

Preparing for the world of diverse worldviews: parental and school stakeholder views on integrative worldview education in a Finnish context

Åhs, Vesa (Th.M.)

Normal Lyceum of Helsinki, Faculty of Educational Sciences, , University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

Ratakatu 6, 00120 Helsinki

Saila Poulter (Ph.D.),

Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

Siltavuorenpenger 3A, 00014 University of Helsinki

Arto Kallioniemi (Prof.)

Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

Siltavuorenpenger 3A, 00014 University of Helsinki

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore integrative worldview education as a platform for learning from worldviews in a diverse cultural context. This is done by examining integrative worldview education in a Finnish secondary school context by examining the views of school stakeholders. The stakeholders examined in this article consist of 174 parents of the pupils and a total of 6 teachers and headteachers from two different secondary schools in Helsinki. We use the concept of learning from worldviews to examine the possibilities of the integrative classroom to facilitate learning from both personal and organized worldviews. The results indicate, that the stakeholders view integrative worldview education as an important tool for widening the worldview of the pupil. Although the stakeholders view the sensitivity of the teacher as paramount in teaching an integrative classroom, integrative worldview education is also seen as important in offering tools for forging mutual understandings in an ever more complex world of worldviews.

Keywords: *worldview education, religious education, integrative education, worldview*

School stakeholder (S)1: I think it is of utmost importance that the pupils learn to actually encounter different kinds of people and come to understand that difference is not something that is out there, but rather opt for the heterogeneous view that we are all different and that worldview is... that everyone's worldview has different shades. With this (encountering) they can learn to explain and learn to listen, which is important.

This is how one Finnish teacher describes individual worldviews in relation to an integrative model of worldview education. In this article we examine the views of different school stakeholders on integrative worldview education (hence WE). The current Finnish model of WE is non-confessional but segregative, where pupils study worldview in groups according to their religious or non-religious denomination. Few schools have currently pioneered an integrative model of WE in the Finnish context, where the pupils study in the same classroom the elements that are similar in several worldviews. In order to examine this novel way of teaching WE in a Finnish context, we examine the experiences and views of WE stakeholders. The WE stakeholders are individuals who are central to the way WE is being taught in the school and classroom. These stakeholders consist of pupils whose views we examined in a previous article which is closely linked to the current study (Åhs et al. 2016), parents of the pupils, and school stakeholders, namely teachers and headteachers. In this article we examine the views of these last two groups of stakeholders. We will use the term parents in this article to refer to the either the parents or other legal guardians of the pupils.

By integrative WE we mean inclusive education that encompasses pupils from both religious and non-religious backgrounds (Alberts 2010; Evans 2008). As the Finnish WE curriculum increasingly emphasizes the role of both religious and non-religious worldviews such as secularism and

humanism as the contents of the school subject (NCCBE 2014), the term worldview education seems apt to describe the subject. The aims of religious education (RE) or WE have been viewed as learning about, learning from and learning into religion (Hull 2001). Learning about religion can be defined as investigation of the nature of religion, beliefs, ethics and religious practices and it includes the skills of interpretation, analysis and explanation. Learning from religion can be defined as the process where pupils learn via the process of learning about religion to develop and communicate their own ideas concerning identity, belonging, meaning, purpose, truth, values and commitment. In other words, learning from religion entails the processes where the pupils develop their own identity by reflecting on what they have learned from different worldviews (Fancourt 2015). The third option, learning religion encompasses models of confessional RE, which is based on learning one religious tradition and the aim is also to strengthen the religious belonging and identity of the pupils. In this model teachers are expected to be believers in the religion themselves and the teaching is confessional in nature. (Hull 2001, 5–6.)

The distinction between learning about and learning from has also been critiqued since these two processes are hard to separate: how can one learn from without learning about? However, these two aspects of learning in WE are a good starting point for our analysis of possible differences that stakeholders see between a segregative and an integrative WE classroom. The pupils themselves saw that an integrative WE classroom offered them a chance to both learn about individual worldviews and to directly learn from their peers in relation to their own worldview (Åhs et al. 2016).

Finnish model of WE

The current Finnish WE model is a religion-based model (Schreiner 2001) or worldview-based model offering students teaching of either their ‘own’ religion or of secular ethics, according to their religious or non-religious affiliation throughout comprehensive school. There are individual curricula for 13 minority religions and secular ethics parallel to the majority Lutheran education. WE is defined as non-confessional in that education is not permitted to include religious practice. The practical arrangement of teaching groups where WE is organized according to the pupil’s religious affiliation has provoked much debate as this ultimately depends on the religion of the parent (Poulter et al. 2015a). The Finnish model has been justified by claims that instead of the subject placing itself either in the confessional or secular ends, the standpoint is every pupil’s ‘own’ particular religious tradition, and thus this guarantees the rights of religious minorities. (For more about the Finnish model, see Matilainen & Kallioniemi 2011; Matilainen 2014; Åhs et al. 2016.)

