



# Pupils and worldview expression in an integrative classroom context

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore pupil perspectives on religions and worldviews in a mutual integrative space of religious and worldview education in a Finnish context. Analysing group interview data (N = 38) gathered from lower secondary school pupils attending mutual classes of religious and worldview education, the article explores how religious and non-religious worldviews can be explored in order to enhance subjectification in worldview education. The findings indicate that for pupils, the heterogeneity and lived dimensions reflected in personal worldviews, and questions relating to meaning, emotion and individuality in worldviews, are at the forefront in learning from religions and worldviews. The experiences of the pupils indicate that the concepts employed in religious and worldview education concerning religions and worldview phenomena should be examined critically in the light of the personal meaning making level of the pupils themselves.

**Keywords** Worldview education · Religious education · Integrative education · Worldview

## 1 Introduction

Pupil (P)20: ... It's a bit like you would be studying postcards, but that way the main point of it is to study not only the postcards but what is on them, or in other words, the message.. If that makes sense?

This is how one pupil in the research data describes learning from other pupils' views on religions and worldviews. With this metaphor the pupil emphasizes the need to understand how religions and worldviews are lived and considered in the lived experiences of different individuals. While a general understanding of religions and worldviews provides an understanding of the format and structure of a “postcard” in general, it is the meaning given by individuals that is the thing itself: the written message on the postcard.

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This article examines partially integrative classrooms of religious education (RE) and secular ethics in the Finnish context. Despite being context specific, the results of this study can provide useful insights into more general themes of religions and worldviews in education. Rather than exploring the novelty of Finnish integrative education, this study aims to contribute to the more general academic discussion regarding the concepts of religion and worldviews and their exploration in educational contexts of multiple religions and worldviews. We propose that the elements in the classroom linked to the lived religion, individual experience and personal worldview of the pupil can be seen to offer crucial elements for RE and secular ethics. Integrative RE education and its implementation is an extremely topical issue in Finland and in many other countries. Other Nordic countries such as Sweden and Norway have implemented forms of integrative RE (Bråten 2015; Llorent-Bedmar and Cobano-Delgado 2014) and integrative RE or worldview education has been implemented in other places such as Quebec in Canada (Brockman 2016; Gravel 2016). Thus, while case-sensitive, the results of this study and our previous research on integrative RE education (Åhs et al. 2016, 2019b) aim to deal with larger questions relating to the implementation and contents of an integrative RE subject in public schools. In general, the way in which RE is implemented in schools is a relevant question relating to larger societal and political themes about pluralism, multiculturalism, education and dialogue: what skills and knowledge should public education provide the pupils in the society today?

In Finland the RE model is separative, physically separating pupils who study either RE or secular ethics according to their religious or non-religious background.<sup>1</sup> Each pupil receives teaching according to his or her *own religion*. This means that while the teaching is non-confessional, the pupils in the classroom come from a certain religious background and the teaching is focused on that tradition. In secular ethics (*elämänkatsomustieto*, literally knowledge of life outlook), which is an alternative subject to RE and emphasizes philosophical, anthropological and ethical worldview exploration, pupils come from non-religious backgrounds or from a minority religious background if RE in that religion is not available or the parents of the pupils so decide.

As recent studies show, there are challenges in implementing separative RE in a current Finnish society that is getting more secular, multireligious and multicultural (Rissanen et al. 2019; Zilliacus 2019). These societal changes demand more emphasis on dialogue skills and engaging with diversity between and within organized worldviews (Tainio and Kallioniemi 2019). While different countries have different starting points and implementations in their RE models, the aforementioned societal changes present similar challenges in how education concerning religions and worldviews should be implemented in comprehensive schools (Poulter et al. 2017).

This article continues the themes focused on two previous research articles on partially integrative worldview education in the Finnish context (Åhs et al. 2016, 2019b). By using the term worldview education (WE) instead of RE, we refer to the classes in which pupils from different RE classes and secular ethics are studying together. We would argue that the language of worldviews, which has been brought forth for example by Valk (2009, 2017b), Miedema (2017) and van der Kooij et al. (2013), holds one key to exploring religious and non-religious viewpoints in a heterogeneous educational setting.

