's not there for people who don't ... he hasn't done anything cos there's all these poor people in poor countries and he doesn't seem to do anything about it' - appendix D, transcript 37, p.47.

[3] Lisa – 'well there is a God existing somewhere I suppose'; Rosie - like in all the religions they can't all be wrong really can they? They can't all think that there's a God somewhere and there's not cos like there's so many religions, that there's got to be like maybe one God' – appendix C, transcript 38, p.48.

[4] Sophie – 'I think God's a spirit like any of us but they, all the old, old, old, old people, make stories up about him like Jesus and the Bible...[I think people think God and Jesus are important] cos they just like someone to rely on'; Sasha – 'they're bored so they just think up something' - appendix D, transcript 37, p.47.

[5] Sophie, appendix D, transcript 37, p.47.

[6] 'in heaven they're all in these little white dressed people (Jenna)...and in hell there's all these devils *(laughing)* (Sophie)...and there's these men with forks (Sasha)' – appendix D, transcript 40, p.51, lines 90ff.

[7] See appendix D, transcript 38, p.48.

and half. Instead of imaging God in a human way some children, like Jenny in group interview 3, try to describe God as a spirit[1]. This same sort of imagery is employed in another interview where Alvin suggests God is 'floating around' and although this is rejected by Rosie and Richard 'silly', Charlie supports this idea – 'I reckon he's all around us, I reckon he's coming round all the churches, like I think he's everywhere'[2].

- **Use of Familiar Images and Experiences - Church and Ghosts**

Charlie's mention of church highlights another aspect of the children's examination of religious concepts: when trying to talk about God the church is often cited in descriptions of what God is like and the place where God is to be found[3]. Drawing on their experiences the children can be seen to develop a connection between God and church[4]. As well as matching up the church with an image of God, it may be observed that conversations about church also frequently pursue the theme of ghosts and a 'spooky' and 'creepy' environment[5]. These ideas are triangulated in transcript 40[6], a fairly lengthy section of conversation that also highlights the significance of ghosts in some children's lives, a concept that figures in some worldviews more prominently than God[7].

Dealing with Death

The children's discussions about ghosts presents one area in which they demonstrate a significant degree of personal investment in a concept. Constructing an understanding about death was another area of importance for some children. Again this is

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[1] Jenny – 'I think he's like a spirit ...everywhere... all like just all in the air, not right up high' – appendix D, transcript 37, p.47.

[2] See appendix D, transcript 38, p.48.

[3] An example of this is presented in appendix D, transcript 38, p.48: 'I think he's in every church, his spirit's in every church' (Alvin); 'there's a piece in every church' (Richard).

[4] Richard – 'it's like spooky in that church'; Alvin – 'there used to be another vicar and he said if you take a deep breath and hold it for a little while and then blow you can feel that all your air's coming back in your face and we tried that and it worked, didn't it?' - appendix D, transcript 38, p.48. See also appendix D, transcript 39, p.49 which shows how another group made the same connections between God and their experiences in the church: Clare reflects on what the church is like inside and she equates this with the presence of God – 'its just like there's this whish and sort of mist and it's like God going all around, cos its quite cold and its quite breezy'.

[5] See appendix D, transcript 39, p49.

[6] See appendix D, transcript 40, p.51.

[7] All the children at St Dominic's said that they believe ghosts existed (appendix D, transcript 40, p.51, lines 24ff) and in transcript 40 the children can be seen to draw on personal experiences (lines 55ff; 11fff), oujii boards (lines 29ff) and what they see on television (lines 68ff) to substantiate this belief. My comments in this interview encourage the children to link their belief in ghosts with heaven and hell and what happens when people die and although they talk at length about their experiences of ghosts they do not integrate this with heaven and hell, except to comment that they would like to be a ghost when they die rather than going to either heaven or hell (line 106ff).

commented upon throughout the interviews and in transcript 41[1] Jay and Alvin reveal the importance of this issue in their own lives:

- Jay is obviously concerned with what happens when people die[2] although despite the impact it has on his life he does not seem to feel able to talk about it with anyone[3];

- for Jay these concerns are partially provoked by seeing actors die on television;

- both Jay and Alvin admit that they do not know what to think for themselves although they do consider an ouiji board as one way of finding an answer to their questions[4], this is soon rejected by them as dangerous 'cos you're wrestling with the dead' (Jay);

- when asked about what they think might happen when people die the boys introduce the concepts of heaven, hell and God[5] and refer to television programmes like *Beavis and Butthead* to articulate their ideas[6];

- in their conversation Jay also transfers his thoughts and concerns about death to understanding why some people think its important to believe in God – 'they might want to believe in it so that if they do die and there's such a thing as heaven they go there'[7].

Religious Identity

Compared to the other three schools in this study the children at St Dominic's School demonstrate little personal religious identity and this last section of data outlines the few occasions when religious identity is discussed. Transcript 42[8] illustrates how some children identified themselves as Christian and others described themselves as 'not really anything' (Rosie). Only two children, Rebecca and Nicola, emerge from the class as attending church and having a specific Christian religious nurture at home. Although others sometimes initially describe themselves as Christian this does

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 41, p.57.
[2] Jay – 'it's strange how like people, like, is that just it? You just die'.
[3] Jay – 'you just like keep it to yourself, cos you don't really want to speak about it cos the more you speak about it the more you worry about it'.
[4] Jay – 'I know its sounds really horrible but I would really like to contact, like do a ouiji board, but like I want to really find out what actually happens and whether its a myth or not, I'm not sure how they work or that either, I know you like do a circle and stick your hand in it but how could it like spin by itself, it must be like the wind or something'.
[5] Alvin – 'I think when you die, like, I think you go up to heaven or something like that, your soul'; Jay – 'but like if you're cremated you probably can't go to heaven, but I want to be buried, not cremated'.
[6] See appendix D, transcript 41, p.57.
[7] See appendix D, transcript 41, p.57.
[8] See appendix D, transcript 42, p.59.

not appear to have any impact or importance in their lives[1]. These observations can be triangulated in other discussions about prayer[2]: whereas Rebecca and Nicola speak about praying at home and on their own, the other children do not attach the same kind of significance or meaning to prayer, which for them only happens when they are at school.

Children's Worldviews at St Dominic's

Because of the unique place and experience RE at St Dominic's School the data from this school provides an interesting contrast to the more religious worldviews of children in the others schools. Having presented the results from all four schools we can progress on to consider an analysis of the data and how it speaks to the place of RE in the children's worldviews.

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[1] See appendix D, transcript 42, p.59.
[2] See appendix D, transcript 43, p.60; transcript 44, p.62.

Chapter 4: ANALYSIS

In setting out the context of this study I situated my research inquiry within a consideration of alternative epistemologies[1]: rejecting a positivistic, quantitative paradigm for a qualitative grounded theory framework, I outlined my intention to listen to children's narratives as a way of exploring the place of religious education in their lives. Through its grounded theory approach this study has incorporated a continuous and progressive analysis from the very beginning of its data collection. Working in this way has been a valuable aspect of the research, allowing me to respond to commonalities as well as any unanticipated themes or insights.

Despite this ongoing analysis, the arrival at this point is, as Ely et al reflect, 'somewhat different':

> 'this is the time to begin to tackle the question that lurked in the back of so many of our minds all along the way, as we wrote copious field notes, yet another analytic memo, transcribed various interviews, and collected every bit of social evidence that the study demanded: 'what do I do with all of this?' It is time to start taming the chaos'.[2]

Part of this research's chaos has already been tamed: the large volume of transcript to be accounted for in the results chapter demanded its own data reduction and selection procedure as pertinent concepts and narratives were presented with some commentary and general observations. In this chapter I will narrate my own process of analysis - recognising that this is only one way of interpreting the children's conversations. I specifically use the phrase 'narrate my own process of analysis' because it acknowledges that the analysis takes place within my own experience of the whole research process. Additionally, it allows the reader to participate in, scrutinise and gain a richer understanding of the research. This position is informed by Pope and Denicolo's discussion of researching within a qualitative paradigm which recommends

> 'an open, frank and detailed discussion of the procedures used in analysis and interpretation of data …those who present their deductions with no

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[1] See introduction and chapters 1 and 2.
[2] Ely et al, 1990, p.140.

acknowledgement of their provenance are doing a disservice, not only to the reader, but also to the participants'.[1]

Preliminary Considerations – Quality Control

Pope and Denicolo's suggestion is just one way in which validity, authenticity and credibility can be addressed. These issues are of particular concern at a point in the research process where the aim is for data to be interpreted and examined in a sound and rigorous way. Within the context of this data's analysis a number of considerations serve to substantiate the validity of the process and its outcomes:

- analysis requires data reduction and reorganisation, but at the same time care is needed to retain the complexity and richness of the data[2];

- the triangulation of data can and must continue throughout the analysis. This method of corroborating themes, issues and concepts within the data can be viewed as providing a multi-dimensional approach to the process:
  - methodological triangulation
  - theory triangulation – which uses different theoretical perspectives
  - triangulation in terms of time, space and person.

These are all clearly relevant and useful in enhancing the validity of this study and its analysis[3].

- in this study I have adopted Glaser and Strauss's methodology of grounded theory, using their principle of working from the data itself[4]. Their suggestions about the production of a quality grounded theory suggest other useful criteria for assessing validity. Any quality theory, they propose, fulfils the following: categories within the analysis **fit** the data, a quality theory **works**, has **relevance**, is **modifiable** (flexible) and is able to demonstrate **density** and **integration**.

Alongside methodological aspects, other considerations pertinent to the study also warrant attention if the research is to be accepted as authentic and trustworthy. This second area focuses on my own personal closeness to the research and the status of the children.

Personal Involvement and the Issue of Children's Empowerment

Throughout this research I have remained constantly aware of the different positions

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[1] Pope and Denicolo, 1986, p.155
[2] Pope and Denicolo, 1986, p.159.
[3] Sidell in Shakespeare, Atkinson and French, 1993, p.108.
[4] Glaser and Strauss, 1967.

occupied by myself as the researcher (and adult) and the children. In recognising an imbalance of power I have striven to allow the children to construct their own narratives and identify for themselves what is important in their lives. During the collection of data this entailed trying to facilitate a more equal relationship in the interviews; listening and responding to the children and permitting them to control what was discussed (although on some occasions particular questions were introduced to stimulate a conversation about RE or religious concepts).

As this study progresses into its analysis I am aware of needing to establish a justification and analytical procedure that remains true to the children's narratives and worldviews. The work and reflections of other researchers such as Casey, Roseneil and Becker[1] encourages me to recognise and work with these personal feelings. Rather than a hindrance they become a way of furthering the research process, increasing its validity and developing a procedure for analysis.

Making the Children's Voices Credible

Becker's exploration of bias and credibility in research begins with the blunt question 'who's side are we on?' (sic.) and he observes that 'credibility and the right to be heard are differentially distributed through the ranks of the system', which in turn leads him to propose a 'hierarchy of credibility'[2]. Becker's questions and comments help me clarify my position and aims:

- I have no hesitation in claiming to be on the children's 'side';
- the theme of credibility provides a way of expressing one of the aims of my analysis – that the children's voices are heard and accepted as credible, that my analysis remains true to this, authentically reflecting and utilising their thoughts and ideas.

The necessity and method of remaining faithful to respondents in research is addressed by many researchers who work with minority groups that can be referred to as 'the silenced'[3]. Casey's work is concerned with the narratives of women teachers and justifying her focus she comments:

> 'the ongoing educational debate ...is a struggle over meaning, one in which, based on their own experiences, particular social groups formulate their own understandings and interpretations of education, and try to put their own

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[1] Casey (1993), Roseneil (1993), Becker (1967).
[2] Becker, 1967, p.244.
[3] Lincoln, 1993.

values into practice...In a deliberate reversal, I move the prominent speakers in the contemporary struggle over education to the edge of my analysis. This marginalization is meant not to underestimate, but rather to undermine the overpowering influence of dominant conservative discourse. At the centre of my study are ordinary, anonymous authors whose ideas have, until now, only been known in their immediate social circles. The purpose of this...is to celebrate their alternative progressive versions of education, and in doing so, to recreate the possibility of public debate'.[1]

Casey's words resonate with my research. In a similar way I see this study as allowing a previously silenced group (children) to voice their own understandings and interpretations of religious education. Rather than examining school policies and talking with teaching staff, I have sought to establish the place of religious education in children's worldviews by moving the children into the role of prominent speakers. My hopes, although within the narrower field of religious education, are the same as Casey's – to stimulate debate about education and this will be pursued further in the next chapter.

Approaches to research like that of Casey and Becker's are encouraging and useful, helping me recognise my own closeness to this study and its role in improving the research's validity. Some might challenge this stance, finding my closeness and subjectivity problematic in that it prejudices the validity of my data and findings. Here I turn to Roseneil, claiming the reverse: that my personal background has enabled me to become an 'insider researcher', placing me in a 'strongly advantageous' position that facilitates greater sensitivity and an ability to resonate with the emerging data[2]. Reflecting on my personal involvement and understanding I feel that this has played a crucial role in the study so far. Drawing support from other researchers I believe it has enriched and enabled the study rather than detracted from its trustworthiness and validity.

The charge of bias is one of the accusations fielded against such a subjective position and here I come round full circle to cite Becker who also addresses this issue:

> 'there are sides to be taken and we are taking one of them ... there is no position from which sociological research can be done that is not biased in one way or another ... we can never avoid taking sides. So we are left with

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[1] Casey, 1993, p.3.
[2] Roseneil, 1993, p.188ff.

the question of whether taking sides means that some distortion is introduced into our work so great to make it useless. Or, less drastically, whether some distortion is introduced that must be taken into account before the results of our work can be used'.[1]

I have stated that I see myself as on the side of the children, wanting to empower them to narrate their own experiences and how they perceive RE. I have accepted that this position has affected the process and data of my study. But what about this stage of analysis? How can the charges of bias and distortion be met and addressed here? To answer this we can return to the methodological considerations outlined earlier:

- that validity and authenticity can be demonstrated by maintaining the complexity and richness of the data throughout any reduction or reorganization;

- that attention should be paid to triangulation;

- that density, integration, fit and quality should be clearly evident in my theories.

Through this analysis I will consider the results in the light of the specific question posed by this study. This will be executed in the following stages:

Stage one – thinking units, categorization and developing themes

Stage two – the concept of worldviews and worldviews development

Stage three – the place of religious education in the development of children's worldviews.

STAGE ONE:

THINKING UNITS, CATEGORIZATION AND DEVELOPING THEMES

THINKING UNITS

The system of 'thinking units' is one of the guidelines for analysis offered by Lofland and Lofland[2]. It is also recommended as a possible method of analysis by Ely et al[3] who describe thinking units as 'broad sorting files', providing an initial overview of the data which can then facilitate further specific categories and subcategories.

Religious and Non-religious Thinking Units

The aim of this study is to explore the place of religious education in the development of children's worldviews. In the light of this, one possible starting point for analysis could be to apply units that differentiate between instances of conversation that are religious in nature versus instances where the topic of conversation is not religious.

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[1] Becker, 1967, p.245f.
[2] Lofland and Lofland, 1984.
[3] Ely et al, 1990, p.143.

The character of such units could then be examined to develop categories and sub-categories which identify the place of religious education in the children's discussions and hence worldviews.

This apparently straightforward and clear procedure for analysis does not, however, fit the data. The complexity, intricacies and tone of the children's interviews does not permit such an easy separation of the religious and non-religious aspects. Instead of remaining overt and distinctly separate, religious concepts are conveyed with different feelings and emotions, often through an implicit religious understanding and frequently within the context of apparently secular themes and issues[1]. The separation of the data into the basic thinking units of religious and non-religious therefore does not work and denies the nature of the children's narratives and worldviews which are represented in the data. Consequently it cannot be justified as the first step in this analysis.

Alternative Thinking Units – Engagement and Non-Engagement

I propose that the thinking units religious and non-religious are incompatible with the data because they are externally imposed distinctions and do not arise from within the data itself. In contrast I suggest that by working **from the data** thinking units emerge that fit and preserve the data's density and integration. A general overview of the data indicates two distinct thinking units that are immediately identifiable across the interviews. Instead of focussing on the content of the interviews these units are drawn from the nature of the children's responses and they can be identified as:

1. when the children are engaged;
2. when the children are not engaged.