Currently, however, there have been some schools in the Finnish educational field who have pioneered a partially integrative model of WE (Käpylehto 2015; Åhs et al. 2016). Our study looks closely at two of these schools, which were among the first to pioneer an integrative model of WE in a Finnish context. Although the national core curriculum does not have a mutual WE subject, these schools have partially integrated the contents of different curriculums from religions and secular ethics in secondary school or grades 7 to 9. The pupils study the majority of their time in the same classrooms and are only separated during study periods where the integration of the different curriculums is difficult, i.e. during close study of the holy book of a religion. The pupils then share their experiences from these separated segments in the integrative classroom. Most of the topics

including ethics and world religions are studied together (Käpylehto 2015.) It should be noted that this integrative model has been developed from the grass-roots level without the involvement of the Ministry of Education. Many such projects have begun in the Finnish educational landscape in recent years. Since the integrative model of teaching WE is new, research on the matter is also very timely.

This partly integrative model of WE is currently being pioneered in a few Finnish schools and for this reason it is important to examine how the different stakeholders of the school, namely pupils, parents, teachers and headteachers view the implementation of the integrative approach. In this article we aim to explore the educational and parental views of WE and compare them to the results gained in our previous study on pupils' perspectives.

Children, parents and school WE

When considering the aims, content and practical organization of religious and worldview education the perspective of human rights and the child's rights perspective should be paramount (Matilainen & Kallioniemi 2011). Schweitzer (2005) argues in the light of the 1989 Convention that a child's right to religion should be seen as a pedagogical rather than a legal question; as an educational right this would translate into educational attitudes and approaches which take children seriously as active subjects of experience rather than as passive objects of education (Schweitzer 2005, 103-107). In WE this comes close to the Deweyan idea of *pedagogical transaction* (see Poulter et al. 2015) which will be theoretically opened up later in this article. Here, suffice it to say that every child's experience and thinking on religion and worldview is unique in a sense that it can never be reduced to the socialisation or transfer of tradition by the educator. This should mean that the child is seen as an active participant in experiencing and learning religions and worldviews while constructing her personal worldview – which might be different from what has been represented as “her own” religion or worldview.

From the perspective of child's rights it is critical to reflect on the relevance of the Finnish RE model based on a child's ‘own’ religion when it is actually determined by the parents' religious affiliation. According to the Human Rights Council, parents and guardians have the right to ensure that the child gains moral and religious education in conformity with their convictions. However, it should also be noted that the parents' right should also be balanced with the states' duty to provide comprehensive education to the child (Akbulut & Usal 2009; Lester 2004).

The argument of children having the right to their own religion or worldview can also be approached from other perspectives, namely from the right to learn from other religions and worldviews (Poulter et al. 2016) and how the individual worldview of the pupil is recognized. In Finland, Lutheran students are obliged to participate in Lutheran RE; all other pupils, whether they belong to another religion or have no religion at all, are free to choose between all the possible RE or secular ethics classes available at the local school. This means that the pupils studying in Lutheran RE do not have the same amount of choice as the other pupils in regards to their WE studies. It is also crucial to ask whether in the classes based on children's ‘own religion’, internally diverse worldviews of pupils belonging officially to the same religion are recognized (Poulter et al.

2016). By categorizing pupils solely based on belonging to a certain religious denomination, the school system might dismiss a large amount of internal variety in both religious traditions and individual worldviews.

Initial results on pupil experiences of integrative WE show that one of the most important experiential factors in integrative WE is the non-labelling of pupils according to worldview categories which the pupils do not necessarily feel to be their own (Åhs et al. 2016). There are also new studies that show that Finnish segregative minority RE has many outcomes. It might help pupils with minority religious identities integrate into Finnish society, so that Muslims would view themselves, for instance, as Finnish Muslims (Rissanen 2014), or due to the segregated model of RE there is a great lack of dialogue between worldviews which challenges the inclusion of minority students in the school culture (Zilliacus 2014). Since the relationship of pupil individuality, parental rights and responsibility and state WE is a complex one, all the stakeholders should be considered when examining the possibilities of the model of WE in in Finnish schools.

Theoretical considerations

The theoretical basis of this study is built on concepts which are well known in critical intercultural education and worldview studies. Religion as a systemic belief structure and fixed social category is questioned, as there is a plurality of ways of being religious. By *lived religion* we mean the heterogeneity inside every religious tradition and the possibility of various individual understandings and interpretations of the said religion. Importantly, this principle/view also applies to secular worldviews. Thus, it would be appropriate here to discuss the *lived worldview* or rather to use the concept of *personal worldview* utilized by van der Kooij, de Ruyter and Miedema (2016).