The term *partially integrative* refers to classes in which pupils from different backgrounds study mostly together, but on some occasions, they still study separately with

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<sup>1</sup> For a more comprehensive look into the Finnish RE and secular ethics model, see Sakaranaho (2013, 2019), Ubani et al. (2019), Åhs et al. (2016).

their RE or secular ethics group (Alberts 2010; Käpylehto 2015). In Finnish basic education, all forms of RE and secular ethics have their own curriculum. However, in recent years some lower secondary schools, especially in the metropolitan area of Helsinki, have begun to implement integrative practices where pupils from different RE classes and secular ethics study together (Åhs et al. 2019). The pupils in these classes still receive education according to their own RE or secular ethics curriculum, but since many topics in the curricula are similar, many lessons and topics are taught integratively. Our interest lies specifically in the integrative elements in the classes and how they influence what is learned about and from worldviews. The goal for integrative classrooms is inclusivity and a safe space for various different worldviews to appear and be in dialogue. This refers to the ability of the teachers and the pupils themselves to create an atmosphere of acceptance, where different viewpoints can be expressed.

Previous research shows that there are many pertinent factors in constructing a safe space to discuss and learn about worldviews in an integrative classroom. An impartial and open teacher, the presence of friends and the fact that the pupils are not expected to represent any particular worldview are seen to be important (Korkeakoski and Ubani 2018; Ubani 2018; Åhs et al. 2016). In both integrative and separative classrooms the pupils learn about cultures and world religions, ethics and customs according to the National Core Curriculum (NCCBE 2014). This has been highlighted in the data, where pupils see the importance of learning about things such as world religions and different belief systems (Åhs et al. 2016). However, as pinpointed by previous research, what changes in the integrative classroom is the role of different religions and worldviews. Since there is no longer an assumed worldview background, the nature of 'one's own religion' and the worldviews of the pupils are presented in a different light.

The separative model of RE and secular ethics has been criticized since it can be seen to essentialize pupil identities through future-fixed affiliation to organized religious groups, whereas there should be options for pupils to explore and adopt various different worldview positions (Zilliacus 2019). The association of a pupil with a certain worldview is somewhat in contrast to the general aims of the National Core Curriculum of Basic Education, where the plurality of communities and languages but also of individuals and their various ways of being, believing and living are emphasized (NCCBE 2014). Plurality rather than simplicity seems to be the theme in the creation of religious and non-religious identities, where both religious, secular, cultural and familial traditions mix to create unique individual positions (Benjamin 2017; Kuusisto et al. 2017). It has been argued that worldview education can emphasize the personal meaning making and exploration of worldviews (Valk 2017a, b). We explore this notion in the context of this article and Finnish integrative WE.

The research focus is to investigate pupils' reflection on worldviews as experienced, lived, life-style matter vis-à-vis a worldview as an ideological and organizational entity. The pupils in the current study provide an extremely interesting case study, since they have previous experience of separative classrooms and thus can provide insights into how worldviews should be contextualized in a new integrative setting.

The current research was conducted by using group interviews with pupils attending integrative WE. This data was used to answer the following research questions:

1. How do pupils perceive religion and worldviews in an integrative setting?

2. What significance do pupils give to the personal dimension of worldviews in an integrative classroom?

Our preunderstanding when implementing the group interviews was based on the previous result (Åhs et al. 2016, 2019b) that an integrative classroom can foster mutual understanding of different positions and worldviews and provide an inclusive learning environment in certain conditions. The group interviews further explored the role of worldviews in the classrooms of integrative WE. Along with the research questions, the interviews also explored the possible inclusive elements in integrative WE from the pupils' perspectives in order to compare the results to previous research results (Åhs et al. 2016, 2019b).

## 2 Conceptual considerations: worldview and lived religion

By using the term *worldview*, we aim to find an inclusive term for pupils from diverse backgrounds present in the integrative classroom. Succinctly put, a worldview can be defined as the ontological, epistemological and ethical framework which ascribes meaning to the world but also orients people in everyday life (van der Kooij et al. 2017; Åhs et al. 2019a). Attitudes towards life goals, interpersonal relationships and various personal concerns are informed by one's worldview and the values it provides (Åhs et al. 2019b). What is important to note is that the concept is inclusive in relation to both religious and non-religious views on life.

The use of the concept of worldview in the context of RE and secular ethics is not new. Valk (2017a), for example, sees the notion of worldview as necessary in the context of WE. His thoughts are somewhat in line with van der Kooij et al. (2013, 2017), where the usage of the term worldview has many benefits. Firstly, it underlines the need to view many types of worldviews in both personal and organizational contexts. It avoids both the overly secular viewpoint of completely minimizing the role of religions and the tendency to overplay the role of religion (Valk 2017a). The concept of worldview also emphasizes the fact that religious and non-religious elements are not mutually exclusive in an individual's life. On the contrary, as noted by sociologists of religion, religious and secular attitudes can no longer be considered as opposing or mutually exclusive concepts. Rather, a plurality of spiritual practices or ideas and secular values seem to better characterize the worldviews of many individuals (Nynäs et al. 2015).