Engagement

The issue of engagement emerges distinctly throughout the interviews and it can be identified in the following situations:

- when a topic provokes extensive discussion and debate, with the exchange of views and opinions;
- when an individual child speaks at length;

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[1] Evident, for example, in how the concept of death is incorporated within discussions about pets, relations and ghosts, as well as elaborate narratives about heaven, hell and the devil. Such narratives appear to be constructed from religious influences as well as other frameworks of meaning in their lives – see, for example, appendix A, transcript 40, p.24; appendix B, transcript 40, p.58; appendix C, transcript 26, p.32 and appendix D, transcript 40, p.51.

- when a child speaks with feeling and/or emphasis;
- when a child presents a narrative relating the topic of conversation to their own experiences.

In each of these instances the children are talking about something which matters to them. Thus the classification of engagement is concerned with the times when children talk about things that matter to them and such things may be discussed either positively or negatively. The unit of engagement addresses not the words used by the children (it is not literal), but is effectively about the way they say what they say. Engagement is consequently identified in the data according to how the children express themselves and interact.

Although I have specified the units as engaged versus not engaged the separation obviously cannot be so clear-cut: instead they can be seen to represent a continuum along which the children's narratives and interviews might be located.

CATEGORIZATION

Building on the identification of thinking units, the next step in the analysis is to develop categories. Analysing the continuum of engagement further we can distinguish between areas that arise as generally significant, or matter, to the children, and areas that are generally not significant and therefore do not matter. To enable a systematic analysis and exploration of the theme of engagement, a table can present the different topics of conversation raised in the interviews at each of the schools[1]. Identification of the categories is possible when the data is examined according to topics of conversation and the schools are set alongside each other.

In the table each topic of conversation is categorised as being an area in which the **majority** of children were either notably engaged or not engaged[2]. This is denoted by a ✓. Where a double tick is used (✓✓) this signals that the children show a particularly intense level of engagement. The symbol (—) indicates that this area was not discussed in interviews at the school.

The table functions to highlight aspects of the children's experiences and thinking that are important to them. These areas can be used as one way of probing

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[1] See page 194

[2] Such categorization and classification necessitates a sizeable degree of data reduction. The criteria of **majority** and **notably** are used so that categories are valid and represent most of the data. The use of the term 'majority' recognises that decisions regarding classification are subjective; the qualification 'notably' seeks to redress this by referring to data which vividly and clearly exhibits either end of the continuum of engagement.

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engagement and developing further categories for analysis. The categories in the tables arise from and fit closely to the topics presented and discussed by the children. It should be appreciated, however, that the data does not neatly comply with these categories, each conversation falling easily into an assigned box. Instead each conversation is likely to incorporate several different categories and many categories can also fit into other categories. As a result of this extensive overlap, where a conversation points to more than one theme, such conversations are accounted for in each of the relevant categories - for example, the topic of football fits within the categories of sport, family, friends as well as freedom and independence. Recognising the infinite ways in which the data and categories overlap serves to maintain and remind us of the complexity and richness of what we are trying to explore.

Table of Engagement

Topics raised	St Anne's Eng.	St Anne's Not E.	St Beatrice's Eng.	St Beatrice's Not E.	St. Christopher's Eng.	St. Christopher's Not E.	St Dominic's Eng.	St Dominic's Not E.
Family	✓✓		✓✓		✓✓		✓	
Friends	✓✓		✓✓		✓✓		✓✓	
Pets	✓✓		✓✓		✓✓		✓✓	
Media	✓		✓		✓		✓✓	
Sport	✓✓		✓		✓		✓	
Money	—	—	—	—	✓		✓	
Freedom and independence	—	—	✓		✓		✓✓	
The future	✓		✓✓		✓✓		✓✓	
Church	✓		✓		✓✓			✓
Church:serving (parish based)	✓✓		✓		—	—	—	
School – ethos	✓		✓		✓			✓
Coll. Worship		✓		✓		✓	✓✓	✓
School:prayers		✓		✓		✓		✓
RE lessons		✓		✓		✓		✓
RE discussions	✓		✓		✓		—	—
Belief	✓✓		✓		✓✓			✓
Truth	✓		✓		✓✓		✓	
Prayer	✓			✓	✓✓			✓
Rel. concepts	✓✓		✓✓		✓✓		✓	
Diff. rel. faiths	✓		✓		✓✓		✓	
Authority	✓		✓		✓✓		✓	
Own ideas	✓✓		✓✓		✓✓		✓✓	
Ontological/ Existential issues	✓✓		✓✓		✓✓		✓✓	

Some Initial Observations

The following points may be noted from the table:

1. common ground of engagement

Family, friends and **pets** are clearly significant areas in the children's lives across all four schools. The **media** is a further common area of engagement in the children's narratives and conversations and the theme of **the future** also figures prominently, three of the schools showing a higher level of engagement. This category includes conversations concerned with ambitions and ideas about life as an adult, as well as moving onto secondary school; thus the prominence of this theme is not surprising considering that in three schools children were moving to new schools in the following year[1].

The category of **freedom and independence** has some overlap with the future and thoughts about being older. Here the same difference in engagement arises: all schools bar St Anne's evince some degree of engagement, whereas at St Anne's the theme of freedom and independence is not even raised as a separate area of conversation. Again it may be possible that the explanation for this lies in the age difference of the children. Whereas the younger children have friendship groups based at school and do not tend to go out on their own, the issues of freedom and independence are more pertinent for the older children as they begin to adapt to the changes brought about through moving on to secondary school.

A further category that presents common ground across all the schools is the theme of **different religious faiths.** St Christopher's stands out as having a higher level of engagement and it can be noted that the content of their conversations differs significantly to the other schools: most children at St Christopher's exhibited a negative attitude and opinion of religious faiths different to their own Christian beliefs. In contrast children at the other schools appeared to embrace the idea of finding out about other faiths and frequently demonstrated inclusivity and respect.

Moving into the arena of more explicit religious categories, discussions about **church** and **serving at church** (outside of the school environment) showed engagement at all the schools except St Dominic's. The children at St Christopher's

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[1] St Beatrice's, St Christopher's and St Dominic's.

spoke about church with a high level of engagement and likewise St Anne's stands out as also demonstrating a high level of engagement in relation to serving at church[1].

2. more common ground of engagement

Abstract discussions about concepts and ideas encouraged engagement and higher levels of engagement across the schools. Interestingly conversations concerned with **religious concepts, ontological and existential issues, personal thoughts** and the ideas of people in **authority** were all signalled as important to the children[2]. Despite the overlapping of these categories with the categories of belief and truth they are used because they are especially prominent as key areas in the children's understandings and narratives[3].

3. common ground of not being engaged

Three main categories emerge as areas where children in all four schools were not engaged with the topic in question: **collective worship, prayers at school and RE lessons**. This statement requires some qualification to take account of the complexity and interconnection of the categories used:

a.) an immediate observation is that within the category of collective worship I have classified St Dominic's as demonstrating a high level of engagement; this is to reflect the fundamental place of serving for both boys and girls in the class. At the same time it is also true to say that the children were not engaged when encouraged to talk about collective worship in general, hence my double classification of this school[4].

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[1] In addition to the considerable overlap between categories I have also allowed myself some flexibility in determining engagement / not engagement. This flexibility is visible in my assigning the children at St Christopher's the classification of engaged with respect to serving. Although none of the children explicitly mention serving in parish communities many children spoke about being involved and assuming varied responsibilities for religious services – see appendix C, transcript 11, p.11. I have aligned this with the same feelings expressed by the children at St Anne's where serving at church is described with similar feelings of involvement and responsibility - see, for example, appendix A, transcript 11, p. 8.

[2] As has been already indicated, because of the complexity of the children's narratives some of the categories incorporate a degree of overlap and this is evident in many of the abstract discussions – many exchanges about religious concepts included the addressing of ontological and existential issues, as well as encompassing the children's own thoughts and ideas proposed by people in authority - for examples of such conversations see appendix A, transcript 44, p.29ff: appendix B, transcript 62, p.92ff; appendix B, transcript 63, p.93ff; appendix C, transcript 59, p.73ff; appendix D, transcript 41, 57ff.

[3] For examples of such conversations see appendix A, transcript 13, p.9; appendix, A, transcript 44, p.29ff; appendix A, transcript 45, p.35ff; appendix B, transcript 30, p.33ff; appendix C, transcript 55, p.70.

[4] These different attitudes to collective worship at St Dominic's will be analysed further later in this chapter.

b.) Similarly my classification regarding collective worship at St Anne's reflects the children's discussions about collective worship in general. Only a few children at St Anne's signalled the importance attached to being able to serve at school masses, therefore the engagement demonstrated in these instances is not represented because the table sets out the opinions expressed by the majority of children in each school.

c.) The category of prayers at school differentiates between prayers recited collectively at school and personal prayers said at other times. It may be noted that prayers at school did not matter to the children in any school, whereas when they talked about their own prayers the majority of children from St Anne's and St Christopher's were engaged[1].

d.) Across all the schools none of the children were engaged in speaking about RE lessons in general. Comments, mainly negative, were made[2], although it can be noted that this is very different to the engaged response of the children when speaking about the occasional opportunities for discussion about their own lives and ideas in RE[3].

The Use of a Table and Categories for Analysis

Whilst acknowledging the extensive overlap of the categories and their limitations in representing the complexity of the data, the development of the categories used in the table explores the notion of engagement and reveals more specifically what is important and what matters to the children. In view of this the identification of categories, as presented in the table, offers a way of remaining close to the data throughout the development of the process of analysis. Unless we can get to this point of linking categories with the broader notion of engagement we cannot know what actually matters to the children. The units of engagement/ non-engagement allow us to appreciate the place of particular categories within the children's narratives. Rather than hard externally imposed classifications these categories are framed within a

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[1] St Beatrice's prayer category is defined as 'not engaged'. This is because the classification is made according to the majority of children. It should be noted that as with St Anne's and St Christopher's some children at St Beatrice's attached very little or no significance to prayer at school, whilst at the same time communicating the significance of personal prayer in their lives (for examples see appendix A, transcript 20, p.13; appendix B, transcript 43, p.63; appendix C, transcript 28, p.41; appendix C, transcript 30, p.42f).

[2] For examples see appendix A, transcript 16, p.11; appendix B, transcript 18, p.20; appendix C, transcript 14, p.15; appendix D, transcript 36, p.45f.

[3] For example see appendix B, transcript 21, p.22.

context (engagement/ non engagement) that identifies them as relevant and significant to the child.

DEVELOPING THEMES

The development of themes in this analysis does not stand apart or alone[1] from our analysis so far. Instead I introduce them as a way of building upon and probing the previous two stages; 'offer[ing] to provide meaning, cohesion, and colour to the presentation'[2]. In addition the establishing of themes provides breadth and depth, whilst all the time remaining close and tightly woven within the actual data - 'counter[ing] the danger of overabstracting by anchoring the findings firmly in the field that gave rise to them'.[3]

   In this context I wish to show how the theme of **relationship** can be located in the data and used to move to a deeper level of analysis. Before using the theme in this way there is a framework of understanding around the concept of relationship which needs to be acknowledged. This brief detour away from the data ensures that there is a clear definition of the context in which this theme is developed and used.

A Context for Developing and Identifying the Theme of Relationship

What Are We Talking About?

I propose that as a starting point we use a generalised working definition of relationship as something that is created and exists between people. Developing this we can say that what we are considering is a concept that is structured by the individual, or self, as well as the collective, or social dimension[4]. To address these aspects of relationship, and construct a context for our understanding, I will incorporate the ideas of Carol Gilligan, Vygostky and Bahktin, whose work encompasses the areas of moral development, cognitive theory, language and narrative.

Carol Gilligan – The Relational Self[5]

Concepts of Self and Relationships

Since the publication of *In A Different Voice* in 1982 Carol Gilligan's studies have addressed the meaning and function of relationship in a number of ways. Her

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[1] Ely et al, 1990, p.154.
[2] Ely et al, 1990, p.154.
[3] Ely et al, 1990, p.155.
[4] The place and function of relationship in human life is a growing field of interest within the social sciences. Further discussion of this can be found in Duck, 1988.
[5] For a general description of Gilligan's ideas in relation to Kohlberg's theory of moral development see Chapter 1.

understanding of relationship arises from an exploration of the ethic of care that she identifies in moral decision making. In examining morality Gilligan also probes the notion of selfhood; both morality and selfhood, according to Gilligan, are intimately linked and may be defined in a relational way[1].

To understand what Gilligan means by the relational self is to recognise what it is not: the relational self is not the separate, autonomous individual of Cartesian, Enlightenment thought. Neither is it a self constructed through historical contingencies or sexed identity, as proposed by Marx and Freud[2]. Instead Gilligan's model stems from object-relations theory and is more closely aligned to other feminist writers who also focus on relationality in an understanding of the self[3]: in a similar vein to them Gilligan proposes that:

> 'a self...is formed through relational patterns with others, particularly in the early years of childhood'.[4]

Relationships, Gilligan contends, are not simply integral and fundamental to the self, they **are** the self, relationship is what a person is:

> 'we know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others, and that we experience relationships only insofar as we differentiate other from self'.[5]

Concepts of Development and Relationships

In rejecting the Cartesian concept of self Gilligan disputes 'moral development theory as defined by Piaget and Kohlberg [which] is grounded in the separate, autonomous self of the modernist tradition'[6] which, according to Hekman, is presented as both the precondition and goal of their theories of development[7]. Kohlberg's presentation of development is defined in terms of a linear progression from dependence to independence, from reliance on relationships to autonomous selfhood. An alternative definition of development offered by Gilligan is that of an unfolding, a realisation of fuller potential and her re-interpretation of development highlights relationships and the relational self as that which enables development of the self. Drawing on her work with adolescent girls she defines psychological health not as disengagement (as

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[1] Gilligan, 1982.
[2] Hekman, 1995, p.72f.
[3] For example, Chodorow, 1987.
[4] Hekman, 1995, p.6.
[5] Gilligan, 1982, p.63.
[6] Hekman, 1995, p.6.
[7] Hekman, 1995, p.6.

with Kohlberg) but as staying in relationships: with oneself, with others and with the world[1].

Beyond Concepts – Epistemology, Methodology and Relationships

As Hekman observes in her commentary and critique of Gilligan, these alternative models of self and development, with their emphasis on relationality,

> '[are] not a vision that can simply be added to the existing development literature. It is, rather, a radical reconceptualisation that opposes the linear developmental model'.[2]

The impact and challenge of Gilligan's ideas extends beyond the realm of developmental models to much larger methodological and epistemological issues. In constructing an understanding of the relational self Gilligan is effectively deconstructing the Enlightenment moral subject and presenting a paradigmatic shift in epistemology 'away from the universalism and absolutism of modernist epistemology toward conceptions that emphasise particularity and concreteness'[3]. The relational self, according to Gilligan, is constituted by relationships; it also is embedded and situated, constituted by language, culture, discourse and history[4].

Concepts of Narrative and Relationships

A further element of Gilligan's work that is relevant to this study, and can inform our understanding of relationship, is her use of narrative. Gilligan uses the notion of narrative as an integral aspect of relationality and therefore it is a concept that is also fundamental to her methodology and epistemology:

> '[Gilligan] asserts that the development of the social sciences toward increasingly formal and analytic modes of thought, the separation of subject from object, and the claim of value neutrality and objective truth foster studies focussed on an ethic of justice. By contrast, she states that the ethic of care is based on an 'understanding of the narrative of social relations".[5]

In creating a methodology which seeks to uncover the function of relationship Gilligan links narrative and selfhood in a narrative-based methodology. This is described by Gilligan in *Meeting at the Crossroads*:

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[1] Gilligan, 1991, p.23.
[2] Hekman, 1995, p.14.
[3] Hekman, 1995, p.2.
[4] Hekman, 1995, p.2.
[5] Hekman, 1995, p.16.

'we needed to create a practice of psychology that was something like the practice of relationship'.[1]

As a consequence Gilligan's studies, together with others working in a similar way, centre on listening to the narratives of girls and young women[2]. In her examination of Gilligan's epistemology and methodology Hekman highlights four definitive aspects:

1. the task of the psychologist is perceived as the gathering and analysing of narratives rather than objective data;

2. the presupposition of an objective researcher is abandoned – instead a relational psychological method is used, the key to which is voice, a 'channel of connection'[3] between researcher and subject;

3. the process is hermeneutical: researchers end up learning as much about themselves as their subjects 'the knowledge they gained from the girls was inseparable from self-knowledge....listening to the girls' voices meant hearing their own voices, voices that had been silenced in their own adolescence'[4];

4. the method is explicitly political and engaged, defined as relational and feminist[5].