The concept of a worldview can be defined in many ways. We utilize the definition formulated by van der Kooij et al. (2016), where a worldview is defined as an outlook on the world which is focused on giving meaning and answering existential questions, such as ethical, cosmological and theological questions. This definition comes very close to the transdisciplinary worldview approach by Selcuk & Valk (2012), which assists in viewing the world as a meaningful whole, and both religious and secular worldviews provide meaningful ontological, existential and epistemological answers at all personal, social and cultural levels. Furthermore, van der Kooij et al. (2016) suggest that the concept of a worldview should be divided into an *organized worldview* and a *personal worldview*. An organized worldview can be defined as the worldview systems or ideologies that are present in the world, such as Christianity, Buddhism or Communism. These organized worldviews answer existential questions, provide ethical guidelines and aim to influence the lives of people. Many individuals are influenced by these organized worldviews but some are not. This possible influence is mirrored in a *personal worldview*, which is the personal meaning-giving outlook on the world, life and humanity of a single individual. Since many people do not construct their whole worldview according to a single organized worldview, the concept of a personal worldview is extremely important (van der Kooij et al. 2016). For example people can identify themselves as a Christian, but also build their personal worldview with elements from humanism, Buddhism and liberalism. On top of these myriad influences are the personal interpretations and emphases of individuals themselves.

The critical component in an integrative classroom is to consider how students can *learn from* these *worldviews* inside the classroom. When we discuss learning about and learning from worldviews, it should be taken into account that worldviews themselves are both organized and personal. The educational idea of *pedagogical transaction* is applied in this article in relation to these worldviews inside the classroom. The idea of pedagogical transaction familiar in Deweyan thinking has been examined in the context of worldview education by Finnish scholars (Sutinen et. al. 2015; Poulter et al. 2015b). The critical component in the transaction is the communication between two individuals that moves in a direction that is not known or controlled by outside forces. *Interaction* refers to a more direct effect with a stimulus and a reaction, i.e. the teacher teaches and the student in reaction receives the content of the study, whereas the term *transaction* refers to a process where two minds are in a communication which is both interpretive and mutual but also unpredictable. In this process, individual thinking emerges without the educator's intention of implementing a completed meaning of things. In the context of WE this means that the pupils can learn the language of worldviews together while examining their preconception and creating new meanings together, the teacher facilitating, not teaching, the unique process of building understanding. In our previous study pupils saw the mutual integrative WE classroom as a possible space to create mutual meanings in a peer-learning environment (Åhs et al. 2016) and it is our goal to examine here whether or not the other stakeholders share this view of integrative WE.

This relates closely to the issue of learning through interreligious and inter-worldview relations that the integrative model enables. Interreligious or inter-worldview dialogue means dialogue between subjects and persons – not between isolated and abstract systems of thoughts – representing different ways of being religious/secular within the same religion/worldview (Pfändtner 2010). In terms of worldview, the integrative classroom can emphasize learning about and from personal worldviews alongside of organized worldviews. Our interest is to see whether or not this heterogeneity of worldviews can be utilized in the integrative WE classroom. In the context of this study, this theoretical setting means that we are interested in finding out how informants name/recognize the element of experience, peer-learning and the personal dimension of religions and worldviews. Importantly, taking learning as a profound personal building process, the central focus is to see children as active learners where the learning outcomes are reflected through the identity development. According to our understanding learning *from* worldviews serves best the philosophical thought of educational transaction by allowing pupils to partake the subjective experimental level of reflection of worldviews instead of keeping worldviews and/or themselves as objects of reflection.

Since the integrative classroom is not based around any particular worldview, the pupils themselves considered that they could see more differences both within their own worldview tradition and in others (Åhs et al. 2016). In this study we aim to look at the possibilities of learning mutually from worldviews in a classroom of pupils from diverse backgrounds.

This article aims to explore the following questions:

1. What do the different stakeholders (parents, teachers and headteachers) view as important to learn in an integrative WE classroom and what kind of educational and pedagogical justification do they name/find/make?

2. According to the stakeholders, how can integrative WE be educationally and pedagogically justified?

Methodological considerations

The data of this study consist of voluntary open-ended questions posted to the parents of the pupils during the semester of 2013/2014 and six 30- to 60-minute semi-structured interviews with the school staff. The questionnaire to the parents consisted of 4 questions pertaining to the teaching of integrative WE. The total number of participants who completed the questionnaire giving answers to all four questions was 174. The questionnaire was concerned at gauging the ideals and experiences that parents have for integrative WE and how they view the integrative teaching of religious education and secular ethics. The informants included parents of pupils who had already studied integrative WE a year earlier and parents whose children were only beginning to study integrative WE.