In this light, it is crucial to define two different levels of worldviews which can be explored, namely the organized/systematized and personal levels. An *organized worldview* represents a more or less coherent system of thought and belief which has been developed through time and influences many individuals. This coherence is often seen through developed dogmas, rituals and sources of traditions such as holy books, scholarly works or professions of faith (van der Kooij et al. 2013).

A *personal worldview* is the lens through which the individual constructs the world (van der Kooij et al. 2015) and through which he or she gives meaning to the world (Taves et al. 2018). There are many different ways of viewing a personal worldview. For example, some view it as strictly consisting of the beliefs that the individual holds about the world around her (van der Kooij et al. 2013), while others see the *enacting* of these beliefs in the world as an important part of the personal worldview (Nilson 2014; Taves et al. 2018). An individual might construct her personal worldview with many ingredients from different organized worldviews.

The concept of worldview should also be critically examined. The personal outlook on the world that pupils have is not easy to express with a single concept, since the concept aims to include both the views and the process in which these views are formed. Other related concepts such as existential configurations (Gustavsson 2018) or life interpretations (*livstolkning*) (Ristiniemi et al. 2018) have been used in the Nordic context. Both of these concepts emphasize the process of formation in relation to the existential questions of the pupil (Gustavsson 2018). These views highlight a few important shortcomings of the worldview concept. Since a *worldview* emphasizes a more fixed outlook on life, the fluidity and flux in the existential questions and processes should be kept in mind. Also, a *worldview* emphasizes the more cognitive aspects of one's outlook on life, while corporeality, practice and emotions are also centre stage in many questions relating to religious and non-religious positions. These cognitive and philosophical emphases of the concept reveal a *worldview* to be a decidedly western theological and philosophical concept (Åhs et al. 2019b). However, even with these caveats, we believe a worldview is useful as an inclusive concept referring to the multiple religious and secular positions in the classroom. Also, the widespread use of the concept (Wintersgill 2017; Freathy and John 2019; van der Kooij et al. 2017) makes it impactful.

In light of the criticisms, the concept of worldview should also be linked to the concept of lived religion (Ammerman 2016). Lived religion as a concept refers to the ways in which religious worldviews are lived in the lives of communities and individuals in all their complexity and variance. The academic study of religion in universities has long since problematized the essentializing world religions approach, which explores religious traditions through definite categories and dimensions, such as beliefs, rituals, the Transcendent and clearly defined sacred texts (Owens 2011; Fitzgerald 2000). However, this approach to religions and religious life is still relatively unproblematized in the school context. This can be seen to reflect the official, reified level of religion, which often relegates the 'unofficial' and lived forms of religion to curiosities or aberrations (Orsi 2004). However, as pointed out by sociologists of religion (Utraiainen 2018), the lived dimension of religion, which is often messy and heterogeneous, plays an important part in the lives of individuals and how they live their religion or worldview. The concept of lived religion refers to these beliefs, practices and emotions that are relevant to the everyday lived religiosity of individuals in which religion is filtered through family traditions, cultures and popular culture, personality and various other factors.

By emphasizing the lived dimension and individuality in worldviews, it is necessary to also shortly examine the pragmatist philosophical starting points which ground our understanding of the concept.

### 3 Pragmatism, subjectification and the individual in WE

Our interest is in exploring the theme of worldviews present in the classroom from a pragmatist point of view of education, where the experiences of the pupils are of utmost importance and an important source for learning. From a pragmatist perspective, knowledge is always related to action. Ontologically, pragmatism can be seen to offer a view of transactional realism (Biesta and Burbules 2003), where the reality that we can observe is always constructed in transaction with the individual and the environment. A pragmatist approach is at the same time both constructivist and realist because the reality we can observe is always constructed in the dyad of individual action and environment. In this view action

and experience are key both to being and knowing. It is the duty of research to explore how worldviews are lived and how they are present in the actions of individuals. As unique individuals and their meaning making systems, our ideas and worldviews cannot be predicted in advance (Pihlström 2011), but must instead be viewed through action. This view emphasizes the need to explore pupil perspectives but also how meaning making in relation to religions and worldviews happens at the level of the individual in the classroom.

From a pragmatist perspective, worldviews can be viewed as multitudes of objects with regard to their instrumentalism in research (Biesta and Burbules 2003). Organized worldviews as constructs offer scientific and religious objects of knowledge about reality, while personal worldviews offer the everyday experiential and lived objects of knowledge. In the personal worldview, the aspects of lived religion or lived worldview become pertinent as they reflect how worldviews and religions appear in everyday life.