I present Hekman's observations in detail because they show how closely Gilligan's ideas fit with and inform the issues around epistemology, methodology and narrative that underpin this study.

Bakhtin – Dialogic and Narrative Communication

It is the social, interactive aspect of Bakhtin's work on discourse, language and the production of meaning that is particularly relevant for our construction of an understanding of relationship. A unifying theme of Bakhtin's ideas is the social character of discourse: from the general, overarching theme of intertextuality to the minutiae of specific utterances[6]. In her consideration of this aspect of Bakhtin's thinking Morris comments:

'the production of actualised meaning can be studied adequately only as a communication event, as responsive interaction between at least two social

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[1] Gilligan, 1992, p.15.
[2] For examples see Gilligan in Gilligan, Ward and Taylor, 1988; Attanucci in Gilligan, Ward and Taylor, 1988; Plessner Lyons in Gilligan, Ward and Taylor, 1988.
[3] Hekman, 1992, p.20.
[4] Hekman, 1992, p.20.
[5] Hekman, 1992, p.20.
[6] Bakhtin, 1981.

beings. Language exists on that creative borderzone or boundary between human consciousness, between a self and another'.[1]

Language for Bakhtin is not static and formed; instead it is in a constant state of becoming, a process which incorporates a diversity of multiple voices – heteroglossia[2]. As the smallest component of discourse Bakhtin identifies the place and role of utterance as generating response as well as responding to all relevant previous utterances[3]. It is this interactive process between people that produces what Bakhtin refers to as the dialogic nature of discourse and consciousness[4].

Bakhtin's ideas on narrative and discourse have been utilized across a range of disciplines[5] and within the arena of qualitative studies researchers have used his ideas in the construction and justification of their methodology and analysis[6]. All that is necessary at this point is for us to note the significance of relationality in Bakhtin's notion of the self. Bakhtin's use of dialogue and dialogic discourse presents us with a notion of self that is relational and exists in dialogic relationship with other selves; the intersection of these discourses facilitates and enables the heteroglossia of language to continue with its process of becoming.

What is apparent with both Gilligan and Bakhtin is the suggestion of an alternative epistemology; one in which understanding and meaning is created between people, through narrative, interaction and relationship.

Vygotsky – Relationship and Cognitive Development

If we need to complement and endorse Gilligan and Bakhtin's emphasis on relationship, the relational, as well as the social, is widely identified as playing an important role within the field of cognitive development[7]. In a broad overview of cognitive development theories Meadows compares the three major models of cognitive development as provided by Piaget, information-processing accounts and Vygotsky, concluding that 'Vygotsky's says most about social facilitation, Piaget's less, and the information-processing approach least'[8].

As we have already observed through the work of Gilligan, Piaget's contribution to

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[1] Morris, 1994, p.4f.
[2] Bakhtin, 1981, p.67.
[3] Bakhtin, 1981, p.276.
[4] Bakhtin, 1981; Morris, 1994, p.6.
[5] Morris, 1994, p.1.
[6] Casey, 1993; Quantz and O'Connor, 1988.
[7] Meadows, 1993; Dunn, 1988; Donaldson, 1987, 1992; Rutter and Rutter, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978.
[8] Meadows, 1993, p.342.

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the concept of relationship is fairly limited. Despite listing social influences as one of the four major factors behind cognitive development[1] it can be noted that, according to Piaget, social interaction can only serve to complete children's development, not create it[2]. In contrast, Vygotsky's theories, and those originating from him, have significantly more to offer. Proposing a very different model of development Vygotsky presents a role of relationship within cognitive development where:

> 'cognition [is seen to] originate in social interaction and centres on children's appropriation of cultural tools, goals and activities, which they internalise in their coming to be fully functioning members of their cultures'.[3]

Learning and cognitive development, according to Vygotsky, centres on the interaction process where a 'scaffolding' technique of learning enables the child to participate in increasingly complex ways, eventually managing the all the actions necessary for the successful completion of a task[4].

Gilligan herself refers to the significant place of relationship in Vygotskian theory, pointing out

> '[that within] Vygotsky's theory all of the higher cognitive functions originate as actual relations between individuals, so that in the course of development an interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one'.[5]

Thus we can see that Vygotsky affirms the conceptualising of relationship as significant and important for the individual.

What are Gilligan, Bakhtin and Vygotsky Talking About?

Gilligan, Bahktin and Vygotsky identify the centrality of relationality in people's lives, as well as affirming the place of narrative in sustaining and creating understanding in our relationships. In utilising a relational definition self we are focusing on the significance of the individual's connections with others and discussing the inherently social nature of the self. The social nature of the self is also affirmed within the fields of sociology and anthropology and, as Jenkins notes, can be located in the American pragmatism and mutualism of James and Dewey, as well as the symbolic interactionism of Cooley and Mead[6]. Describing his standpoint as

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[1] Piaget, 1932.
[2] Meadows, 1993, p.342.
[3] Meadows, 1993, p.344.
[4] Meadows, 1993, p.344.
[5] Gilligan, 1988, p.xxi.
[6] Jenkins, 1996, p.37ff.

'pragmatic individualism'[1] Jenkins is a strong advocate of the importance of relationship for the individual:

> 'the self is...altogether individual *and* intrinsically social. It arises within social interaction. It is constructed within the internal-external dialectic of social identification. It draws upon the external social environment of people and things for its content. Even though it is the most individualised of identities selfhood is absolutely social. It depends for its ongoing security upon the validation of others, in its initial emergence and in the dialect of continuing social identification'.[2]

In highlighting the fundamental role of relationship in human existence we should however, avoid being too simplistic about what we are discussing. To do so would be a failure to acknowledge the sheer complexity involved in the process, a complexity that Gomez signalises in her analysis of Object Relations Theory:

> 'relationship is conceived not as an easy process, but as an ambivalent expression of both our incompleteness and our autonomy. We are drawn by our need for affiliation to connect with others in the elusive shared phenomenon we call rapport, while the equal imperative to preserve our individuality fosters distance, conflict and estrangement'.[3]

It is the ideas of Gilligan, Bahktin and Vygotsky that have marked out the significance and parameters of a concept of relationship for us to use in this third level of data analysis. Equipped with this context we are able to assess and develop the theme of relationship in the data analysis. Building on what we have established about the concept of relationship we could reasonably expect relationship to be a crucial aspect of the children's lives and narratives. Our first task is to establish whether this is so: are there grounds for us to use relationship as a theme in the data? This means that we have to explore the ways in which relationship is apparent and the different kinds of relationships that are discussed. If we can establish that the theme of relationship is valid and fitting we can take our analysis further and consider how this informs the larger question posed by this study – the place of religious education in the development of children's worldviews.

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[1] Jenkins, 1996, p.51.
[2] Jenkins, 1996, p.50.
[3] Gomez, 1997, p.200.

Back to the Data with Relationship

Where is Relationship to be Found?

The theme of relationship, I propose, is to be found within the **content** of the data collected as well as the **process** of data collection. Generally it should be noted that this study's data collection is constructed upon the theme of relationship; specifically the establishing and facilitating of a particular kind of enabling relationship between (1) the children and myself as researcher and (2) between the children themselves. I firmly believe that it was this process and these relationships which created the climate to allow the children to articulate their worldviews.

The earlier stages of our analysis inform and verify relationship as a fundamental theme in the collected data:

- **Thinking Units**

  The theme of relationship is evident as underpinning the continuum of engagement and non-engagement that constitute the thinking units of our analysis. The concept of engagement refers to the way in which children talk about something that matters to them and is therefore concerned with process rather than content - it is the **way** the children talk instead of **what** they talk about. When the theme of relationship is applied to this process notable engagement can be characterised as when the children speak about relationships that matter and are significant in their lives, either positively or negatively. The many engaged discussions about pets in all of the schools illustrates this[1]. In contrast, the children's non-engaged conversations appear to express a lack of relationship and this can be seen in several exchanges about RE lessons[2].

- **Categories**[3]

  If we consider each of the categories identified in the second stage of our analysis and apply the theme of relationship it is apparent that what the children are discussing in their narratives are different kinds of relationships in their lives and how they are affected by them. To verify this further, and support the validity of relationship as a key theme in the data, I would suggest that the theme of

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[1] For examples see appendix A, transcript 7, p.6; transcript 40, p.24; appendix B, transcript 14, p.14ff; appendix C, transcript 7, p.8f; appendix D, transcript 6, p.5f.
[2] For examples see appendix A, transcript 15, p.11; appendix B, transcript 26, p.27; appendix C, transcript 18, p.20.
[3] For the table of categories see p.197.

relationship is consistent throughout the data - all the narratives speak of relationship in some way and there are no exceptions.

In addition to being present in each of the categories it is frequently the theme of relationship that connects together different categories. An example of this is the way relationship weaves together and underpins the categories of sport, friends and family, something exemplified in Richard and Robert's discussion about football[1].

By considering previous stages of analysis we are able to demonstrate sufficient grounds for the theme of relationship to be employed and investigated further as a key theme in the data. Having established that the theme is valid and fits the data we can begin to explore what kinds of relationships are expressed in the children's narratives. In addressing kinds of relationships we are recognising the complexity of the concept of relationship as multi-layered and multi-faceted.

What Kind of Relationships?

Our probing of the continuum of engagement/ non-engagement has already exposed one layer of differentiation in relationship: the distinction between relationships that matter and relationships that do not matter. As with the concept of engagement this discrimination represents not a polar opposition but a continuum upon which the children's narratives may be located. Working from what we can observe in the data, returning to the raw data and building on the analysis so far, it is possible to delve deeper into the nature of the children's relationships and how they differ. I propose that the relationships discussed by the children are shaped by five crucial qualities:

1. the degree of **negotiation** within the relationship;
2. the way in which **meaning** is provided for the child within the relationship;
3. the degree of **security** provided for the child within the relationship;
4. the degree of **freedom and independence** (physically, cognitively and spiritually) within the relationship;
5. the place of **authority** and **authoritative statements** within the relationship.

These qualities simplify and at the same time lead us on into the complexity of relationship for each individual child and each relationship that child has. The way these five qualities are balanced in any given relationship at a particular time opens up

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[1] The text of this conversation is to be found in appendix A, transcript 4, p.2 and the link between football and relationships in Richard and Robert's narratives is discussed further in chapter 3, p.62ff.

infinite possibilities of variation; yet whatever the balance they work together to form the nuts and bolts in the machinery of each relationship.

What Kind of Relationships? Two Examples.

I will now apply our understanding of relationship to two contrasting examples of data. There are four reasons for doing this:

1. the presentation of an example brings the theoretical analysis alive;

2. the use of a specific example combines the different layers of relationship which have been uncovered and can serve to illuminate and inform the different understandings of relationship which have emerged so far;

3. the reference to an example is consistent with the grounded theory approach of this study which incorporates a cyclic return back to the raw data;

4. the exploration of an example verifies the authenticity of the study's findings and its analytical framework.

Example 1 – Kate and Lucy at St Beatrice's[1]

In presenting the results from this second interview I observed the particular significance of family relationships for Kate and highlighted six issues pertaining Kate's relationship with her mother:

1. Kate worries what her mother thinks of her;

2. Kate recognises a conflict between pleasing herself and pleasing her mother;

3. Kate's relationship with her mother is very different to her other family relationships with her father, brothers and sisters;

4. Kate appreciates her relationship with her mother;

5. Kate learns from her mother.

The engaged nature of Kate's discussion about this relationship serves to alert us to the fact that this is something which matters to her. The five qualities of relationship that we have established (negotiation, meaning, security, freedom and independence, the place of authority and authoritative statements) can be applied to Kate's narratives. In her discussions Kate presents her mother as an important **authoritative figure** in her life who provides a strong balance of **meaning** and **security** (see issues 4 and 5 above). These qualities feature palpably in the relationship, the qualities of **negotiation, freedom and independence** however, are not as apparent; the

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[1] For relevant transcripts see appendix b, transcripts 32 – 46, p.39- 69.

dominance of her mother causes Kate to be the sort of person who worries a lot[1] and a chief concern seems to be keep playing football, which she enjoys, even though her mother doesn't want her to. Here, and in the light of the many activities Kate engages in, we see a limited amount of negotiation and independence. Kate herself illustrates this situation when she relates how she feels when she is able to get out on her bike:

> 'I ride my bike as well and its good like its as if I can leave all my worries
> behind …I've joined this tennis club…and I ride over there, its really good…its
> like all your worries behind you, pushed back…its really peaceful'.[2]

When applied to this example of data the framework of relationship constructed in our analysis fits and is able to probe Kate's narratives about her mother, revealing the pivotal place of this relationship in Kate's life.

Example 2 – Serving at St Dominic's

In the data from St Dominic's the children reveal how being able to serve at church services is important to them. Instrumental in this situation is the figure of Fr Dave and the relationship he has with the children. There is a high degree of engagement throughout these sections of interview, indicating that this is another instance where the children concerned are talking about something that matters to them. If we apply the same qualities of relationship to this data a very different balance of qualities emerges in contrast to the example above. For most of the children at St Dominic's the only religious nurture, or religious education they are exposed to comes from their experiences through school church services and being a server. Within their relationship with Fr Dave the boys' narratives indicate that they perceive him to be a figure who speaks with **authority** and provides **meaning** within the context of the practicalities of serving as well as broader religious issues and ideas. As well as offering the **security** of understanding, a significant feature of the relationships is **negotiation** and **freedom/ independence.** These aspects are displayed prominently: in the way the boys verbalise their feelings of ownership and responsibility about the church and serving; in the way they express their feelings of being valued and listened to by Fr Dave. The balance in these relationships at St Dominic's provides a distinct contrast to that of Kate and her mother although in each case the relationships have an important function in the children's worldview. Placing the two examples alongside each other we can note the following:

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[1] See appendix B, transcript 33, p.40ff.
[2] Appendix B, transcript 38, p.52, lines 7-20.

- the qualities of relationship which have been identified in our analysis provide a framework and understanding which fits the data and permits us to pursue a richer and deeper analysis;

- as is evident in the examples considered above the balance of qualities in any relationship determine the kind of relationship and its impact on a child.

Where do we go from here? Moving on to stage two of analysis

We have reached the point at which we have established the centrality of relationship in the children's narratives and a way by which we can probe the meaning of different kinds of relationships. We need now to fit this within an understanding of the concept of worldviews and worldviews development.

STAGE TWO:

THE CONCEPT OF WORLDVIEWS AND WORLDVIEWS DEVELOPMENT

The Concept of Worldview

As the word itself suggests, the concept of 'worldview' is used to denote a way of understanding, or viewing, the world. Beyond this it is used to signify a cornucopia of ideas spanning the self[1], identity[2], community, belonging[3], meaning making[4], meaning systems[5], narrative and discourse[6]. Despite the wide-ranging possibilities of usage, the concept of worldview is explicitly employed by a relatively small number of writers and researchers[7] and even here the concept is not extensively defined and may only be briefly mentioned with little or no explanation[8].

One of the most extensive expositions of the concept of worldviews is offered by Ninian Smart in his book *Worldviews – crosscultural explorations of human beliefs*[9]. Exploring both traditional religions and secular ideologies, Smart describes his work as 'worldview analysis'[10]. The worldviews he investigates are those of different, generally homogenous, groups. Worldviews is thus utilised by Smart as a category of analysis and presentation which is rooted within a religious and social understanding:

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[1] Gilligan, 1988.
[2] Casey, 1993.
[3] Jenkins, 1996.
[4] Wells, 1986.
[5] McGuire, 1992; Berger and Luckmann, 1967.
[6] Bakhtin, 1981; Witherell and Noddings, 1991; Wells and Nicholls, 1985; Quantz and O'Connor, 1988; McLaren, 1993.
[7] For example, Bahktin, 1981; Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Casey, 1993; Erricker et al, 1997; Gates, 1976; Gilligan, 1988; McGuire, 1992; Smart, 1983, 1989.
[8] As can be noted with Casey (1993) and Gilligan (1988).
[9] Smart, 1983.
[10] Smart, 1983, p.5.

'the modern study of religion helps to illuminate worldviews, both traditional and secular, which are such an engine of social and moral continuity and change; and therefore it explores beliefs and feelings, and tries to understand what exists inside the heads of people'.[1]

It should be acknowledged that conceptually Smart's ideas offer some indication of what the term worldviews denotes. However, if we compare Smart's use of worldviews to the concerns of this study two fundamental discrepancies are immediately obvious:

1. in this study the term worldviews is grounded within the individual person whereas Smart applies it to groups;

2. this study is concerned with examining the construction of worldviews and Smart does not interrogate the specifics of construction.