The answers from the parents, teachers and headteachers were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The answers were categorized with multiple rereadings and reorganizations until six large categories emerged and the data were saturated. While the views of the parents and school staff aligned on most occasions, the data from the teachers and headteachers yielded an additional category consisting of views related to the responsibilities and possibilities of the school space as a platform for worldview learning. (tähän vielä metodiviite)

It should be noted that the schools in which the current study was conducted are fairly unique in the Finnish educational landscape. The socioeconomic status of the parents is above average in the Finnish context and the schools are among the few pioneering schools which have arranged worldview education in partially integrative classrooms. The schools are also more multicultural and multireligious than in many parts of Finland. Although the data is thus case sensitive, it is important to note that many other schools in Finland have also begun to integrate their worldview education during the past few years (Åhs et al. 2016) and thus the question of how integrative WE can be implemented in a Finnish context is becoming more and more urgent. Case-sensitive data can be used to measure the larger questions that are inherent in implementing this model in Finland. The pupils, parents, teachers and headteachers all have experiences from both segregative and integrative models of WE and this important and unique situation can be used to examine the larger themes and questions regarding integrative WE in Finland.

Anonymity of the participants was taken into consideration with anonymous questionnaires in the case of the parents. Since the school staff data consists of interviews from four teachers and two headteachers, we did not make a distinction between the participants, but rather use the term school stakeholder in connection with all of them.

Results

Qualitative content analysis resulted in five different main categories (see Table 1.). In general the parents and school stakeholders were positive towards integrative WE. Over 80% of the parents held a positive view on integrative WE and the possibilities it offered. The school staff saw it as both a pedagogical and educational opportunity to increase the meaning and relevance of WE to the

pupils in a modern multicultural world. However, there were also challenges that were inherent in the integrative model which were articulated by both the parents and the school stakeholders. As one parent put it, integrative WE was helpful in ‘developing a sense of understanding of different cultures and beliefs amongst the group, which should help develop tolerance and a more rounded world view’.

Table 1.

The first category, *encounter*, consists of views that deal with the encountering of other worldviews and the possibilities that the integrative classroom offers in terms of learning from other pupils and through encountering differences. This category consists of views that emphasize the promotion of understanding and tolerance through encounters made possible in integrative WE. The term ‘tolerance’ (*suvaitsevaisuus* in Finnish) used in the research material of this study refers strongly to recognition and understanding of other person’s views and positions. However, we are well aware of the connotations that associate tolerance with the majority’s hegemonic thinking about minorities and with asymmetrical power positioning between the tolerator and the tolerated. The same applies with the term ‘difference’, when those who are ‘different’ are seen as people “who are not like me”, but the self-critical reflection of one’s own difference is lacking. Thus, emphasizing togetherness and encountering difference can be harmful for those who are constructed as Other. (Riitaoja & Dervin 2014). Nevertheless, we will use tolerance as a beneficial term in describing the positive stakeholder view on communicating learning from pupils whose thinking or believing might differ from one’s own.

In our study, the parents held the view that in the process of encountering different worldviews, the pupils would not only learn about differences between worldviews but also gain skills to develop a sense of respect towards diverse ways of thinking and being:

Parent (P) 64: ‘The tolerance inside the group will increase and the pupils will learn that not everyone has to think alike’.

P70: ‘The classes will increase the sense of togetherness despite differences’.

P146: ‘Due to the classes I think they will be better equipped to accept one another despite different religions’.

The unifying theme in the data was the idea of transaction between pupils with different worldviews that will equip them with better skills to cope with differences. The school staff saw that these transactions between pupils were one of the most important qualities in the integrative classroom which rose to the forefront in the interviews. Interestingly enough, at least in the Finnish context, peer-learning and personal contact with other worldviews was seen as highly important for the development of the pupil’s own worldview. The same element was also mentioned by pupils themselves as very important (see Åhs et al. 2016). The parents saw that these exchanges of thought with other pupils were at the core of what could be gained at best in an integrative classroom.

P88: 'The pupils can engage in valuable dialogue with each other despite their different worldview background. With this, they will learn to see things from many perspectives'.

P28: 'Integrating classes makes sense from a practical perspective. It will also enhance true dialogue with pupils from different worldviews'.

P149: 'Tolerance will increase when dialogue is possible with pupils from different religions'.

P110: 'I think the classes provide a unique opportunity to learn about other religions and cultures directly from the individuals themselves. This will increase the pupils' understanding, empathy and tolerance'.