If we use the pragmatist viewpoint that emphasizes knowledge as action and the individual meanings created in transaction with the environment, we can make sense of personal worldviews not only as cognitive structures, but also as lived, often implicit and even conflicting entities that are articulated situationally and in relation to the environment of the individual. They “are molded by, and in part constituted by, real emotionally and existentially valid lived experience” (Dilthey 1890/1957 quoted in Nilson 2014, p. 74). The pragmatist approach to personal worldviews begins with the action of the individual, rather than the organized level of systematized worldviews presented by philosophers and theologians (Taves et al. 2018). Worldviews, when viewed through this lens, are personal constructs tied intricately to individual personality and living. The link of worldviews and the personalities of individuals is important, because it is at the locus of personal worldviews in general. No personal worldview is detached from an individual’s unique personality. Here it is important to note that a worldview as an individual psychological concept, similar to personality, is relational and differential—it is the thing that makes an individual unique (Koltko-Rivera 2004). While worldviews are most certainly social, organized and shared, they are also individual and unique similar to personality. A focus on this dimension of worldviews can serve as one starting point for inclusive worldview education.

As argued by Biesta (2015) education functions in three different domains: *qualification*, *socialization* and *subjectification*. Qualification has to do with equipping people with knowledge, skills and dispositions, which is also a primary aim of WE. The role of WE is to prepare children with knowledge about worldviews. However, education is also concerned with the ways in which we become part of social, cultural and political practices and traditions. This is the socialization dimension of education that is also very elemental, as we can see that there is a whole range of societal agendas that are included in the school curriculum such as citizenship education (Biesta 2015, p. 128). The third dimension in which education operates has to do with the impact on the individual. For education to exist in the ethical sense, it is necessary to consider a person’s coming to the world’ as the main aim of education, which is about the subjectification of an individual free from the instrumentalistic goals that the two other domains contain. The domain of subjectification is where we hope to frame the findings of this study, namely the personal and lived dimension of worldviews that are shaped in the classroom that invite both teacher and pupils to the “unknown surface”. We argue that the *learning from religion* approach that entails a strong commitment to personal engagement and lived experience is a way to strengthen the subjectification of WE.

In relation to subjectification and WE, the views presented by Hannam (2018) are particularly apt. For Hannam, education should act as a place of freedom where individuals can act in plurality. Here equality is not achieved in sameness, but in distinctiveness as

individuals who are necessarily tied to others and who are visible in the mutual space, or in this case, school. The Arendtian plurality that Hannam proposes sees the differing subjects in the classroom as plurality. Here we see an important starting point for WE, when the pupil and his action in relation to others is key:

To imagine children coming into the world separately, into a world where things remain the same; of children being forced into the existing order of things without any question, would be the opposite of what I argue religious education should do. (Hannam 2018)

As Hannam notes, the key question in RE could be “What does it mean to be religious?” rather than only “What is religion?” (Hannam 2018). That is, the focus should be shifted to the meanings, emotions and purposes that individuals and collectives attach to lived religions. We would largely agree with this, but also expand this to include worldview positions in general in order to bridge the often artificial gap between religious and non-religious worldviews, a gap which is not supported by the latest evidence from sociological studies on religion (Nynäs et al. 2015; Utraiainen 2018). The worldview of individual persons does not necessarily conform to a rigid divide between religiousness and non-religiousness, but is rather more complex with many situational elements. Precisely what meaning is given to these different elements and beliefs in the lives of individuals and at what situations could be at the centre of worldview education.

## 4 Research data

The research data consists of nine group interviews (N = 38) with three to seven pupils in each interview. The schools in question were lower secondary schools in Helsinki, with one being a public school and the other a private state-funded school.<sup>2</sup> The pupils were studying in classes from 7th to 9th grade (ages 13 to 16). Both schools had implemented partially integrative WE lessons, so the pupils had both integrative and separative classes during their WE studies. Both of the schools had pupils from various different RE groups and secular ethics. The aim was to include pupils from both majority and minority RE background in as many interview groups as possible. All interview groups had pupils from evangelic-lutheran majority RE and secular ethics and five of the nine groups had pupils from minority RE groups. The interviews varied in length from 30 to 60 minutes depending on the participants and the school timetables. The interviews were conducted during the school day. Both schools are situated in the metropolitan area of Helsinki and their profile is multicultural. These starting points should be kept in mind since the data is context sensitive. The data gathered in our studies is also unique on an international level, since the pupils have extensive experience of both the separative and integrative settings of WE. The pupils could highlight their experiences on what is important to learn in WE when reflecting on both forms of teaching.