What is evident from these divergent positions is that this study is addressing a different focus to Smart's; we are concerned with the way in which individual children construct their worldview. Consequently, for the purposes of this study, we need to reinterpret Smart's conceptualisation and advance it in a different direction; one which focuses on the individual's meaning construction, or what Wells would refer to as meaning making[2].

The Construction of a Conceptual Model of Worldviews

This study's data and analysis presents us with a model of the self that is relational. Utilising this key theme we have the means by which we can move from Smart's group worldview towards a more appropriate construct that addresses the worldview of the individual. The question we are faced with, therefore, is how a concept of worldviews fits within the relational self. To locate such a concept coherently it is necessary to recognise how it is interdependent with, yet at the same time distinctive from, other elements of the relational self. Here I introduce the additional concept of identity. By comparing and integrating the abstractions of self, worldviews and identity I propose to develop a concept of worldviews appropriate for this study.

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[1] Smart, 1983, p.1.

[2] Wells, 1986. For the purposes of this study I do not use the phrase meaning making. Instead I refer to **meaning construction** as a way of acknowledging and bringing together the key concepts of worldviews, worldview development, narrative and relational self which all underpin this research. The terms **meaning** and **construction** are used intentionally: **meaning** (not truth, belief or faith) because that is what is created in worldviews (and worldviews development) and **construction** because it is a relational, ongoing, active process.

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As a way of distinguishing between identity and worldview I contend that it is possible to define identity as when a person focuses on **'this is who I am in relation to them and that'**. In contrast worldview can be construed as when a person focuses on **'that is who they are/ what that is in relation to me'**. Both identity and worldviews are therefore each dependent on relationship and both refer to and define the relational self. Yet the two constructs are different; identity denotes the self relationally looking in (at itself) and worldview refers to the self relationally looking out (at the world).

The relational context of the self, together with this comparison and discrimination between identity and worldview, is ratified and informed by Jenkins' profiling of identity[1]. Combining a sociological and anthropological approach Jenkins comments

> 'identity is a matter of ascription: *by* individuals of themselves, and *of* individuals by others'.[2]

Here Jenkins touches on the realm of relationship and, endorsing the relational framework of our study, he goes on to describe the creation of identity through a process of dialectical interplay between internal and external definitions of the self[3]. This understanding therefore maintains the role of relationship for the process of self in becoming:

> '...what people think about us is no less important than what we think about ourselves. It is not enough to assert identity. That identity must be validated (or not) by those with whom we have dealings'.[4]

Jenkins' observations echo Gilligan's research with adolescent girls. Speaking of identity as well as moral growth, Gilligan, like Jenkins, highlights the ability to 'establish connection with others' and the 'experience of attachment' as fundamental to a definition and understanding of self[1].

In affirming the way we have portrayed identity, Jenkins' comments allow us maintain our distinction between worldviews and identity as conceptualisations that encompass aspects of the self. Although I distinguish between the two abstractions I do not imply that the relational self can be so easily divided. Instead of existing as separate dualistic aspects I suggest that worldviews and identity need to be acknowledged as interdependent and integrated. If we return to our model of the self

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[1] Jenkins, 1996.
[2] Jenkins, 1996, p.102.
[3] Jenkins, 1996, p.25.
[4] Jenkins, 1996, p.21.

as in a continual, dynamic, relational process of realisation, worldviews and identity can not be separated out because each is dependent on and works with the other in its constant re-defining and understanding of the self.

A Metaphor for Understanding Worldviews

The metaphor of knitting a jumper is a useful tool by which we may represent the way worldviews and identity form different aspects of the self. Through the process of knitting (relationships) a jumper is created (the self). A jumper has two different sides; that which faces inwards (identity) and that which faces outwards (worldviews) and although these sides are different they are created simultaneously through the one knitting process.

To take this metaphor a step further we can also note that a knitting pattern may or may not be used when knitting a jumper. It is possible to relate this image to the concerns of this study; is the jumper (the self, identity and worldviews) made with or without the use of a knitting pattern (RE)? Is a pattern helpful (does it enable the development of worldviews) or does it hinder the knitting process (create conflict, for example)?

A Definition of Development and the Development of Worldviews

The allegory of a knitting pattern highlights the fact that we are not only concerned with worldviews per se but also with what I have called the **development** of worldviews. Having identified an appropriate conceptual model for worldviews and located it within the relational self we need to say, within the context of this study, **what** development is, so that we can then consider **how** such development occurs.

The Oxford Concise English Dictionary defines development as 'a stage of growth or advancement ...to bring or come to an active or visible state or to maturity'. This description typifies the predominant notion of development as a rational, linear progression through a series of stages towards a fixed end point. Indeed pertinent to our study is that fact that this understanding has been and still is widely employed in education, RE and children's development theories[1].

Clearly such a notion of development does not fit with either the epistemological stance of this study or its process-based hermeneutics. Therefore we cannot therefore define development in the usual linear and progressive way, instead we need an understanding of development that speaks to and is congruent with our framework

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[1] Gilligan in Gilligan, Ward and Taylor, 1988, p.155.

and data. In view of this I propound, for the purposes of this study, that **development is defined as change and that the change we are specifying is a movement towards increased complexity**.

Although this interpretation does not sit easily with the Concise English Dictionary's definition, The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language offers an different explication which speaks of development in terms of change and increased complexity as well as linear progression and stages:

> '[development is] the act of developing, the state of being developed, a significant event, occurrence, or **change**...a progression from a simpler or lower **to a more** advanced, mature, or **complex form** or stage'.[2]

This definition of development can also be substantiated by Gilligan, Lyotard and Benjamin, all of which provide frameworks of understanding within which our definition of development can be agreeably situated[3].

From this we can say that **when we speak of the development of worldviews we are referring to that aspect of the ongoing process of meaning construction in which a worldview is changed so as to be more complex than before.** Because this definition is necessarily also relational we can say that **the development of worldviews appertains to particular relationships that effect, enable or facilitate a specific kind of change (increased complexity) in the process of worldviews construction[4].**

Identifying the How and When in the Development of Worldviews

Having arrived at a definition of worldviews we can ask **how** and **when** change occurs for their development. Grounding this in the research process and data it can be observed that the development we are talking about takes place on two different levels:

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[1] As with the theories of Piaget (1932), Kohlberg (1983), Fowler (1981) and Goldman (1965).
[2] *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from InfoSoft International, Inc.
[3] See Hekman,1995; Gilligan in Gilligan, Ward and McLean Taylor, 1988; Lyotard, 1983 and Benjamin, 1992.
[4] If development is understood as increased complexity we can use the term in a cyclic way that is congruent with our narrative, relational paradigm. For if increased complexity is used as criteria for understanding the development of worldviews it is also possible, within this cyclic model, for complexity to be lost. Thus if we apply a linear framework to this model of development (e.g. a child getting older) it could be possible that when certain influences come into play (e.g. repressive/ exclusivist ones) a cruder simplification may occur, therefore effecting a movement to decreased complexity.

1. firstly it occurs through the relational nature of the research process itself which effects a particular relationship (a) among the children and (b) between myself as researcher and the children. The nature of these relationships, inherent in the research process, enables the children to reflect upon and narrate concepts. experiences and relationships, which in turn facilitates a development of their worldview.

   Such development is visible in a number of group and follow-up interviews. For example, through the course of their discussions about God many children incorporate increasingly complex ideas. A simple illustration of this can be found in appendix A, transcript 26[1]: if we follow Emily's comments about God through the group's conversation we can see that she starts by describing God as a 'really good guy...I think he looks like someone really, really wise, old, a wispy beard'. Whilst other children in the group play with images of God as Father Christmas and with yellow hair Emily comes in with 'I think, I know, why can't God be a girl instead? Yeh'. Here Emily has clearly introduced further complexity into her thinking and concept of God. The group's ensuing discussion considers whether God could be a girl and Emily counters their dismissal of this possibility with 'well everyone always considers him a man but you don't know do you?..You haven't been to heaven'.

   Emily's meaning construction concerning God is now more complex; through the discussion her concept of God now includes the possibility of God being a girl and offers, in a crude form, a justification for doubt and the need for further enquiry.

2. Secondly, the development of worldviews can be seen to occur in the significant relationships that are recognised and described by the children in their narratives. An analysis of these narratives reveals how such relationships enable the children to incorporate increased complexity in their meaning construction and worldviews: the previously cited examples of the relationships between Kate and her mother and the children at St Dominic's and Fr Dave illustrate this level of worldview development.

In the two levels of worldview development discussed here the theme of narrative response offers us a theoretical context for understanding when and how worldview

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[1] See appendix A, transcript 26, p.16.

development occurs. Within this aspect of our study the suitability of narrative response as a theoretical underpinning is informed and supported by a diverse range of theorists and researchers[1].

Informing the How of Worldview Development– Bakhtin on Discourse, Dialogue and Relationship

The ideas of Bakhtin, which have already been referred to, also offer a way of informing and supporting both the concept of worldviews development and narrative response. If we revisit Bakhtin's social, relational understanding of the self we can note his emphasis on the dynamic, active nature of everyday dialogue and discourse, through which meaning and self are constructed. What is also pertinent is the place of responsive understanding as a fundamental force within the formulation of discourse[2].

Drawing out the threads of active dialogue and responsive understanding it is possible to highlight the position of children as active participants in social dialogue who contribute their own responsive understanding within the heteroglossia (diversity) of voices and discourses. Applying these ideas to the concerns and context of our study we have arrived at a point where we can contend, with the support of Bakhtin, that the development of worldviews is the way in which children, through their dialogic relationships and discourse, are enabled to construct, reconstruct and clarify an understanding through which they create their worldviews and identity.

Development, Discourse and Narrative

The aim of this study has been to recognise and analyse the process of worldviews development. To this end I have used the concept of narrative to frame and further my data collection and analysis. Although Bakhtin talks about discourse rather than narrative I believe that within the context of this study we can claim that there is a congruity between the two terms and writers such as Casey, Wells and Witherell and Noddings[3] support this[4]. In each case these writers consider development of the self and in doing so employ terms with similar meanings.

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[1] Benjamin, 1970; Casey, 1993; Cuppitt, 1991; Freeman, 1993; Gilligan as cited in Hekman, 1995; Gilligan in Gilligan, Ward and McLean Taylor, 1988; Hardy, 1977; Meek, 1985; Wells 1986; Taylor, 1989; Witherell, Noddings, Florio-Ruane and Makler in Witherell and Noddings, 1991.
[2] Bakhtin, 1981, p.280f.
[3] Casey (1993); Wells (1986); Witherell and Noddings (1991).
[4] My earlier comments about worldviews in this chapter highlighted a considerable overlap among equivalent terms. Narrative and discourse, in addition to storying and meaning making can be included as such equivalent terms.

Here our analysis brings us round full circle: we come back to identifying and verifying the children's narratives (discourses) as that which informs us about the children's worldviews and the processes of their construction.

Example: Narrative, Relationship, Identity and The Development of Worldviews

Previously in this analysis we constructed an understanding of relationship which was authenticated and illuminated with an example from the data. Having pieced together a theory of the construction and development of worldviews we can consider a further example which, as before, illustrates our theory as well as demonstrating its fit and closeness to data from which it emerges.

Me, My Dad and Football[1]

In discussing the results of my interview with Robert and Richard, two boys from St Anne's, I highlighted the pervasive way in which football underpins many aspects of the boys' lives, including their relationships with their fathers. Within the context of our theory of worldviews we can explore this example further:

- **worldview – 'I think football is important and I support this team'.**
  In this instance we see the boys looking out at the world (that is what that is in relation to me) and football is defined as an important aspect of their worldview.

- **narrative**
  To investigate this worldview and probe its construction the next question we need to ask is 'why?' Open-ended interviewing poses this question to the boys in different ways and in response they offer narratives which show how different family relationships, in particular that of father-son, are located and given meaning through football. We therefore have narratives that speak of the shaping of the self and the construction of identity as well as worldview.

- **identity – 'football is important because I do this with my dad and sometimes other members of my family are involved as well'.**
  The boys' narratives point beyond their identities as football supporters to something deeper: football is the context within which the father-son relationship is located as significant and meaningful in their lives. Here the boys look inwards (this is who I am in relation to them and that) and being a football supporter is thus also defined as an important aspect of their identity.

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[1] The results of this interview are discussed p.6ff and the relevant transcripts can be found in appendix A, transcript 4, p.3 and transcript 5, p.4.

- **identity and worldview woven together at same time**

  Our construct of worldviews incorporates and is dependent on the way worldview and identity is woven together at the same time in the construction of the self. This aspect of our theory is also evident in Robert and Richard's narratives:

  - the theme of football is utilised in the construction of the boys' understanding of identity as a son (i.e. self looking inwards);
  - at the same time it also gives meaning to the world beyond the construction of identity (i.e. self looking out at the world).

- **the development of worldview**

  Having demonstrated the fit between our theory of worldviews and this example we can reflect on the development of the boys' worldviews. The significance of football in Robert and Richard's worldviews is facilitated through their relationship with their fathers and because of this we can say that the relationship works and provides the opportunity for worldview development. To speak of a relationship working within the context of worldviews development we can turn to Gilligan who comments:

  > 'the ability to establish connection with others hinges on the ability to render one's story coherent'.[1]

  We can observe that in their narratives both boys, through football, articulate strong connections with their fathers which enables them to make sense of their own identity and worldview in the context of this relationship; football renders their story (i.e. meaning making, narratives, worldviews) coherent. The boys are able to locate themselves because of the positive and affirming nature of their respective relationships.

  Application of the five qualities of relationship, drawn from our data analysis, allows us to verify the rigour of our conceptual model and investigate the development of worldviews further. Because of the way in which the qualities of negotiation, meaning construction, security, freedom and independence and authority are present in the boys' relationships with their fathers, we can observe that these relationships sustain and provide meaning for the boys' worldviews. If the development of a worldview is how, through the relational self, the world changes, is shaped and constructed, then in this example football is centrally

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[1] Gilligan in Gilligan, Ward and McLean Taylor, 1988, p.155.

placed within the boys' worldview construction and this is enabled and sustained through those relationships which provide football with its significance and meaning.

Moving on to stage three of analysis

Utilising and building on our analytical framework we have equipped ourselves with a process based, relational understanding of the development of worldviews. The third and final stage of this analysis is to revisit the data and consider what our conception of worldviews reveals about RE provision in each of the schools.

STAGE THREE:

THE PLACE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S WORLDVIEWS

For the purposes of this research RE has been defined both formally and informally so that it encompasses curriculum, collective worship, ethos and nurture[1]. The results from the four schools show that the balance and character of formal and informal RE varies in each and consequently we have four different models of RE provision to investigate. This last stage of analysis will examine how each model of RE fits with our framework of worldview development. It has been established that within the concept of worldview development there are two key defining features: a balance of qualities of relationship[2] and an opportunity for narrative response. This stage of analysis will therefore seek to uncover the degree to which these two features are either present or absent in each school's RE.

In locating these two features of worldview development within the four models of RE there are three different kinds of data that need to be taken account of:

1. children's responses which specifically address RE in their school;
2. children's narratives which do not refer to the provision of RE but in which it is possible to determine the influence of RE;
3. children's conversations which contrast strongly with the balance of qualities and opportunity for narrative response within RE.

As well as providing their own unique insights into the nature and impact of RE, analysed together the combination of these different kinds of data serves to triangulate

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1 Nurture is included because the all schools in this study are denominational.

[2] Defined as I) the degree of negotiation within the relationship; II) the way in which meaning is provided for the child within the relationship; III) the degree of security provided for the child within the relationship; IV) the degree of freedom and independence (physically, cognitively and spiritually) within the relationship; V) the place of authority and authoritative statements within the relationship.

and verify our observations and conclusions. After considering each model of RE we can then make comparisons between the schools and draw some conclusions about what constitutes good or bad RE provision for the development of children's worldviews.

ST ANNE'S

RE at St Anne's

In this school RE is perceived by both staff and children as occupying a prominent and important place in school life. It occurs within the formal framework of lessons and regular collective worship (mass and prayers) and in the informal arena of ethos and nurture. Although recognising its significant role in the school the children's discussions about RE are distinctly unengaged, with little comment apart from it being boring. This general non-engaged attitude towards RE would suggest that this model has no place in the development of the children's worldviews. However, a closer investigation of the data, utilising the framework of (1) balance of relationship qualities and (2) opportunity for narrative response, reveals a far more complex role of RE within the children's meaning construction.