The school stakeholders saw the model as enabling real transaction of thought between pupils themselves:

S1: 'The (integrative teaching) has been more straightforward because it has been less about teacher-pupil interaction and sometimes more about pupil-pupil interaction... so sometimes it really feels like we have achieved some sort of real interest and genuine dialogue. These are still small moments but... in the previous years we have been concerned about the fact that while we are teaching Islam there are Muslim pupils just outside the classroom door waiting for their next (own Islam RE) class. This situation has been really unfortunate and unnatural. Whereas now this [new situation] feels right'.

The second category, *impact on personal worldview*, consists of the ideals about the pupil's personal growth through integrative WE. This category is of special interest to us since the theoretical background concerns aspects of learning from religion in relation to the personal worldview. This category is also closely connected with the first one, as difference and diversity were the means to reflect on the personal formation of a worldview. This includes acquiring new perspectives, increase in empathy and changes in the pupil's personal worldview. Sometimes this was seen as a realization that many faiths and beliefs share the same goal, or that the pupils will gain an understanding of the phenomena around them.

P155: '[In the classes] the pupils will understand that different religions also share certain similarities. The pupils can also learn to discuss among themselves whatever their own worldview may be, and hopefully will learn to respect the opinions of others'.

P143: 'The classes can, simply put, widen one's understanding of different worldviews'.

In the school stakeholder data, the integrative model was seen to acknowledge the individuality of the pupil's worldviews:

S6: 'First of, the pupils... they are very open minded and tolerant and also many of them are quite secular so that they are not in the WE classes as representatives of a certain religion but rather as representatives of themselves as persons and individuals... Most of these pupils have in no way chosen their denomination but it has instead been given to them by their parents. And... in this way they can maybe view things, from a different neutral and perhaps even outsider perspective'.

Few of the schools stakeholder comments were directly related to this element of personal worldview in the classroom. Since belonging to a certain religious denomination for instance is not a given starting point, the individuality of pupils' worldviews is given more thought. In school stakeholder data, this was also seen as a possibility for the pupils to evaluate one's own worldview background from a different perspective.

Although the current Finnish model of WE is non-confessional, the school stakeholders considered that the integrative model allows pupils to view their own denomination through their own worldview rather than through the concepts of that religion or worldview which has not been chosen by the pupils themselves. It must be critically noted here that constructing a worldview is never a neutral process – nor even desired from the pedagogical point of view – and not something that the teachers literally aimed at. Thus, the intention here is that the teaching would offer an objective approach that would treat all pupils equally.

This category also includes comments that are doubtful whether or not the new integrative model of WE can provide the pupils with meaningful experiences and material for them to learn from religion. Although these comments are in the minority in the entire data, they show that a link between learning from worldviews and the teaching of an organized worldview is sometimes apparent. These stakeholders considered that WE should not be neutral, specifically because it eliminates the opportunity to learn essential things from the specific organized worldview of the pupil's home and culture. These comments also link the teaching of one's own worldview to concepts such as emotional weight and relevance in teaching. In other words, these informants see that teaching multiple worldviews as neutral as possible in an integrative classroom diminishes the possibilities of the pupil to form their own individual worldview:

P17: 'In the integrative classes the time to study one's own worldview is diminished if the pupil receives only factual information without any feeling. With this, the process of forming one's own worldview will be hindered'.

P154: 'The pupils can get the feeling that everyone should be similar. A neutral style of teaching can lead to this'.

The third category, *tools for diversity*, consists of ideals about WE providing tools for the pupils in a multicultural world. The difference in these comments in relation to the first category *encounter* is that the comments in this category referred to skills rather than attitude elements that have some kind of larger utility in the modern multicultural world. The parents and teachers saw integrative

WE as an important subject, where the pupils could learn to operate among a plurality of worldviews. These tools ranged from attitudes to cognitive skills and concrete behavior models. In addition to understanding differences globally, some comments also considered that the pupils would acquire tools to better understand ethnic and religious minorities in Finland:

P36: 'International cooperation requires basic knowledge of different religions. This prevents social errors with people who hold a different faith than one's own'.

P41: 'Integrative teaching prepares pupils to encounter different cultures. The understanding of other religions includes general knowledge, business knowledge, creative knowledge and it enables the pupils to understand history, literature... the list is endless'.

The school stakeholders felt that integrative WE enabled them to reach the aims of the curriculum at large better and also to offer teaching that was relevant to the world outside school:

S4: 'I think this is what WE teaching probably should be. It prepares the pupils for the world they are actually living in'.

S3: 'There have been some really good moments when I feel like I am truly achieving the aims set to us... fostering recognitions and tolerance and a wider understanding of worldviews'.