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<sup>2</sup> In a number of respects, public and private schools are relatively similar in the Finnish context when compared to many other countries. The public (i.e. state) schools operate under the communities administrative educational offices, while the private schools are independent with regard to the guidelines from these offices.



## 5 Methodological considerations

The interviews were conducted with focus group and group interview methods. While group interviews focus on the answers given by the participants, focus groups emphasize the attitudes and actions in the interview situation (Bloor et al. 2001). Focus group interviews are usually less structured with the emphasis on free dialogue between participants, while group interviews usually follow strict interview guidelines similar to structured personal interviews. Our approach was a mix of the two approaches, since as noted in methodological literature, interviewing children and adolescents benefits from a more structured approach when compared to adults (Vaughn et al. 1996). The group format offered the pupils a platform for expressing their ideas in a safe, yet stimulating environment. While the effect of other pupils' opinions is present in a group interview setting, the discussions which are possible in this environment provide valuable possibilities for the pupils to express their ideas.

Interviews in groups are often used at the preliminary stages of a research when focusing on the general themes of a phenomenon. However, interviews in groups are also useful at a later stage of a research such as here, when a certain hypothesis or preunderstanding has already been constructed (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). It was our aim to focus on many elements of integrative WE, but especially those linked to personal worldviews in the classroom. We created ten preliminary questions for the interviews to facilitate discussion. The questions were of a general nature and probed the general experiences and opinions related to worldviews and learning in the integrative space.

Since for practical reasons the interviews were conducted during the school day, we employed the help of the teachers in creating the interview groups. This was in order to take into consideration the personal characteristics of the pupils and the social relations between them. This is in line with the methodological literature, where teacher help is recommended when creating group interviews in a school setting (Vaughn et al. 1996). Altogether 38 pupils from 2 different lower secondary schools participated in the interviews. The aim was to have groups consisting of approximately 6 pupils. However, for practical reasons, the group sizes varied from 3 to 7 pupils. The questions which were used probed general themes about learning, worldviews and teaching so the pupils were given space to themselves articulate what they thought was important.

Ethical considerations were noted at each step of the research process (Lagström et al. 2010). Consent for the interviews and their recording was obtained from the guardians of the pupils, the pupils themselves, the teachers and head teachers and also in the case of the public school, the administrative educational offices. One of the researchers visited both schools before the interviews and informed the pupils about the purpose and nature of the interviews. The same procedure was repeated before the interviews took place. No identifying data such as names or other background information on the pupils were stored. The only data gathered were the recorded interviews and the notes taken during the interviews by one of the researchers. Through a process of transcription, the pupils were all given a random numeral identifier.

The presence of two researchers made it possible for one of the researchers to act as the moderator in the interviews. The first author's role was primarily to facilitate the interviews with general questions relating to the topics of the discussions and maintain discussion. The second author's moderator role was to maintain discussion and ensure that different participants had opportunities to participate in the discussion. The second author participated in the discussion but also held the role of an observer, noting in particular such



**Table 1** Categories from group interview data

Categories	Content
1. Personal worldview	The lived and experienced dimension of worldviews in the classroom
2. Mutual space	The purpose of an integrative classroom space in WE
3. Teacher position	The role and significance of the teacher in an integrative WE classroom
4. Challenges	Challenging elements in integrative WE

things as nonverbal cues and certain expressions that could possibly be worth examining more deeply. Therefore, her focus was to supplement but also “interrupt” the interview by asking for clarification (Bloor et al. 2001). Group pressure and possible conformity are possible shortcomings in a group interview setting, especially with children or adolescents. We were aware of these shortcomings and implemented a dual interviewer setting in order to more carefully observe group dynamics. Different prompts and questions were used by both interviewers during the interview in order to encourage the expression of various viewpoints. It was also heavily emphasized that the interviews were not connected in any way to the teaching of integrative WE and thus would not affect the evaluation of the pupils or their standing with the teacher.

The gathered and transcribed textual data were analysed at three different phases. The first phase was the individually employed inductive content analysis by the first two authors. In the second phase the categories were compared and collated. In the third phase the third author was also involved in theoretical construction and a theory-laden approach with the emphasis on the concept of a personal worldview.

## 6 Results

The analysis of the group discussion yielded four pertinent categories relating to integrative worldview education and the exploration of worldviews. In relation to the theoretical background of the study, we will explore the most significant category relating to the conceptualization of worldviews and the significance of the personal worldview in the classroom. The names of the categories and their general content are presented in Table 1.