The Balance of Qualities at St Anne's – An Emphasis on Authority

For RE to facilitate worldview development we are investigating how it fosters relationships that contain a **balance** of authority, freedom and independence, security, meaning and negotiation. An overview of the data clearly points to a particular emphasis on **authority** as the prevailing, defining quality that underpins the relational character of RE at St Anne's. Children's responses that specifically address RE reveal a widespread recognition of authority that resides with the teachers and head[1]. Arising out of this, for many children, is the issue of truth[2]; according to the children's understanding the school's claim to authority enables it to present children with a tight, well-defined worldview and belief system that is upheld as the truth.

This model of RE's strong focus on its own authority appears to be at the expense of encouraging children to engage in their own meaning construction. In retaining authority for itself the school appears to be restricted in being able to give permission or foster confidence in the children so that they are able to speak with their own voice of authority.

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[1] For examples see appendix A: transcript 13, p.9; transcript 44, p.29; transcript 45, p.36.
[2] For example see appendix A, transcript 13, p.9.

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Locating the Qualities of Negotiation, Freedom and Independence

Staying with the dominant role of authority within this model of RE we can consider the way in which this emphasis limits the qualities of **negotiation, freedom and independence**. In presenting a contained worldview and belief system as the truth we may speculate that within the relational structures of RE at St Anne's there is little space or perceived need for either negotiation, freedom or independence: these qualities are not present or fostered simply because they are not deemed necessary. This is not to say however, that the children nevertheless assume negotiation, freedom and independence in their meaning construction outside of RE. Throughout the data collected from St Anne's there are a number of examples where the children exhibit a high degree of negotiation, freedom and independence in their discussions about religious concepts[1]. These instances are outside of data which specifically addresses RE and in them the children reveal a remarkable capability to engage in their own meaning construction, displaying a range of skills and abilities that enables them to reflect and communicate with each other. Thus we have contrasting data which not only demonstrates the value of negotiation, freedom and independence within the relational process but also highlights how such qualities are visibly lacking within the relational process of RE at St Anne's.

The Presence of Meaning and Security in this Model of RE

Returning to the issue of truth and the school's presentation of a contained, well-defined worldview and belief system we can explore how the qualities of **meaning** and **security** fit within this construct of RE. Examining the data the fairly rigid authoritarian worldview and belief system is perceived by the children as both useful and a source of tension. It is useful because:

- it provides a clearly defined sense of identity which, in different instances, the children understand as religious, Christian and/or Catholic[2]. The data suggests that the children see themselves as sharing in this identity to a lesser or greater degree and this provides them with a sense of belonging and **security**;

- in offering such a clearly defined worldview and belief system this model of RE provides **meaning** in that it presents the child with concepts and ideas which are

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[1] For examples see appendix A: transcript 28, p.17; transcript 44, p.29; transcript 45, p.36; transcript 46, p.40.

[2] See appendix A: transcript 13, p.9; transcript 21, p.13; transcript 23, p.14; transcript 45, p.36.

either accepted, or assimilated and developed in the child's own meaning construction[1].

Alongside these two edifying aspects of the model of RE at St Anne's there is data that suggests that this same rigid framework of belief and truth can also create conflict and tension. This is apparent when the children express difficulty in accepting the truth claims presented in RE or when the concepts presented by the school conflict with their own ideas, reflections or experiences[2]. Assessing the overall balance of qualities of relationship at the school it can be said that authority is the prevailing feature, and the diminished presence of other qualities is in direct relation to this emphasis.

The Opportunity for Narrative Response within this Model of RE

The second aspect of worldview development that we will be trying to locate within each model of RE is the opportunity for narrative response. This means we will be seeking to determine how and where a given model of RE allows children to consider and express their own reflective understanding[3]. Again the data from St Anne's means that we are able to establish a thicker, triangulated evaluation of the place of narrative response in its model of RE.

Within a number of conversations that do not address RE it is possible to find examples of narrative response within the data: for instance, we find instances of the children discussing relationships that provide opportunities for narrative response[4] as well as examples of the children using the interview situation itself as an opportunity for narrative response[5]. There is a stark contrast between these examples and data where the children's generally negative, non-engaged comments about formal RE point to a lack of opportunity for narrative response. To probe and evidence the lack of opportunity for narrative response in this model of RE we can note the ways in which the children comment upon the issues of engagement and involvement:

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[1] Images of God or understandings about what happens when people die are illustrations of this – see appendix A: transcript 8, p.6; transcript 9, p.7; transcript 40, p.24; transcript 43, p.47; transcript 44, p.29; transcript 45, p.36; transcript 46, p.40.
[2] See appendix A: transcript 15, p.11; transcript 44; p.29; transcript 45, p.36.
[3] In addition to verbal expression I include non-verbal expression, as well as the possibility of expression through ritual.
[4] See appendix A: transcript 41, p.25; transcript 46, p.40.
[5] See appendix A: transcript 5, p.4; transcript 7, p.6; transcript 8, p.6; transcript 26, p.16; transcript 32, p.19; transcript 37, p.22; transcript 40, p.24; transcript 41, p.25; transcript 43, p.27; transcript 44, p.29; transcript 45, p.36; transcript 46, p.40; transcript 48, p.48.

- in their conversations there are occasions when the children speak about feeling engaged and involved in RE; for example, when they serve at mass or are involved in assembly[1];
- these rare occasions are seen as outside of what normally happens in formal RE (lessons and collective worship) and serve to highlight the children's understanding of RE in general where they don't feel engaged or involved in collective worship or lessons.

When the children are encouraged to work from their own experience and be involved they express less estrangement from RE. Equating the issues of engagement and involvement with an opportunity for narrative response, we can say that although formal RE at St Anne's does not allow for narrative response as a matter of course, its opportunity is welcomed by children when it does occur.

The Balance of Qualities of Relationship and Opportunity for Narrative Response - what can be said about these processes in this model of RE?

Because the process of worldview development incorporates (1) a balance of qualities of relationship and (2) an opportunity for the children's narrative response, we have examined the data to ascertain how and where these elements are to be found within the model of RE at St Anne's. We have established that this model operates in a predominantly authoritarian manner and that this emphasis restricts a balance with other relational qualities such as freedom, independence and negotiation. Additionally, there appears to be little opportunity for children's narrative response within this model of RE. Thus from our analysis of the data from St Anne's we can conclude that the model of RE at this school does not incorporate a framework by which the process of children's meaning construction and worldview development is facilitated. What the data does illustrate, however, is that although this process does not take place within RE, outside of RE the knowledge and truth (concepts and language), which this model provides, is used by the child when they have the opportunity to reflect and consider their worldviews.

ST BEATRICE'S

RE at St Beatrice's

RE at St Beatrice's occurs formally through lessons and regular collective worship, and informally through the school's ethos and nurture within the Roman Catholic

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[1] See appendix A: transcript 22, p.14; transcript 24, p.15.

faith tradition. Much like St Anne's, RE is acknowledged by both staff and pupils as a prominent and defining characteristic of the school[1]. At the same time however, when asked about RE, many of the children describe lessons and collective worship at their school as boring and unengaging[2]. In pursuing a thorough and balanced analysis of the data from St Beatrice's we have the three different kinds of data to consider[3] and, in addition, contrasting data from the group and second interviews[4]. By taking account of these various strands of data it is possible to move beyond the children's generally dismissive comments about RE and probe how this model impacts upon the children through its balance of qualities of relationship and the opportunities it offers for narrative response.

The Balance of Qualities of Relationship at St Beatrice's – The Significance of Authority and Lack of Negotiation, Freedom and Independence

Despite the marked variety of data from this school it unanimously points to **authority** as the overriding, pre-eminent quality within the school's model of RE[5]. Where different children explicitly address this emphasis on authority it is commonly described in terms of RE providing knowledge, mainly knowledge about what to believe[6]. The content, authoritarian-led model of RE at St Beatrice's is widely recognised, anticipated, and to some degree, valued by the children. Authority in this sense (as conveyed knowledge) is therefore not necessarily a negative quality within RE provision, although this is not to suggest that the children wholeheartedly accept such authority: in highlighting the prominent role of authority the data also draws attention to a lack of **negotiation, freedom and independence**.

One of the most insightful references to a lack of balance of qualities arises from my second interview with Kate and Lucy. Taking a broad overview of the data the children generally convey feelings of restricted negotiation, freedom and

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[1] See staff responses in questionnaires, appendix E. For examples of the children's comments about this see appendix B: transcript 30, p.33; transcript 56, p.84; transcript 57, p.85; transcript 58, p.87.
[2] See appendix B: transcript 18, p.20; transcript 19, p.20.
[3] (I) children's responses which specifically address RE in their school; (II) children's narratives which do not refer to the provision of RE but in which it is possible to determine the influence of RE; (III) children's conversations which contrast strongly with the balance of qualities and opportunity for narrative response within RE.
[4] For a discussion of this contrast see chapter 3, p.98f.
[5] See appendix B: transcript 16, p.17; transcript 20, p.21; transcript 22, p.22; transcript 23, p.23; transcript 25, p.25; transcript 30, p.33; transcript 43, p.63; transcript 46, p.69; transcript 58, p.87; transcript 61, p.91; transcript 62, p.92; transcript 63, p.94.
[6] For example see appendix B, transcript 58, p.87 and transcript 62, p.92.

independence within the model of RE at St Beatrice's[1]. What is interesting is that there is an overall consensus among the children that this perceived lack of negotiation, freedom and independence extends beyond RE to their school and home life[2] where, as a consequence, they frequently feel that they are not listened to or accorded enough regard, simply because they are children[3]. In contrast to this the children's conversations about friends show that this is where the qualities of negotiation, freedom or independence are recognised and expressed[4] and this data corroborates the lack of such qualities within the model of RE.

The Presence of Meaning and Security in this Model of RE

The remaining qualities we need to consider in this model of RE are that of **meaning** and **security**. Through the emphasis given to authority the data reveals that the RE at St Beatrice's provides a rigid framework of knowledge and belief. As we saw at St Anne's such a framework and assertion of authority can incorporate the qualities of meaning and security, even though it might also be a source of conflict for the child; this scenario appears to be the situation at both RC schools. The data from St Beatrice's suggests that through its authority and tight worldview this model of RE does provide, for some children, varying degrees of meaning and security. This is especially evident in data from the second interviews where religious belief and a religious framework of meaning construction form an important part of the children's identity and worldviews[5]. Whilst indicating the ways in which RE supports and nurtures this religiosity through meaning and security the data also reveals how the presence of these qualities is nonetheless also limited and problematic[6].

It is far harder to locate the qualities of meaning and security as aspects of RE within the data from the group interviews. Although the firm authoritarian, knowledge base of RE is evidenced[7] there is a variety of data which indicates that RE is generally irrelevant rather than meaningful or capable of providing security. Delving into this

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[1] See appendix B: transcript 19, p.20; transcript 30, p.33; transcript 63, p.94. In addition see Kate and Lucy, appendix B: transcript 46, p.69 - it is worth reading the whole of appendix B, transcript 46, p.69 for the richness of dialogue and reflection which both girls engage in at this point of the interview.
[2] See appendix B: transcript 46, p.69; transcript 37, p.51; transcript 38, p.52; transcript 50, p.76.
[3] See appendix B: transcript 8, p.5; transcript 31, p.39.
[4] See appendix B: transcript 2, p.2; transcript 11, p.11.
[5] Within the second interviews there is data which evidences this provision in RE both explicitly and indirectly - see appendix B: transcript 43, p.63; transcript 58, p.87; transcript 59, p.88; transcript 61, p.91; transcript 62, p.92; transcript 63, p.94.
[6] For example see appendix B: transcript 46, p.69.
[7] See appendix B: transcript 17, p.19; transcript 19, p.20; transcript 30, p.33.

data the two themes of belief and belonging expose the lack of meaning and security in RE:

- **belief**

  the issue of belief and unbelief is touched on at various occasions throughout the interviews at the school. As part of its knowledge base the school expresses certain clearly defined beliefs and this sits in contrast to the views of many children who express their own non-belief or belief in something completely different: according to these comments RE does not and cannot provide the children with any meaning or security; the beliefs of the school are perceived as either unbelievable, irrelevant and/ or meaningless[1].

- **belonging**

  within the group interviews there is extensive data which demonstrates how, within its religious context, many children do not experience a sense of belonging and identity with the school[2]. This too can be seen as indicative of a lack of meaning and security in RE: because the children feel separate and apart from the school's ethos and teaching the likelihood of them finding meaning and security is restricted.

Although diverse and complex the data from St Beatrice's allows a coherent appraisal of the balance of qualities of relationship within RE, what is ratified across the data is that within this model of RE authority is the prevailing precept and the qualities of negotiation, freedom, independence, meaning and security are circumscribed and limited as a result.

The Opportunity for Narrative Response within the Model of RE

In searching to locate an opportunity for narrative response it can be noted that there are a number of instances in the data where children talk positively about the opportunity for discussion in RE lessons. According to the data these discussions appear to address the current topic in question, such as friends or relationships, or permit the class to share written work which has been done at home[3]. Despite being recognised as a normal part of RE lessons the data shows that many children do not know why such discussions take place. Although they occur as a regular aspect of RE

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[1] See appendix B: transcript 16, p.17; transcript 20, p.21; transcript 22, p.22; transcript 24, p.24; transcript 25, p.25; transcript 26, p.27; transcript 30, p.33.

[2] See appendix B: transcript 15, p.17, transcript 16, p.17; transcript 24, p.24; transcript 25, p.25; transcript 27, p.30; transcript 30, p.33.

[3] See appendix B: transcript 20, p.21; transcript 21, p.22; transcript 60, p.89.

the discussions are not perceived as having any particular relevance to the rest of RE[1]. The children's incomprehension about why they have such discussions in RE is interesting: it indicates that the climate created at such times is perceived as alien to what they believe to be the nature and concerns of RE generally[2]. The question we are posing is whether these regular discussions amount to an opportunity for narrative response in RE. To answer this we need to examine the data to ascertain if, within the discussions, there is space for the children to consider and express their own reflective understanding. The data illustrates how the discussions allow children to narrate, or story experiences and relationships[3] and this might be understood as narrative response. Against this, however, the data also raises a number of points that suggest that if the opportunity for narrative response within the discussions is present at all, it is fairly limited:

1. the discussions are restricted in terms of the opportunity for depth of reflection[4];

2. the children only listen to each other, there is no dialogue between the children where they are able respond to what has been said in any great depth or detail[5];

3. the main dialogue that takes place exists between each child and the teacher: the discussions appear to involve the children telling stories and which are then interpreted by the teacher who, within a religious framework, imparts knowledge about Jesus and God within the context of the topic (e.g. friends)[6].

The data from St Beatrice's would therefore seem to suggest that the children find it difficult to locate and value their discussions within the context of a model of RE which is perceived as imparting 'faith truths'. Placed alongside each other these two elements are so disparate that they could be seen as two different sorts of narratives, or storying. Thus the problem for the children is that there is no meeting ground between the two aspects of RE: the discussions they have cannot be located within the idea of knowledge (as defined and experienced across the rest of RE) and do not really amount to an opportunity for narrative response.

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[1] An example of this is to be found where the children cite RE class discussions about friends; although they obviously enjoyed the opportunity to listen to each other and talk about their friends they cannot locate this within the broader framework of RE – see appendix B: transcript 20, p.21; transcript 21, p.22; transcript 22, p.22.

[2] It may be noted that this data also confirms our conclusions regarding the emphasis on authority and lack of other qualities within the balance of qualities of relationship in this model of RE.

[3] As evidenced in appendix B: transcript 21, p.22.

[4] For example see appendix B: transcript 60, p.89.

[5] For example see appendix B: transcript 21, p.22.

[6] For example see appendix B: transcript 22, p.22.

In conjunction with these points further evidence which suggests a lack of narrative response is the sharp contrast between (1) data that reveals the nature of the discussions in lessons and (2) the kind of narrative response which occurs within the interview process itself[1]. This contrast highlights what narrative response is and can be and how such a climate is not created within the discussions that occur in RE.