The fourth category, *equality of worldviews*, consists of views that deal with the question of the status of the majority and the rights of the pupils, parents and minority groups in integrative WE. Many of the parents saw the new model as increasing equality among pupils since integrative WE is similar for all the pupils in contrast to the previous model of segregative WE.

P67: 'This enables equality between different forms of RE and secular ethics. Worldview education should emphasize things in common rather than differences'.

P132: 'I believe this arrangement offers the possibility of gaining knowledge equally and in a more value-neutral way'.

This category also consists of views concerning minority rights and the fear that integrative WE can infringe on the rights of the minority by emphasizing the views of the majority. On the other hand, some stakeholders held the view that integrative teaching eliminates the feelings of otherness in minority pupils:

P53: 'The minority may have difficulty in establishing its own view'.

P101: 'Minority groups don't feel themselves to be different from others'.

The school stakeholders also considered that the new model served the rights of the pupils well since it acknowledges them as equals both in theory and in practice as the pupils no longer have to be divided according to their official religion or worldview:

S5: 'Many pupils that belong to a minority describe their previous experiences in WE as... they say it's kind of heavy for them to stay and wait in school [their own religion class] as all the other kids leave for home. They say you feel like an extra or an outsider and this enhances the feeling of alienation from the majority'.

The fifth category, *conflicts and challenges*, consists of the potential challenges that are possibly inherent in an integrative classroom. Some parents felt that possible narrow-mindedness inside the group could create false or biased perspectives among the pupils. This is in line with the pupil data, in which the pupils saw that in order for the integrative classroom to function as an arena of peer-learning and worldview encounter, the general attitude should be toward tolerance and curiosity in relation to other worldviews (Åhs et al. 2016).

Most prominent in the parental data was the fear of the possible negative influence of the teacher on the pupils. The neutrality of the teacher was regarded as important and there was a fear of the possible biases of the teacher towards certain worldviews or the possible fanaticism of the teacher.

P51: 'An incompetent or narrow-minded teacher would not be an impartial guide and adult, which would easily lead to conflicts'.

P42: 'A risk would be if the teacher tries to convert the pupils to his/her own faith'.

While the conflicts and challenges in the parental data consist of the possible worldview biases in the classroom, in the school stakeholder data this category consists of comments pertaining to the realities of school life in general, which often creates pedagogical challenges.

S1: 'When you realize that your 'audience' consists of pupils with all different types of worldviews, your choices of words are different'.

S4: 'Also you can't just teach the 'basic stuff' there. The situation automatically diversifies your teaching and thus also guarantees quality of teaching for all the pupils'.

S3: 'This kind of worldview education is the right way. However, now I am not so happy about the fact that this has not been developed at the Ministry of Education at all. It is much harder for a single school to start developing curriculums and mixing them together'.

The teachers saw that the integrative classroom was inherently more challenging for them compared to teaching ‘normal’ segregative classes. The teachers also acknowledged the possible danger of bias in their teaching which the parents also saw as a possible challenge. The comments above highlight the fact that the teachers in question were aware of this challenge and aimed at creating an equal integrative classroom space by reflecting on their choices of words and actions. The school stakeholders acknowledge the important role of the teacher in creating a positive learning experiences for the pupils in an integrative WE classroom. One of the other main challenges the teachers bring up is the status of the curriculum in relation to the teaching. Because the national core curriculum currently provides different curricula for different types of WE, it is a notable challenge for the school stakeholders to integrate these curricula in their local and school level curriculum.

Conclusions

We suggest that the key element that construes the *learning from* aspect in an integrative WE is based on the idea of pedagogical transaction in which the learning space is open, safe and equal between participants. From the pupils’ perspective this safe and equal space can be created in a classroom of different worldviews as long as the teacher is sensitive to the individuality of the pupils (Åhs et al. 2016). All the stakeholder view the teacher as central figure in this process. The emphasis that both the stakeholders and the pupils themselves (see Åhs et al. 2016) give to peer-learning indicates that the integrative WE classroom has the possibility of facilitating these transaction processes when certain pedagogical criteria are met.

While the pupils see the importance of these transactions as giving voice to the personal worldviews of individuals and as challenging the labels that the segregative model of WE applies to the pupils (Åhs et al. 2016), parents and teachers see these transactions as critical in preparing the children for a multicultural world. The teachers and headteachers see that by integrating the different worldviews to the same classroom, it is possible to create unique transactions between the pupils at school. This vision was prominent in the school staff stakeholder data and emphasis was put on the fact that integrative WE classes give pupils a ‘normal’ situation/space with their home class to facilitate dialogical transaction between pupils.