We explore the contents of the first category in depth with a theory-laden approach, and briefly describe the contents of the other three categories at the end of the analysis. Categories two, three and four provide important insights into the possibilities and challenges of integrative WE, but their results were similar to previous results (Åhs et al. 2016) and did not provide deeper insights. The first category was the most prevalent in the data and provides unique insights into pupil views on personal worldview in the context of integrative WE.

The first category *personal worldview* contains discussions and comments presented in the group interviews that pertain to the personal and lived worldview of the pupil, the pupil’s worldview background or the importance of learning from the personal dimensions of worldviews. This is the most significant emphasis in the data, because whatever the religious or non-religious background of the pupil or other thoughts relating to WE were, the pupils saw that learning about and from lived experiences was perhaps the most important thing that could be achieved in a mutual classroom. There was no

substitute for linking worldviews to their emotional and lived dimension within the lives of the pupils. This also created interest in studying these phenomena:

P20: ... then you have your own classmates that have a personality... or personal views so you can like at least somewhat relate and know where they are coming from and then these views become much more interesting and they can tell you a lot more.

The pupils appreciated the ability to discuss worldviews as they related to, for example, the familial traditions, cultural background and individuality of the pupil. These all filter ‘what it means to be religious’ and create unique interpretations and lived dimensions of worldviews. The individual has knowledge based on personal experiences that is not available in the official representation of religions or worldviews:

P16: ... every student has their own experiences with their religion like their culture and what their parents are like...in some religion even though it’s the same religion people have different traditions so that um... even though there are two people with the same religion they could have done some of the things differently so... we can know more stuff, not only the main things.

P11: and like... everyone has their own conceptions about things. Even though we have this thing called Christianity there are various different types all over the world and even then like... everyone has their own thoughts relating to them.

P34: that the pupil herself tells about is (referring to preferable methods of learning) because... it tells you about her life. Like this is how it happens in normal life.

P34: the pupils tell their own views while the teacher kind of tells only about how things are done in general. That way you do not get to know how someone does these things in their family for example. When the pupil tells it you get different views on the topic and not only the general view, since not everyone does everything similarly.

The pupils themselves seemed to grasp the importance of exploring the lived experience relating to religions and worldviews (Ammerman 2016) whether this was related to how they are lived in general or how individuals in the classroom experience them in their personal worldview. This contrasts to the world religions approach and instead empowers the individual and her worldview as it is lived. The importance of exploring the organized level of religions and worldviews is clear, but its inadequacy alone is revealed in an integrative classroom setting. As the pupils say, it is not ‘normal life’ or the lived dimension of how worldviews come to life. As the first comment suggests, worldviews are filtered through personal thought and action, family traditions, cultural emphasis and societal values. A monolithic understanding of worldviews without the emphasis on how they are lived paints religions and worldviews as ahistorical, instead of historically contingent and changing phenomena in the lives of individuals.

However, it should be noted that the pupils often referred to religions when talking about different living viewpoints on life. This can be seen as a type of stereotyping about religions from a secular hegemonic perspective, where distinctively religious identities are conceived as something exotic and interesting to be learned from. The discourses representing a secular position as a neutral point of observation are one of the challenges for inclusive integrative WE and the role of the teacher in highlighting the non-neutral starting points of all worldview positions is clear (Kimanen and Poulter 2018). Especially the pupils from more religious backgrounds can feel alienated from the majority. As Berglund’s

(2017) studies on Swedish pupils show, in order to ‘fit in’ with the secular majority, a more religious identity is often hidden or not talked about.

However, the importance of lived experience was emphasized by pupils from all backgrounds and it was often related to learning about individuality rather than certain religious or secular worldviews. In the interview data the importance of linking worldviews with personality, feelings and individuality was an important aspect of worldview exploration and it sometimes contrasted with the ‘official’ content present in books and the curriculum:

P19: well... then you can actually also learn to know them (other pupils) better personally.

P37: I think it’s always nicer to listen to the persons themselves who tell about their own experiences

P38: yeah... the books certainly don’t... or like they don’t tell about the feelings that things evoke and the person can... he/she can personally tell about these things.

Here the link of personalities and worldviews is apparent. The worldview as it appears personally and individually as emotionally valid experience (Nilsson 2014) seems to be an important aspect of worldview learning for the pupils. Naturally, this learning about personal worldviews and their meanings is something where the knowledge of the teacher is not at centre stage:

P13: ...when all the pupils have their own views and when they tell about it (worldview), the teacher can also gain new perspectives on the matter and teach these new perspectives to her next pupils.