The Balance of Qualities of Relationship and Opportunity for Narrative Response: Belief and Knowledge that is Separate and Irrelevant

In attempting to locate the two aspects of worldview development within this model of RE the data suggests an authoritarian model of RE which is perceived as irrelevant and does not engage in processes which address and encourage the children's meaning construction and worldview development. Emerging out of the data is the notion of separateness and this theme is evident both within the content of the interviews and the interview situation itself[2] where the children appear to see themselves as apart and distanced from certain environments and relationships. This separateness is also perceptible within RE where authority, and its associated issues of knowledge and belief, fosters a model of RE which remains external, remote and inconsequential to many of the children[3].

In comparison to data pertaining to RE, other responses and comments from the children highlight how, in contrast to RE, friends, pets, family and other children occupy an important place in their meaning construction. In addition, other data illustrates how, in the appropriate environment, there is the capability and wish within the children to reflect on and discuss deeper issues[4]. This supplemental data suggests the conclusion that the kinds of relationships that facilitate the process of worldview development cannot be located in this model of RE.

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[1] For examples see appendix B: transcript 26, p.27; transcript 30, p.33; transcript 35, p.44; transcript 38, p.52.

[2] I comment upon this feeling of separateness when discussing the results of the group interviews at St Beatrice's – see chapter 3, p.98ff.

[3] This is aptly expressed by Jonathan in his comments about RE - 'they just kind of like tell us stories which we just have to figure out, but its useless cos if we don't get taught anything about it …then it a guess really cos we don't get to talk about what really happens' - appendix B, transcript 26, p.27.

[4] In an extremely limited way some data does suggest that outside of RE, in the children's own meaning construction and worldview development, it is possible to determine the influence of RE, for example in the language and use of religious concepts when speaking about what happens when people die, see appendix B, transcript 25, p.25; transcript 26, p.27.

ST CHRISTOPHER'S

RE at St Christopher's

The data from this school unequivocally exposes a particularly prominent and rigid Christian context that underpins life for the children not just at school, but also at home[1] and within their church communities[2]. Thus in pursuing a careful and rigorous analysis we need to recognise that the model of RE at St Christopher's is firmly embedded within a much broader Christian environment. The significance of this Christian framework is unparalleled in the other schools in this study and unlike the other schools, is evidenced across the data as relevant and significant, to some degree, for all the children interviewed. In acknowledging the broader Christian context of RE we have a range of data with which to verify and enrich our investigation:

1. the three kinds of data that have been used throughout the analysis of each model of RE[3];

2. the group interviews;

3. the second interviews;

4. the instances of divergence and congruence between the two second interviews.

Across this spectrum of data RE is identified as occupying a prominent position in the school, occurring formally and informally through assemblies, regular time spent praying[4], lessons and ethos[5]. Having established the context and avenues of RE we can progress with our analysis and consider where and how we might locate the balance of qualities of relationship and the opportunity for narrative response.

The Balance of Qualities of Relationship at St Christopher's – The Qualities of Authority, Meaning and Security within a Christian Framework

Data from the group and second interviews, as well as the head and class teacher,

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[1] See appendix C: transcript 1, p.1; transcript 9, p.9; transcript 12, p.12; transcript 52, p.69; transcript 50, p.66; transcript 59, p.76.

[2] See appendix C: transcript 10, p.10; transcript 11, p.11, transcript 12, p.12; transcript 22, p.25; transcript 25, p.31; transcript 35, p.49; transcript 39, p.54; transcript 40, p.54; transcript 41, p.56; transcript 54, p.71; transcript 59, p.76.

[3] (I) children's responses which specifically address RE in their school; (II) children's narratives which do not refer to the provision of RE but in which it is possible to determine the influence of RE; (III) children's conversations which contrast strongly with the balance of qualities and opportunity for narrative response within RE.

[4] The distinctive place of prayer at St Christopher is a further aspect of RE that is unparalleled in the other schools in this study – see appendix C: transcript 28, p.41; transcript 30, p.42; transcript 45,p.59; transcript 59, p.76.

[5] See appendix C: transcript 13, p.12; transcript 14, p.15; transcript 18, p.20; transcript 30, p.42; transcript 37, p.51; transcript 39, p.54; transcript 40, p.54; transcript 41, p.56; transcript 42. p.56; transcript 43, p.57; transcript 45, p.59; transcript 56, p.73; transcript 57, p.74; transcript 59, p.76.

indicates that the model of RE at the school is primarily concerned with the nurture of Christian faith and Christian identity[1]. The children's comments reveal how **authority, meaning and security** are the three main relational qualities which together structure and sustain this Christian nurturing framework in RE[2].

The place of authority in RE is explicitly addressed on a number of occasions in the data and is located by the children mainly with the head, but also with other teachers[3]. The way the head exercises authority is particularly discernible in the children's conversations about assembly where he is described as teaching and talking about Jesus and God[4] and leading prayers[5]. The comments appear to invest him with authority because he is an adult[6], because he is the head of the school, and because 'Mr Chapman is very close to God'[7]. The data therefore reveals that the expression of authority in this model of RE is understood by the children as an authority to speak about the Bible, God, being a Christian and asserting a Christian framework of rules, beliefs and truth. Because authority is located within the Christian framework in this way many children regard it as an absolute authority[8]: it expresses and refers to the ultimate authority of God and the Bible. It is interesting that this notion of absolute authority is visible even where children express negativity or disagreement with what they are told[9].

Within the model of RE at St Christopher's authority both defines and is defined by its Christian framework. Similarly, the same can be said about the prominence and role of **meaning** and **security** in this particular model of RE. In highlighting how the various aspects of RE offer meaning and security the children's comments also indicate the different ways in which this is circumscribed within the framework of Christian identity:

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[1] See chapter 3, p.138f.

[2] For general examples of data which refer to these qualities in RE see appendix C: transcript 13, p.12; transcript 37, p.51; transcript 39, p.54; transcript 40, p.54; transcript 41, p.56; transcript 58, p.75; transcript 59, p.76.

[3] See appendix C: transcript 13, p.12; transcript 41, p.56; transcript 56, p.73; transcript 58, p.75.

[4] See appendix C: transcript 13, p.12; transcript 56, p.73; transcript 58, p.75.

[5] See appendix C: transcript 28, p.41; transcript 30, p.42.

[6] Across the Christian nurturing environment of the family, church and school data from the first and second interviews shows that the children commonly perceive adults as a focus of authority, thus the perceived authority of the head can be seen to be supported and reinforced by the children's other relationships with adults - see appendix C: transcript 11, p.11; transcript 12, p.12; transcript 22, p.25; transcript 26, p.32; transcript 27, p.35; transcript 50, p.66; transcript 55, p.72; transcript 59, p.76.

[7] See appendix C: transcript 12, p.12.

[8] See appendix C: transcript 13, p.12; transcript 20, p.23; transcript 56, p.73; transcript 58, p.75; transcript 59, p.76.

[9] See appendix C: transcript 37, p.51; transcript 56, p.73.

- a strong sense of security is offered through the clear definition of the rigid boundaries of Christian belief and behaviour in all aspects of RE[1];

- in setting out a coherent and authoritative framework of what constitutes Christian identity and worldview, RE at the school provides meaning which is comprehensible and significant for the children[2];

- according to the children's understanding RE lessons which address other religious beliefs and faiths appear to enhance the framework of Christian meaning and security by fostering a sense of exclusivity and otherness in relation to other religions[3].

A Lack of Qualities: Negotiation, Freedom and Independence

Comments from the group interviews at St Christopher's point to a distinct lack of negotiation, freedom and independence within the children's experience of nurture in Christianity[4]. Within data that specifically focuses on RE this same lack of qualities is noticeable. In contrast, there is alternative data where children either describe relationships that include these qualities or the dialogue of the interview process itself exhibits negotiation, freedom and independence[5]. Within these different instances of conversation the following observations can be made:

- they highlight even more forcibly how, according to the children's perception, this model of RE does not include aspects of negotiation, freedom and independence;

- the authoritarian, rigid framework of what is means to be a Christian and to believe in the truth of the Bible[6] (presented for many children beyond RE to encompass their lives at home and in church) is, in varying degrees, accepted by most children. However, such a framework does not encourage them to assume negotiation, freedom and independence in their relationships or in their meaning construction, particularly outside of the perceived boundaries of being a Christian.

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[1] The children's responses throughout the data show how lessons, collective worship and ethos all contribute to this sense of security – see appendix C: transcript 13, p.12; transcript 39, p.54; transcript 40, p.54; transcript 41, p.56; transcript 45, p.59; transcript 56, p.73; transcript 57, p.74.

[2] See appendix C: transcript 13, p.12; transcript 56, p.73; transcript 58, p.75; transcript 59, p.76.

[3] See appendix C: transcript 14, p.15; transcript 15, p.17; transcript 16, p.18; transcript 17, p.19; transcript 18, p.20; transcript 42, p.56; transcript 43, p.57; transcript 59, p.76.

[4] See appendix C: transcript 11, p.11; transcript 12, p12; transcript 13, p.12; transcript 26, p.32.

[5] Although still expressed within a Christian framework the qualities of negotiation, freedom and independence are either referred to or evident in the following - appendix C: transcript 22, p.25; transcript 26, p.32; transcript 27, p.35; transcript 31, p.43; transcript 32, p.45; transcript 50, p.66; transcript 55, p.72; transcript 58, p.75; transcript 59, p.76.

[6] The ultimate authority and importance of the Bible is referred to by a number of children – see appendix C: transcript 20, p.23; transcript 22, p.25; transcript 27, p.35; transcript 31, p.43; transcript 32, p.45; transcript 45, p.59.

The children's comments from the interviews at St Christopher's show how a corporate, firm Christian framework of beliefs, identity and worldview underpins RE at the school. By emphasising the qualities of authority, meaning and security in RE the data demonstrates how the school nurtures this sense of a shared Christian faith and identity in its pupils. The lack of evidence for the presence of freedom, negotiation and independence within RE suggests that in focussing on a shared Christian identity this model of RE does not address the meaning construction of its pupils. A consideration of the opportunity for narrative response within RE at the school can serve to verify these conclusions and enable us to assess whether this model incorporates the process of worldview development.

The Opportunity for Narrative Response in this model of RE

In assessing the opportunity for narrative response within the model of RE at St Christopher's we are seeking to establish where and how RE allows children to consider and express their own reflective understanding. Although contrasting data suggests that the children would welcome (and are capable of engaging in) such activity[1] there is no evidence in the data that such an opportunity is offered in RE. It is interesting to note that throughout a number of the children's lives personal prayer offers the greatest opportunity to consider and articulate (if only to themselves) a reflective understanding of themselves, experiences and religious belief[2].

RE at St Christopher's – A Focus on a Shared Christian Framework, Rather than Individual Meaning Construction

In investigating the two aspects of worldview development (balance of qualities of relationship and opportunity for narrative response) we are addressing how RE incorporates the process of children's meaning construction. Instead of engaging in the processes of meaning construction, the data and its analysis establishes that the model of RE at St Christopher's focuses on nurturing a shared Christian framework of meaning, identity and worldview. Children's narratives that do not specifically comment upon RE confirm how other agencies in the children's lives (mainly home and church) reinforce and maintain Christian nurture through the same shared

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[1] As well as being specifically mentioned in the data (appendix C, transcript 19, p.22) the nature of several interview conversations also demonstrates how readily the children engage and enjoy such discussions (see appendix C, transcript 22, p.25; transcript 23, p.29; transcript 24, p.30; transcript 59, p.76).
[2] See appendix C: transcript 8, p.9; transcript 28, p.41; transcript 29, p.42; transcript 30, p.42; transcript 45, p.59; transcript 59, p.76.

Christian framework. This is not to say that the shared Christian framework of identity and worldview is not utilised or important for the children. Throughout the interviews, and in varying degrees, a number of children reveal how the sense of a shared Christian identity, supported and enriched through RE, is personally significant for them[1]. Alongside this however, the children's responses also indicate that within RE there is no recognition of or opportunity for personal meaning construction, especially that which might occur outside the boundaries of the school's Christian framework. There is evidence within some of the children's comments that this inability to address meaning construction in RE can result in the perception that RE and its Christian framework is insubstantial or a source of tension and conflict for the child[2].

ST DOMINIC's

RE at St Dominic's

In each of the four schools in this study we are seeking to discover how different models of RE incorporate the process of worldview development through the balance of qualities of relationship and the opportunity for narrative response. In contrast to the other three schools in this research, RE provision at St Dominic's stands out as very different for a number of reasons[3]:

1. although RE lessons were part of the curriculum in previous years, the class at present do not receive RE lessons[4];

2. the school has no formal RE curriculum framework[5];

3. for the majority of children religious identity and religious belief is neither prominent or regarded as important either in or outside of school[6];

4. the exception to this lack of either formal or informal RE at St Dominic's is the significance of the children's relationship with Fr Dave and their involvement in

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[1] See appendix C: transcript 11, p.11; transcript 13, p.12; transcript 28, p.41; transcript 40, p.54; transcript 41, p.56; transcript 56, p.73; transcript 59, p.76.
[2] See appendix C: transcript 14, p.15; transcript 18, p.20; transcript 37, p.51; transcript 56, p.73; transcript 58, p.75; transcript 59, p.76.
[3] These points are discussed in greater detail in the results section, chapter 3.
[4] See appendix D: transcript 2, p.2; transcript 25, p.31.
[5] See appendix D: transcript 2, p.2.
[6] See appendix D: transcript 24, p.31; transcript 37, p.47; transcript 38, p.48; transcript 42, p.59; transcript 43, p.60; transcript 44, p.62.

collective worship which takes place on a weekly basis at the church next door to the school[1].

As the above points reveal, the provision of RE at this school is therefore very limited in comparison to St Anne's, St Beatrice's and St Christopher's. According to the children and class teacher's comments formal RE consists of collective worship and, to a lesser degree, assembly[2]. Even within the arena of informal RE the children's comments do not characterise the school's ethos or environment as religious[3]. In contrast to this limited RE the data clearly demonstrates the extensive degree of informal RE that takes place between the children and Fr Dave[4].

Because RE at St Dominic's is concentrated within the church and the children's relationship with Fr Dave, our analysis of the model of RE at this school will necessarily focus on the balance of qualities of relationship and the opportunity for narrative response that exists within this aspect of RE.

St Dominic's: A Different Balance of Qualities of Relationship

In their conversations about Fr Dave and serving at church the children's comments do not just discuss what has been defined in this study as RE, but they also speak of a particular kind of relationship between themselves and Fr Dave. If we consider the balance of qualities of relationship in this context it is immediately obvious that compared to the other schools in this study the qualities of authority, meaning, security, negotiation, freedom and independence are all present and expressed in a very different way:

- **authority**: even though religious belief and understanding is not particularly important or meaningful for them, the children's comments demonstrate how they recognise the authority of Fr Dave to speak about the church, collective worship, God and the Bible[5];

- **meaning**: through their relationship with Fr Dave and the experience of serving the data highlights how feelings of involvement, responsibility, ownership and

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[1] See appendix D: transcript 26, p.32; transcript 27, p.33; transcript 29, p.36; transcript 30, p.38; transcript 31, p.39; transcript 32, p.41; transcript 33, p.41; transcript 34, p.42; transcript 35, p.43; transcript 40, p.51; transcript 43, p.60.

[2] Recognition of RE taking place in assembly is only mentioned briefly on one occasion during the interviews at St Dominic's - see appendix D: transcript 36, p.45.

[3] See appendix D: transcript 21, p.28; transcript 23, p.30; transcript 24, p.31.

[4] See, for example, appendix D: transcript 29, p.36; transcript 30, p.38; transcript 31, p.39; transcript 33, p.41; transcript 36, p.45.

[5] See appendix D: transcript 29, p.36; transcript 30, p.38; transcript 35, p.43; transcript 36, p.45; transcript 40, p.51.

personal engagement all contribute to the children's ability to understand, respect and find personal meaning in the ritual of collective worship[1]. The provision of meaning in this way is verified by the children's negative comments about collective worship at church that does not include serving and does not offer meaning[2]. In other data which does not specifically address collective worship the children's narratives about God and what happens when people die also demonstrate how their positive experiences of RE augments their meaning construction[3];

- **security:** for most of the children at St Dominic's the RE which they receive through Fr Dave and collective worship is their main source of religious nurture and religious education. In the light of this the children's narratives illustrate how RE offers a sense of belonging and security by furnishing them with self-confidence and a religious understanding and awareness, however limited, which provides grounding for their meaning construction[4];

- **negotiation, freedom and independence:** in contrast to the other schools in this study these qualities are easily located and expressed across the diverse range of data from St Dominic's. Whilst acknowledging, to a lesser or greater degree, the significance of their experiences of RE and their relationship with Fr Dave, the children also freely demonstrate negotiation, freedom and independence in communicating personal decisions, beliefs, attitudes and meaning construction[5]. It is noticeable that contrary to the other schools, the children at St Dominic's express no feelings of conflict or tension between what they are told within the context of RE and their own worldviews.