It is notable that some of the parents in this study presented views that link learning from one’s own worldview background with constructing one’s personal worldview. These views hold that relevant worldview education can only be achieved by teaching the pupil in the language of his/her own organized worldview. However, multiple comments brought forth the idea that as worldviews are personal they can only be reflected by being in contact with various different beliefs and practices. As Teece (2010, 101) writes: ‘learning about and from religions can be said to be a dialogue between the pupils’ life worlds and the worlds of the religions.’ The majority of the stakeholders including the pupils themselves (Åhs et al. 2016) consider that the integrative classroom has the potential to truly resonate with the life worlds of the pupils since it enables encounters with actual lived worldviews. As both the pupils and parents noted, the segregative model might also make false generalization about the personal worldviews of the pupils by categorizing them according to organized worldviews. However, although in integrative WE there are no physical barriers

separating the pupils into different classrooms, the ability of the teacher to facilitate a classroom atmosphere where dialogue is possible is crucial.

The fundamental question here is one of definition and categorization. If individuality and the personal dimension of worldviews are taken into account, then worldviews should not be presented as monolithic and closed entities into which individuals can be grouped. This is also present in the data where the parents and school stakeholders emphasize the importance of learning general knowledge about worldviews such as Islam and Christianity, but also that pupils would learn about and from personal worldviews. The transactional space created in the class not only enables pupils to gain knowledge about organized worldviews – which would also be possible in a segregative classroom – but also uniquely gain an understanding of the meaning of individual experience, heterogeneity and flexibility within and between worldview traditions. However, we still stay critical about the ‘learning from different worldviews attitude’ as difference can easily be interpreted as a goal in itself and it might be targeted to minorities. It is important to stress here that transactional space can also be possible in a class of students from the same organized worldview background, as every pupil’s personal worldview differs from each other’s (Poulter et al. 2016).

Some parents saw that integrative WE might provide pupils with the notion that all worldviews share the same goals and are similar. These comments claim(?) that the uniqueness of the worldviews is lost if they are presented neutrally and objectively to the pupils. This is a relevant question for all WE education, since organized worldviews often claim authority on truth in relation to other organized worldviews. For example, acknowledging that different worldview systems make incompatible claims on ontological and epistemological questions and presenting these differences neutrally to the pupils is however not the same as making all worldviews seem the same. By differentiating between the organized and personal worldview in an integrative WE classroom, it is possible to examine how encountering similarities and differences in pedagogical transactions affects the personal worldviews of the pupils. The fear of false similarity was shared by a minority of parents and the majority noted that the integrative classroom might provide pupils with insights into different ways of thinking rather than create a false sense of unity. Transaction as an educational attitude in integrative WE means an active dialogue which is not only based on similarities but also on differences. By encountering these differences directly, yet sensitively, dialogue is possible (Schweitzer 2011). The ideal encounter is to acknowledge similarities and differences between worldview systems (Heimbrock 2009), which means that even difficult differences should not be silenced. Importantly, transactions between lived personal worldviews makes it possible to see differences as individual, and not only as systemic.

The informants of this study were able to name possible problems attached to integrative WE. Among the parents there are fears that the majority stance would overpower the minorities and that the possible extreme views of the teacher or the pupils would lead to negative experiences. When considering the data from the pupils (Åhs et al. 2016), the parents and school stakeholders, it seems that these negative outcomes have been averted in the schools which have pioneered the integrative model of WE in Finland. It should also be noted that these risks are inherent in any model of WE, since the topics are very sensitive to the identities and personal development of the pupils. It should also be noted that in WE positive and beneficial pedagogical transactions between pupils is largely

dependent on the teacher's pedagogical competence. An impartial approach to teaching integrative WE has been proposed as it allows the teacher to consider many different standpoints, opinions and give due respect to all of them. With appropriate knowledge, attitude and skills teachers can form a bond of respect between them and their pupils. (Jackson & Everington 2016.) This allows pedagogical transactions to occur in the classroom space and prepares pupils for a world of worldviews, both collective and personal. A classroom space that facilitates these transactions should be one where both religious and non-religious worldviews, the majority and the minority, can have a voice.

References

Akbulut, O. & Usal, Z. 2009. Parental Religious Rights vs. Compulsory Religious Education in Turkey. In *International Journal of Minority and Group Rights* 15(4): 433-455.

Alberts, W. 2010. The academic study of religions and integrated religious education in Europe. In *British Journal of Religious Education* 32(3), 275-290.

Heimbrock, H-G. 2009, Encountering as Model for Dialogue in RE. In *Religious education as encounter. A tribute to John M. Hull*, edited by S. Miedema, 83-97. Münster: Waxmann.