P3: learning about their own views and not only about what the teacher knows

This position gives power to the pupils themselves in defining their worldviews. As explored in relation to discourses (Kimmanen and Poulter 2018) in WE classrooms, these possibilities can give an important voice to minorities and make their experience visible. These comments contrast ‘book knowledge’ with lived knowledge. However, there is also the danger of exoticizing minority religious experience. If the only position through which the minority religious pupils can have a voice in the classroom is religious expertise, this minimizes the possible positions available for the pupil in question and creates a ‘highly religious’ minority position.

In order to discuss the elements relating to personal worldviews in an integrative space, the pupils emphasized the need for respect and attention when listening to and learning from the experiences of others:

P18: respect

P16: yeah pretty sure it’s respect

P17: quiet attention when people speak

The last comment about attention captures the opinion of many pupils that others should be given space to express their thoughts and feelings in relation to worldviews. Including attention as a crucial skill for learning through individual experiences can be seen as key from the pragmatist perspective. The mutual action in the classroom space is something that requires goodwill and an attentive mode of being. Unlike non-personal knowledge relating to institutionalized worldviews, the meanings given by individuals are also temporally unique and require the attention and respect of others. As Taves et al. (2018) note, an experienced worldview can often be implicit and individuals take great care when, how

and to whom they articulate it. In articulating worldviews, they are also constantly formed, solidified and changed. Thus, respecting but also paying attention is necessary in a qualitatively different way than merely paying attention to a book or teacher's oration:

P15: well my views as I... I could be a... someone could say that I'm an atheist but I still believe in reincarnation, that is the logical way for me to see the afterlife. So my ways are often that I do not really believe in any gods and then people often criticize these beliefs but I'm used to it so...

P16: I think it's mostly either... we don't criticize things that people have in their heads... just mostly respect them.

P18: yeah, we're taught to respect other people's beliefs and their way of seeing things...

The comment of pupil 15 above also illustrates how the personal worldviews of pupils do not conform to a single organized worldview. The pupil in question relates how he often encounters criticism because of his eclectic worldview. However, the respectful attitude of others in the classroom makes it possible to explore and relate the pupil's worldview. In order to explore worldviews, the pupils felt it was important that this attention was also one of interest:

P21: if you're not interested... like if someone is for example a Hindu and then another pupil couldn't care less about Hinduism then that might be considered hurtful by that pupil.

The following contrasting experiences from two pupils discussing the theme of dialogue in the classroom sums up the need for quiet respect well:

P37: it's like so relaxed and there you can say things like how you feel they are... and you don't have to like be afraid that someone would start laughing or something...

P38: in our group things are a bit different... in our group I think it might be more difficult to give your opinion because everyone is not so... open in our group so they might just... shout something relating to another's opinions and stuff like that. That's probably why in our group we can't talk so openly about these things with the whole class.

These comments also reflect the fact that pupils are not necessarily talking about personal worldviews per se. More often the effects on the inclusivity of the mutual space are related to the atmosphere in the school, pupil relationships, possible discrimination and the school culture in general.

Discussions relating to religions and worldviews are never completely devoid of disagreements even when focusing on the personal level. On the contrary, as worldviews are a central part of individual identity and closely linked with personality, they can also incite arguments and conflict:

Researcher (R)1: The other thing you mentioned was that there can be some conflicts or arguments. Can you tell something about those?

P15: For example some of our classmates, they get really like... do you like actually believe in that? How stupid can you be that you can really do that and just... for example... they just pick on things that sound like off to them... and they just start arguing about them. And then they get really noisy.

P16: Also there are strong believers and also atheists and there are also like... people who don't really care so when they look at a new religion and they're like oh this is

like okay and everything and they start arguing because the strong believers... maybe sometimes they're like oh this is ridiculous or something like that.

In the comments a secular scientific position and a strong religious position are seen to be opposed. This relates to the themes of how religions and worldviews are presented and what discourses are employed when examining them. The pupils continue their discussion about the arguments:

P15: It actually can be quite a good thing that we... that there's arguments because that's the fastest way to learn

P18: yeah

P17: mm

P15: or not to learn... so. Then people will just understand it and arguments will slowly start to disappear... in the end.. you guys probably know all this

P18: when... the people that... maybe if I'm to present my religion, the people that are supposed to observe behave.. it helps you. Because when you present and if they're laughing and they are mocking at you and saying bad things about you, you don't feel like doing it anytime... yeah. So the people listening or watching should also behave so that it helps. It's a good idea.

The exploration of personal worldviews and the arguments that arose from conflicting positions or truth claims were seen almost as a necessary part of learning. However, this is difficult since it demands a lot of the teacher and the pupils themselves in order for the arguments to be fruitful.