Ironically within the boundaries of collective worship and the role of Fr Dave, RE at St Dominic's offers the only model throughout this study in which each of the five qualities are present in a significant fashion and contribute to a **balance** of qualities of relationship.

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[1] See appendix D: transcript 30, p.38; transcript 31, p.39; transcript 32, p.41; transcript 33, p.41; transcript 35, p.43.
[2] See appendix D: transcript 33, p.41; transcript 27, p.33.
[3] See appendix D: transcript 37, p.47; transcript 38, p.48; transcript 39, p.49.
[4] See appendix D: transcript 27, p.33; transcript 32, p.41; transcript 35, p.43; transcript 37, p.47; transcript 38, p.48; transcript 39, p.49.
[5] See appendix D: transcript 36, p.45; transcript 34, p.42; transcript 37, p.47.

The Opportunity for Narrative Response

Within the narrower context of RE examined above the children's comments do not indicate that there is any opportunity for them to consider and express their own reflective understanding. Looking beyond this the only possible opportunity for narrative response at St Dominic's is highlighted not by the children but by the class teacher in her discussion about RE lessons:

> 'I mean I'm not very good at RE, I have to admit, I do quite a lot on discussion and like behaviour and the moral issues really, but I don't do so much on sort of formal religion...I don't do it as a sit down sort of thing, but things trigger it...so we'll talk about it then'.[1]

Even if we could broadly understand this as RE we cannot be sure whether it amounts to a space at school in which the children can consider and express their own reflective understanding: there is no mention of such occasions throughout the children's narratives. From this we can speculate that these occasions in class are neither perceived by the children as (1) RE or (2) something that significantly affects their lives.

Outside of the school environment the children's comments highlight the important role of family, friends and even pets as relationships which incorporate space to talk and express oneself[2]. A closer examination of this data reveals that even within these valued relationships there is no obvious mention in the data of any opportunity for narrative response.

St Dominic's and the Process of Worldview Development

Where RE does occur at St Dominic's the data indicates that this fosters a sense of belonging (rather than belief) among the children as well as affecting, to some degree, meaning construction outside of RE. Beyond this the impact of RE upon the children's worldview development appears to be limited because the RE does not directly engage with the children's meaning construction by allowing opportunities for narrative response. Even though the data suggests that outside RE and school the children's meaning construction is significantly affected by family, friends and the media[3], none of these are given space within the school context for reflective consideration and expression. As a result we can conclude that the children's

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[1] Appendix D, transcript 2, p.2.

[2] See appendix D: transcript 7, p.7; transcript 9, p.10; transcript 12, p.14.

[3] See appendix D: transcript 11, p.12; transcript 12, p.14; transcript 15, p.18; transcript 16, p.20.

worldview development and meaning construction is significantly restricted as far as formal provision is concerned and yet, in terms of relational opportunity and participation with one individual, in the context of collective worship, this possibility is evident. The issue here seems to be that although formal provision (and possibly the lack of it) cannot necessarily provide what is required, a particular individual and the way that he/she conducts their relationships with children can.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S WORLDVIEWS – How It Is

The aim of this study is to examine how appropriate and useful particular models of RE in church schools are within the context of children's worldview development and meaning construction. Any attempt to realise this goal has to work with the complexities inherent in both the process of worldview development and the role and nature of RE in church schools. The children's conversations documented and analysed in this study illustrates and brings together these complexities. Through careful scrutiny and constant grounding in the data the concept of worldview development has been established as a fundamentally open, relational process. Additionally, the data also reveals how RE in the four schools, according to the children's understanding, combines, in varying degrees, education in and about religion, indoctrination, evangelism, catechesis and instruction, all of which takes place across lessons, collective worship, assemblies and ethos.

Despite the assumptions of the staff at each of the schools, our analysis of the children's conversations poses a serious challenge to any claim that RE in these schools is adequately able to address and engage with the complexity and relationality of children's worldview development[1]. When encouraged to speak about RE the children appear to engage negatively in order to assert that the RE they experience is not helpful and does not connect with the process of worldview development[2]. In contrast to this, children's comments about other areas of their lives highlight those

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[1] When discussing RE at their schools the heads and teachers all claim to address, in some way, their pupils' development and meaning making (see chapter 3 and completed questionnaires in appendix E) and this aim is endorsed across the agreed syllabuses, diocesan guidelines and curriculum frameworks that shape their models of RE: these too stipulate each child's personal development as a key focus and concern for the school generally and something to be explicitly addressed in RE.

[2] This is clearly evident in the children's expressed feelings of general alienation within lessons, collective worship and assemblies, a scenario also attributed to RE in the 1950s by Cox in Cox and Cairns, 1989, p.15.

environments and relationships where they are able to experience the process of worldview development.

To delve deeper into the complex nature of RE at these church schools, and its overall inability to engage with the process of worldview development, a (preliminary) distinction between **what** and **how** to think is useful. Pursuing the process of worldview development in RE we are looking to find instances where RE addresses **how** to think. Instead of revealing any processes of dialogue, critical openness or movement towards autonomy the data exposes how RE, in its different aspects, tells the children **what** to think[1]. This is demonstrated in a number of ways, notably through the general portrayal of RE as imparting objective knowledge in which reality is linear and simplified; and truth and belief, supported by the notion of authority, are non-negotiable[2]:

knowledge, not process

-   from the children's understanding, the underlying focus of RE is described as becoming acquainted with and learning a knowledge base. A chain of 'told – learn - employ', particularly within assemblies, collective worship and RE lessons is described, in varying degrees, by the children at St Anne's, St Beatrice's and St Christopher's[3]. This overall framework of RE does not incorporate worldview development and is a barrier to children's own meaning construction since it does not facilitate any notion of process. It does not allow critical openness or encourage the children's narrative response so that they might express their own reflective understanding and then accommodate and revise their meaning construction and worldviews accordingly. Reality, as presented through RE, is too simplified and fails to resonate and engage with the children's lives which, as is evidenced in the data, are experienced and lived as complex and ambiguous[4].

knowledge supported by authority

-   in stressing their authority to speak about truth and reality all the schools appear to limit the opportunities they provide for negotiation and freedom in the children's meaning construction. The children convey that through RE they learn that the

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[1] Obviously across the four schools in this study the extent and nature to which RE tells the children what to think varies considerably.

[2] These aspects of RE are also identified by Oppenheimer in her critique of the way adults engage with children about religious belief and meaning construction (1994)

[3] It can also be seen in the children's comments about assembly at St Dominic's.

[4] The considerable complexity of children's lives, as revealed in this study, is also recognised by Whitaker, 1997, p.5f.

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authority to speak about what is true and real rests with the teachers and head, not with them. For many children this generally creates significant tensions with their meaning construction:

- there is a disparity between their meaning construction and what they are told by authority figures which can be difficult to reconcile;
- they do not feel comfortable with thinking or believing something different;
- they do not feel able, allowed or confident in considering, communicating or expressing their own meaning construction, particularly if it does not concur with the framework of meaning presented in RE.

In exploring why the models of RE at the schools in this study fail really to accept and facilitate children's worldview development we are confronted with a fundamental tension between didactic instruction on the one hand and negotiation of meaning on the other. In showing how RE focuses almost exclusively on the former the children's comments reveal a distinct tension between aspects of delivery and learning which is clearly evident in the context of the denominational schools studied[1]. This general framework in RE goes against the British Council of Churches report which challenges a knowledge, 'what to think' approach in any kind of RE:

'[Christian education should] offer a nurture which both puts the child into dialogue with his past, and also leaves him free to develop his own personhood, in continuity with that past...this means that when Christians seek to nurture their young into Christian faith they literally do not fully know what they are nurturing them into. They only know what they are nurturing them out of, i.e. out of the Christian past. They know the resources but not the use which will be made of them. What we pass on to our children is not the painting but the paintbox'.[2]

A comparison of 'what and how' illustrates the fundamental difference between a process and knowledge approach in RE and it also demonstrates how the general frameworks of RE, certainly at St Anne's, St Beatrice's and St Christopher's, are not founded upon a concept of process and dialogue that concerns itself with worldview development. It is not enough, however, to leave our analysis here: whilst this general landscape of RE is obviously not grounded within the process of worldview development the data does point to ways in which RE manages to impinge on

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[1] This data endorses the observations of others who also point to authority and knowledge as the model and type of understanding promoted by RE in church schools - see Melchert, 1994a, 1994b and Hornsby-Smith, 1978, p.139.

[2] BCC, paragraph 62f.

children's worldview development. In those instances where RE does affect meaning construction the children's relationships at school and their experience of family and church is influential. Across all the schools the children's narratives reveal how family and/or church have a much greater impact upon meaning construction than RE, whether or not such construction incorporates a religious framework of worldview development

This situation raises more questions for church school RE[1]: why is there such disparity between what the schools think they are doing and what they are actually achieving? How do relationships outside of school differ from those established in RE and the school's nurturing environment? How does this speak to the theoretical and practical aspects of RE in church schools and education generally? By approaching questions such as these the following chapter draws some conclusions and implications that point to a possible way forward for church school RE and its engagement with children's meaning construction.

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[1] RE such as that examined in this study.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

'Dialogue is an issue like motherhood: almost everyone is in favour of it. It is a 'good thing'. It is so self-evidently valid that many of us feel that we need not think about it. We tip our hats to the concept, and go about our business without a second thought. Like many motherhood issues, dialogue is honoured in our rhetoric. In our practice, however, it is questionable that we consider dialogue to be of a high priority...it might be nice to have the luxury of conversations...but we really do not have the time'.[1]

In attending to the dual complexities of church school RE and children's meaning construction, this research has identified an open, relational, narrative process as both necessary and enabling for the development of worldviews[2]. Whilst this process speaks to the broader context of education - an issue to be discussed later – the main direction of this chapter will be to focus, in the light of our findings, on the specific concern of this study: the place of church school RE in children's worldview development.

Crucial to our discussion in this chapter are the assumptions/ claims which directed this research towards church schools in the first place: the fact that such schools are widely regarded and upheld as being particularly effective in facilitating children's development, especially through careful regard for ethos and values, as well as a well structured and informed programme of RE. Although they do not specifically refer to worldview development as an aspect of their RE, it is evident that the heads and teachers involved in this research believe that through RE they are attending and positively contributing to their pupils' understanding of the world around them[3]. The children's conversations, on the other hand, expose a disparity in the situation: revealing that RE does not adequately engage them and does not adequately

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[1] Lochhead, 1988, p.1.
[2] I recognise that this study represents only a case study of four schools and on this basis it does not presume to make substantial generalizations about RE and church school education. However, within these recognised boundaries this research seeks to draw implications and conclusions that remain true to the narratives of the children and what they say about RE in relation to their meaning construction.
[3] See methodology and results - chapters 2 and 3. However, in the light of the findings of this research I recognise that the study could have benefited from more data from the heads and class teachers, for

incorporate either the opportunity for narrative response or the balance of relationality necessary for facilitating the process of worldview development.

If our analysis in the previous chapter exposes the reality of when, where and how denominational RE (in relation to the schools studied) participates in the children's meaning construction, this is also reflected in the initial quote at the beginning of this chapter where Lochhead brings together dialogue and motherhood[1]. Lochhead's analogy is pertinent and illuminating: by substituting 'dialogue' with 'worldview development' we are confronted by the findings of this research: even though everyone (church schools and RE) might be in favour of it (the development of children's worldviews) and think they are doing it, the kinds of conversations necessary for this open, relational, narrative process do not take place.

The findings of this study demonstrate that RE fails to significantly engage with children's worldview development because it does not incorporate an open process as identified in this research. But why is this process not present? It may be suggested that the models of RE represented in this research – on the whole strongly authoritarian and catechetical - are not compatible with a process characterised by openness, a narrative framework and interdependence. In drawing conclusions and implications Lochhead's ideas prompt consideration of other influences which have their part to play in the construction of RE: although the degree to which **practitioners** address worldview development has been analysed, a model of RE is also shaped by its **syllabus** and **theoretical underpinnings.** Even if a process element is not evident with practitioners, do these other contributors to church school RE show that a process approach is acknowledged, promoted or even congruent with the nature and aims of church school RE? In answering this question the study can then move closer to being able to confidently offer pertinent recommendations and challenges for church school RE[2].

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example open interviews, such as those conducted with the children, could have provided a richer and better insight into the assumptions and attitudes of the staff to RE and the nature of their schools.

[1] Writing within the context of inter-faith encounter Lochhead (1988) describes dialogue in terms of negotiation, integration, activity and relationship: it is something that goes beyond the merely verbal level (p.54) and is rich enough to be an end in itself (p.46). Employing dialogue in this manner Lochhead's conceptualisation supports and fits with the narrative process established in his study.

[2] Whilst the predominantly catechetical nature of the RC schools in this study fits well with the typical portrayal of RC schools (see chapter 1 and Chadwick, 1994, p.7f which both refer to the general and domestic focus of CE and RC schools respectively), the CE schools of this inquiry represent two different foci: St Dominic's broadly conforms to model which attends to the general education of the whole community and St Christopher's is domestically orientated. Although this study recognises the generalised distinctions that may be made between RC and CE schools, it feels that such categorisation

An Open Process in RE Syllabus and Theory
Syllabus

The schools in this research present two contrasting examples of how a process framework may or may not be evident in a church school RE syllabus[1]. The RE syllabus *Here I Am*, specifically designed for RE in RC primary schools, is used by both St Anne's and St Beatrice's and the concept of process, together with catechesis[2], is clearly and prominently presented around a seven-staged structure consisting of recognise- reflect- respect- relate- rejoice- remember- renew. If we are looking to see where elements of an open process are visible the scheme does set out provision for children to consider and discuss life experiences and relationships. On the other hand, however, *Here I Am's* strong catechetical purpose prevents the process framework being completely open ended or allowing any extensive negotiation of meaning and understanding. To a degree, therefore, we might conclude that the syllabus used by St Anne's and St Beatrice's does go some way to acknowledging and promoting an open process that is also compatible with the nature and aims of its RC RE syllabus[3].

Unlike *Here I Am*, the syllabus from St Christopher's (CE), located within the guidelines offered by the local diocese and the 'official syllabus laid down by SACRE for [County] schools', does not appear to reflect any aspects of process. In addition the RE syllabus is also shaped by the school's own character: the Bible is highlighted as 'the benchmark for all that is taught'[4] and the scheme of work for RE is set out in terms of areas of knowledge and content. Whilst it is true that the school's RE policy mentions a variety of learning activities in RE[5], and specifically states that 'a wide variety of activities and resources will be used to encourage pupils to ask questions,

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and differentiation (a) does not grasp the diffuse nature of the priorities and procedures operating in church schools generally (see Gates, 1996, p.130) and (b) is unnecessary and inappropriate for the purposes of this inquiry. Instead it contends that in drawing its conclusions and implications it is more important to continue to acknowledge and account for the complex, multi-layered models of RE revealed in the data at all four schools. Consequently this study will continue to speak of church school RE rather than distinguishing between CE and RC.

[1] Here we can only consider the curriculum frameworks of St Anne's, St Beatrice's and St Christopher's, none being available for St Dominic's at the time of this research.

[2] The catechetical emphasis of RE in RC primary schools is discussed by Hastings in McLaughlin, O'Keefe and O'Keeffe, 1996, p.280.

[3] It is interesting to note how the data from St Anne's and St Beatrice's illustrates that even where an open process is incorporated into a syllabus it is ultimately dependent upon the practitioner to appreciate, understand and effect that process in RE as it is experienced in the classroom.

[4] Religious Education Policy and Scheme of Work for St Christopher's.

[5] These include writing, talking, listening, reading stories, dancing, music making, using artefacts, research skills, visits, visitors and art.

explore religion and respond to their learning in an inquiring and exploratory way', there is no account of process. As this syllabus' model of development and learning focuses on knowledge and content, we may conclude that such syllabuses in church schools demonstrate instances where the process necessary for worldview development is neither evident or compatible with their own aims.