Hull, J. M. 2001. 'The Contribution of Religious Education to Religious Freedom: A Global Perspective'. In *Religious Education in Schools: Ideas and Experiences from around World*. International Association for Religious Freedom, 4–11. Accessed 2nd January 2017. <iarf.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Religious-Education-in-Schools.pdf>

Fancourt, N. 2015. Re-defining 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion': a study of policy change. *British Journal of Religious Education* 37(2): 122-137.

Jackson, B. & Everington, J. 2016. Teaching inclusive religious education impartially: an English perspective. In *British Journal of Religious Education*, 1-18. Published online 9th May 2016.

van der Kooij, J., de Ruyter, D. & Miedema, S. 2016. Can we teach morality without influencing the worldview of students? In *Journal of Religious Education*.

Käpylehto, K. 2015. Kulosaaren malli: dialogiin perustuva katsomusaineiden opetusjärjestely. In *Näin rakennat monialaisia oppimiskokonaisuuksia*, edited by H. Cantell, 123-146. Juva: PS-kustannus.

Lester, E. 2004. Gratitude and parents' rights over their children's religious upbringing. In *Journal of Beliefs and values: Studies in Religion & Education* 25(3): 295-306.

Matilainen, M. & Kallioniemi, A. 2011. 'Headmasters' Conceptions of the Finnish Religious Education - Solution from the Perspective of Human Rights'. *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 2, 1–14.

- Matilainen, M. 2014. How should Religious Education (RE) Delivery Models be Organised? Student Teacher Perspectives for the Finland of Today and Tomorrow. *Religious Education Journal of Australia* 2/2014, 3-8.
- Pfändtner, W. 2010. Constructive Dialogical Pluralism: A Context of Interreligious Relations. *Sophia* 49: 65-94. DOI: 10.1007/s11841-009-0156-x
- Poulter, S., Kuusisto, A., Matilainen, M. & Kallioniemi, A. 2016 (in press). Examining Religious Education in Finland from a Human Rights Perspective. In *Religion, human rights and education*, edited by A. Sjöborg & H-G. Ziebertz. Springer.
- Poulter, S., Sutinen, A. & Kallioniemi, A. 2015. Uskonnonopetus julkisessa koulussa: Pedagoginen transaktio kasvatusfilosofisena lähtökohtana. *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 119, 5-6, 403-415.
- Poulter, S., Riitaoja, A-L. & Kuusisto, A. 2016. Thinking multicultural education ‘otherwise’ – from a secularist construction towards a plurality of epistemologies and worldviews. *Globalization, Societies, Education*. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2014.989964>
- Riitaoja, A-L. & Dervin, F. 2014. Interreligious dialogue in schools: Beyond asymmetry and categorization? *Language and Intercultural Communication*. 14(1): 76-90.
- Rissanen, I. 2014. *Negotiating Religion and Identity in a single faith religious education: a case study of Islamic education in Finnish schools*. Waxmann: Münster.
- Schreiner, P. 2001. Towards a European Oriented Religious Education. In *Towards Religious Competence*, edited by In H-G. Heimbrock, C. Scheilke & P. Schreiner, 253–267. Münster: Lit-Verlag,
- Schweitzer, F. 2005. Children’s right to religion and spirituality: legal, educational and practical perspectives. In *British Journal of Religious Education*, 27(2): 103-113.
- Schweitzer, F. 2011. Dialogue needs difference: The Case for Denominational and Cooperative Religious Education. In *Religious Education in a Plural, Secularised Society. A Paradigm Shift*, edited by L. Franken & P. Loobuyck, 117-130. Münster: Waxmann.
- Sutinen, A., Kallioniemi, A. & Pihlström, S. 2015. Pedagogical Transaction in Religious Education: Diversified Society and John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education. In *Religious Education* 110(3), 329-348
- Teece, G. 2010. Is it learning about and from religions, religion or religious education? And is it any wonder some teachers don’t get it? In *British Journal of Religious Education*, 32(2): 93-103.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1989. <http://www.boes.org/un/engun-c.html>

The Finnish Board of Education. 2014. National Core Curriculum for Basic Education. http://www.oph.fi/saadokset_ja_ohjeet/opetussuunnitelmien_ja_tutkintojen_perusteet/perusopetus (accessed 27.5.2016)

Zilliacus, H. 2014. *Supporting student's identities and inclusion in minority religious and secular ethics education: a study on plurality in the Finnish comprehensive school*. University of Helsinki: Helsinki.

UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child. 1959/1990.

http://www.unicef.org/lac/spbarbados/Legal/global/General/declaration_child1959.pdf

Åhs, V., Poulter, S. & Kallioniemi, A. 2016. Encountering worldviews: Pupil perspectives on Integrative Worldview Education in a Finnish secondary school context. *Religion & Education* 43(2): 208-229.