Theoretical Underpinnings

In addressing the theoretical underpinnings that contribute to the models of RE in church schools it is as well to remind ourselves that the scope of debate and different theological, philosophical and educational positions is diverse. What we are interested in pursuing here is:

1. whether there is any theoretical stance that acknowledges or promotes the concept of an open process in RE;

2. whether there is any theoretical underpinning in **church school** RE that is able to demonstrate that an open process, such as that advocated for worldview development, is compatible with church school RE.

Nature and Goals in RE - Is There An Open Process in Theory?

Documenting childrens' experiences and perceptions of RE, this research exposes frameworks of RE that are predominantly based on a content, authoritarian, didactic model. Critiquing this kind of RE Hastings describes them as closed:

> 'closed to personal intellectual inquiry in the religious field, closed to responsible decision-making by the individual persons, closed, in practice to the rights of the person'.[1]

In a similar vein to Hastings there are a number of commentators and researchers, within the context of RC and CE church schools, who also call for a move away from a closed, fixed model of RE[2]. Revisiting the place of catechesis, nurture and instruction there is widespread support for and insistence on church school RE that is grounded within the principles of critical openness, autonomy, freedom, the forming and use of conscience, dialogue and conversations that are not afraid to tackle difficult philosophical questions[3]. It is also contended that for RE to become more relevant

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[1] Hastings in McLaughlin, O'Keefe and O'Keeffe, 1996, p.272.
[2] For example see Barnes, 1996; BCC, 1984; Church of England Board of Education, 1967; Crump Miller, 1990; Day, 1996; Gallagher, 1996; Goldman, 1967; Greer, 1990; Groome, 1994; Hastings, 1996; Hornsby-Smith, 1978; Hull, 1990; Hypher, 1996; Leahy, 1994; McClelland, 1996; Melchert, 1994a; Melchert, 1994b; O'Leary, 1983; Phillips, 1994; Rossiter, 1990.
[3] The British Council of Churches, (BCC) 1984; Congregation for Catholic Education 1982; Congregation for Catholic Education 1988; Day, 1996; Gallagher, 1996; Groome, 1994; Hastings,

and meaningful it has to accept and address diversity and ambiguity[1], re-visioning itself as part of an evolving[2], relational and dialogic process[3] that is shared between persons in a cyclic not linear fashion[4]. Thus, fundamental to this proposed reassessment is a radical re-evaluation of the place of relationship in church school RE: child-child and child- teacher relationships that are characterised by dialogue and engagement with the whole person, their experiences and a storying process[5].

In addressing the **nature** of RE, this arena of theoretical debate also explores and supports a re-visioning of the **goals** for RE. Instead of simply looking for acquired knowledge, the object of RE is directed towards the more fluid and unquantifiable realm of providing tools and methods with which to live meaningfully, as Crump Miller submits:

> 'the problem today is to develop both theology and educational theory to meet the current situation and to anticipate the future...they [children] need the tools, knowledge and methods to live meaningfully in a new kind of world that is faced with almost insuperable problems in such areas as ecology, energy, racism, feminism, sexism, overpopulation, and probably mass starvation...Rather than outline specific goals in terms of description, what we need are areas in which generalised goals may be established. If we take a pluralistic and flexible view of the meaning of religious maturity, we cannot expect results in terms of fixed beliefs or codes of behaviour. If we take seriously the meaning of human freedom responding to a specific and vague stimuli, both human and divine, we may hope to evoke insights but we cannot determine assembly line results'.[6]

Here our earlier metaphor of knitting a jumper is useful[7]: the findings of this study suggest that children experience RE as giving them a ready-made jumper that invariably doesn't fit them (a fixed worldview and system of meaning). What

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1996; Hull, 1990; Hull et al, 1994; John Paul II 1979; Oppenheimer, 1994; Phillips, 1994; Price – occasional papers; Zipfel, 1996.

[1] This is endorsed by Price (1990, p.144) who speaking of RE generally highlights the important role of story in RE and suggests a framework that includes enabling the child to: put forward his or her own ideas in a non-threatening environment and attempt to evalutate rather than passively accept a right answer.

[2] Hull, 1984.

[3] Day, Occasional Papers Series, p.17.

[4] Groome, 1994, p.228; Westerhoff, 1994, p.71.

[5] British Council of Churches, 1984; Brueggemann, 1991; Crump Miller, 1990; Day, 1996; Day - Occasional Papers Series, p.14; Gallagher, M., 1990, p.46; Groome, 1994; Hastings, 1996.

[6] Crump Miller, 1994, p.253f and p.258. In support of this proposition it is interesting to note that his comments echo the concerns and conversations of the children in this study.

[7] See p.215.

commentators like Crump Miller suggest is that RE should not offer a finished product but instead engage in the very act of knitting (be part of the child's process of worldview development). But is such a shift in focus possible within church schools? Within the current theoretical debate it is clear that an open, dialogic process is advocated and endorsed, but are there those who can also show that it is possible to authentically recast the form of church school RE, whilst, for example, maintaining confidence in a distinctive philosophy and separate identity?

Certainly the inherent difficulties in this situation are not ignored in the contemporary discussion[1] and concern is expressed for a 'clearer differentiation of aims, contexts, processes, methods and expectations for RE'[2] within the school environment (as distinct from the role and function of the church)[3]. Narrating his experiences of implementing a process model of RE, Hastings, head of a RC Secondary School, demonstrates that notwithstanding the radical implications intrinsic to the practicalities of a process framework - how pupils and staff relate to each other, ethos, collective worship and lessons - a process approach in RE is both effective and possible. Commending a process model Hastings bluntly signals the necessity to change to different goals, despite the difficulties:

> 'the choice is now between a growth of openness to intellectual challenge and dialogue with the human race, and a continued censored conversation between obedient neophytes...knowing and loving being the great activities of life, a school aiming at relationships must pursue intellectual and moral search, involving growth in personhood and relationship. A Catholic school cannot offer a packaged answer about God or the meaning of life, but a hunger for, and determination to find truth and rightness'.[4]

Is the Theoretical Process of RE Debated within Church Schools Congruent with the Process of Worldview Development?

It can be observed that the theoretical expounding of a process model for RE, such as that expressed by Hastings, has some affinity to the process we have determined as necessary for the development of children's worldviews[5]. However, does this

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[1] See British Council of Churches, 1984, p.39, para.110f; McLaughlin, 1994.
[2] Rossiter, 1990, p.299.
[3] Leahy, 1994, p.426.
[4] Hastings, 1996, p.283 and p.275.
[5] For example common ground lies in the emphasis on relationships: relationships that are characterised by dialogue, narrative and storying, negotiation and meaning, freedom and authority, security and independence.

theoretical debate go far enough? Is the process they are speaking of really capable of addressing children's worldview development? Day presents his vision of a reformed RC moral education as

> 'the moral audience of one who gives credence to the lived and the known, who enters into dialogue and the narrative of the other, who grants authority to what the other speaks through her attention to what is said; this is a starting point in the renewal of Catholic moral education'.[1]

This conceptualising of storying and narrative, through relationship, as the basis for renewing RC education, goes further than many other contributors in the debate about church school RE. Although Day's proposal fits with an open-ended, dialogic process of worldview development, the same cannot be said of other theoretical positions that advocate a process approach in RE. Gallagher's promotion of storying and narrative is a case in point:

> 'we must be patient companions...we often tend to skip the first step of walking the road with people and taking time ...and listen[ing] attentively to their story'.[2]

Here Gallagher highlights the importance of storying and listening but it is presented as 'the first step'. This understanding of process is clearly one that does not accommodate the more open, interdependent process identified for engaging with worldview development. Unlike Gallagher's construct this study contends that the process necessary for worldview development cannot be seen as a first stage of meeting ground between the teacher and child, neither is it an extra add-on: instead the process itself suffices; providing a framework, place and goal for RE[1]. Although individual voices, such as those of Day and Hastings, advocate a process for church school RE that sits comfortably with the process of worldview development, it is evident that even within the realm of theoretical speculation and debate the kind of open process proposed by this study is not fully appreciated or congruent with the nature and goals of church school RE.

Recommendations and Challenges for Church School RE

Drawing on its findings this research presents the following challenges to church schools:

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[1] Day, 1996, p.171.
[2] Gallagher, 1996, p.292.

1. that they should seriously consider what it means to engage with children's worldview development;

2. that they should address the theoretical and practical implications of this for the nature and goals of RE in church schools;

3. that there should be clearer understanding of the distinction between nurture and RE[2], as well as believing and belonging[3], so that they can either (a) own up to the fact that the catechetical aspect of RE, as presented in this study, inhibits children's worldview development by precluding an open-ended, dialogic process or (b) revise how RE might be more effective in exploring and fostering such processes in RE.

If this re-appraisal of church school RE is to be rigorously and appropriately realised this study recommends that:

1. **there should be better communication among the different levels of those who contribute to the shaping of models of RE in church schools:**

There needs to be a more systematic process of communication between those proposing the theoretical models and those who are expected to implement them in the classroom.

2. **practitioners need to develop a clear understanding and be comfortable with their role in the classroom so that they can confidently engage in the kinds of relationships necessary for the process of worldview development to be realised in education and RE:**

It is recognised that the process advocated by this study presents a difficult role for the teacher:

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[1] Although outside of the context of RE, the notion of dialogue advanced by Lochhead also attests to an active, relational, open process that 'is its own justification...a truly dialogical relationship has no other purpose than itself. Dialogue is the end of dialogue' (Lochhead, 1988, p.79).
[2] This endorses the recommendation of an earlier study by the British Council of Churches, it is advised that church schools should clearly distinguish between nurture and religious education and re-evaluate their responsibility for both - 'work done in Christian nurture in church schools must be in addition to and not instead of their educational work. Many church schools are already well aware of these distinctions, but further progress must be made in exploring and expressing them' - British Council of Churches, *The Child in the Church,* recommendation 14.
[3] The children's narratives from St Anne's, St Beatrice's and St Christopher's all point to models of RE (assembly, collective worship, lessons, ethos) that emphasises believing rather than belonging. In contrast the narratives from St Dominic's illustrate the reverse: a positive appreciation of belonging (that does not necessarily demand believing), is the defining tone of the children's experiences of RE (collective worship, assembly). The importance of pursuing a thorough understanding and distinction between a community that emphasises belonging and/or believing is also signalled by Lawton (1997) and Chadwick (1994).

'on the one hand we must guide them into forms of thought and their appropriate standards of reasoning, so that they can order their thoughts coherently. On the other hand we must not prevent them being able, on occasion, to take their own initiatives to call these standards into question. It is not easy for teachers to correctly balance two such opposed emphases and much educational debate is about precisely this difficulty'.[1]

Affirming Bosacki's model of the ideal practitioner[2] Day also spells out the flexibility and reflection necessary for any teacher who values and wants to encourage children's worldview development:

'there must be a trustworthy teacher who is prepared to enter into a dialogical relationship with his/her students, who listens as well as tells, who receives and consecrates as well as directs and admonishes, who is prepared to hear and hallow the reality of the person before offering advice. There must be ongoing opportunities for students to name, describe, and assess their own experiences; to authorize what it is they know, to be trusted as knowledgeable informants as to what the moral life involves, and to make clear what it means for their life to be moral in the fullness of its lived context, about which they must be assumed to be the most expert'.[3]

For this to be authentically present in the classroom the training of teachers and their ongoing professional development has to be considered[4]. This necessarily suggests that those institutions who administer teacher training should take account of and reflect on how teachers understand and establish their professional roles and relationships in the classroom.

3. there should be a broader theoretical debate:

It is advised that pertinent insights and discussions outside the specifics of church school RE could broaden and inform the theoretical debate concerning the nature and goals of church school RE. For example, the field of RE beyond the church school context could be useful[5]. It is also proposed that the theoretical discussion about RE in church schools could benefit from considering the wider domain of children's

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[1] Degenhardt, 1990, p.233.
[2] '[to] create a curriculum and a classroom that promotes the marriage between reflection and spontaneity, thought and emotion, causes and reasons, explaining and interpreting?' - Bosacki, 1998.
[3] Day, p.171, points which are also explored by Grumet, 1991.
[4] McLaughlin (1996, p.150) draws attention to the character of teacher training, particularly for teachers in church schools as an area for concern that needs addressing. Similarly Cole and Evans-Lowndes (1991, p.97), considering successful RE, also propose that more time should be given to initial teacher training, INSET provision and support from advisers and inspectors.
[5] For example, Hull, 1996; Jackson, 1997; Priestley, 1992; Watson, 1993; Weightman, 1982.

meaning construction[1] and exploring the epistemological themes of dialogic relationships and narrative. In bridging the themes of epistemology, narrative, and theology, it is suggested that Cuppitt's explorations[2] could be especially valuable as a means of encouraging and extending a richer theoretical debate.

4. there should be further research:

The mosaic nature of RE in church schools is widely recognised[3] and endorsed by the findings of this study. Because this study represents a case study of RE at only four church schools in the south of England, it is recognised that further research in other church schools (primary and secondary), with different ages of children, could inform what it means to speak of education and worldview development in denominational RE. It is also recommended that further research should be undertaken to test and explore the practical implications and value of an approach in RE that attempts to have regard to the process of worldview development.

Implications and Conclusions Beyond Church School RE

Although this study's primary concern has been to explore the general assumptions made about church school RE and its contribution to the development of children's understanding, its elucidation of the nature of worldviews and the processes through which they are constructed offers an insight that speaks to an educational context that extends beyond church schools and their RE. Again we can turn to Lochhead's interpretation of dialogue to express the pervasive relevance that is embodied in the principles and framework of this process:

> 'as an activity, dialogue is learned by practice. As we develop the skill of listening, the importance of dialogue and its priority among our various activities becomes clearer. We come to see dialogue not so much as an activity among other activities but as a quality that needs to pervade all our conversations and all our relationships'.[4]

Here lies the groundwork for further research: having developed a methodology and framework of analysis that deals with RE in church schools, the same methodology and framework could be developed and applied in (a) schools that are not denominational and (b) other curriculum areas. These other avenues of research could serve to:

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[1] For example as explored by Bonnett, 1994; Coles, 1989, 1992; Donaldson, 1987, 1992; Wells, 1986.
[2] Cupitt, 1991.
[3] See McLaughlin, O'Keefe and O'Keeffe, 1996, p.1ff.
[4] Lochhead, 1988, p.76.

1. inform the nature of worldviews and their development;
2. explore how an open process facilitates an effective learning environment;
3. reveal how different curriculum areas engage and impact upon children's meaning construction.

Such research and probing into this conceptualising of process and worldviews makes a particular kind of contribution to the philosophical debate about the nature and direction of education in today's society, not in the least because it emerges from the narratives and experiences of children rather than adults. This is all especially apt given the current educational (and political) concerns about how to address children's social, cultural, moral and spiritual development across all aspects of education.

Beyond education we might speculate that in essence the process we are discussing reaffirms the nature of authentic and effective communication: communication that recognises and respects genuine conversations and relationships.

Engaging with Children's Worldview Development in RE - Back to Church School RE and What This Research Has To Offer

This study has accomplished its aim of determining the place of RE in the development of children's worldviews and in doing so has also demonstrated the complexity of children's worldviews and how we invariably underestimate their ability and willingness to engage in the process of meaning construction. The data indicates that RE which is not process based has fundamental problems in engaging with children and offering anything that is meaningful and relevant to them[1]. This therefore suggests that however difficult the transition to confronting diversity, accepting ambiguity, complexity and different kinds of belief and unbelief, RE in church schools has to consider not just if a move towards process is **possible** but whether it is in fact **essential** if it wishes to genuinely contribute to children's social, moral, cultural, spiritual development and meaning construction.

It is unfortunate, to say the least, if, despite their sustained efforts and wishes, church schools are not part of this process[2]. In highlighting the failure of RE to substantially affect children's worldview development this study urges church schools to reconsider their vision for education and the relationships they foster in their schools.

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[1] This replicates the findings of research carried out by McClure (1996) and Egan (1988, p.141).
[2] Despite my own experiences of a church school education I was surprised by the degree of irrelevance and ineffectiveness expressed about RE in many children's narratives, particularly in the light of (1) the nature and depth of meaning construction referred to outside of RE (for example with

For RE in church schools to be effective, relevant and meaningful this study marks out a way forward that is not characterised by right answers but by dialogue, interdependent relationships and a searching together. Only then will church schools be able to declare with confidence that they have not left children stranded in their quest for meaning construction, but have strengthened their pupils with the courage and ability not just to embrace the world and themselves but to also try and make sense of it in relation to the question of faith.

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friends, family and church) and (2) their own existential/ ontological concerns and their readiness to engage in discussion about them.