Interestingly, some of the pupils, while emphasizing the importance of personal experiences and meaning, saw that knowledge related to religions would be best served when they go 'elsewhere':

P4: well like, if we go to China or somewhere like it then you should know something about their traditions, so that you are not completely ignorant about what they're doing there.

P36: yeah totally and... well here in Finland religion does not necessarily affect your life that much, but then when you look at some other countries like India or something like that then religion can be a very big part of their life.

This view that true difference and religious life is 'out there' is one that normalizes the secular position on religion in the Finnish context while emphasizing religion when examining different cultures. This can be a byproduct of the world religions approach that emphasizes religious dogmas, rituals and beliefs instead of the lived dimensions of religions.

Finally, some of the pupils emphasized the ability to explore different personal positions in worldviews in an integrative setting in relation to normativity in their former separative education. As one pupil explains:

P16: I feel like in religion... your own religion group you're more taught like you should do this, you should do that, right? But in the normal ethics... the mutual group, you can't really be like... say you need to do this, you need to do that because not everyone believes in the same thing.

The other three categories in the data consist of pupil talk that implies similar experiences to those from pupils in our previous study (Åhs et al. 2016). The second category

relates to the importance of mutual space in WE. Much like previous results (Åhs et al. 2016), the pupils generally saw the mutual classes as a positive and wanted to continue studying together. The third category contains comments relating to the importance of the teacher's professionalism and impartiality in an integrative classroom. These findings indicate that the role of the teacher in creating a mutual inclusive space for dialogue is extremely important, especially the teacher's sensitivity when dealing with different positions in the classroom. The teacher should create a space where the expression of individual views is possible but should not make assumptions regarding the pupil's background or supposed worldview. The pupils should also not be made to represent certain worldviews except when they come from their own initiative. The last category *challenges*, deals especially with difficult or contentious themes in the classroom. There was some overlap with category one especially with regard to possible themes that might offend or insult others. Other challenges related to the classroom atmosphere or to possible bullying unrelated to worldview education. Many of these challenges arose from more general phenomena in school but were also present in the integrative classroom. The importance of an accepting atmosphere, inclusive attitudes and tolerance were seen as key in school life.

## 7 Discussion

In this study we have analyzed pupil views on integrative worldview education. The main research findings were pupil experiences and thoughts relating to the importance and place of personal worldviews in such a classroom. In relation to our research questions, the results indicate that the pupils in this study emphasize the need to view religions and worldviews in general through their lived dimension which become apparent especially through individual experiences and personal worldviews. To these pupils the questions relating to the meaningfulness in being religious or non-religious are clearly more pertinent than the academic question 'what is religion?'. These results also indicate that in the Finnish WE tradition there is a need for a re-examination of concepts such as the pupil's own religion, religion and worldview and the usefulness of these concepts in conveying the nature of a personal and organized outlooks on life. Whether or not the model of WE is separative or integrative, there needs to be more care when exploring concepts relating to the relation between the pupil's worldview and various different organized worldviews. As the pupils emphasized, the membership principle does not necessarily reflect the worldview of the pupil, although it can play a significant role.

In accordance with the pragmatist perspective on worldviews, it would seem that the personal meaning making and lived experiential view of worldviews is considered extremely important by the pupils. The pupils were interested in worldviews as they were tied to the individuality of others and were not merely generalizations. This allowed pupils to see both the variety and plurality of worldviews but also made them intelligible when tied to particular persons, feelings and lives.

The discussions with the pupils reveal that an approach which emphasizes that it is necessary to consider the lived dimension of religions and worldviews (Ammerman 2016). The contrast between the official religiosity reflected through the world religions approach and the lived dimension of religion reflected through the personal worldviews of pupils was apparent in pupils' perspectives. However, the emphasis on personal and lived dimensions does not simply come out of an integrative classroom, it must be an active pedagogic and didactic choice in teaching WE.

We argue that the ‘learning from’ worldviews approach that entails a strong commitment to personal engagement and the lived experience is a way to strengthen subjectification (Biesta 2015) in WE. It is important to ensure that pupils can communicate their ideas and make meaning of the world in active dialogue with peers about religious and worldview matters as a part of their subjectification. The personal connection to the experiential and lived dimension of religion and worldviews can be crucial for cultivating pupils’ motivation towards the subject. This brings RE or WE outside the predictable confines of information to be learned about worldviews and focuses more on the subjectivities and their construction. To bear with the risk, the willingness of not completely controlling the subjectification aim of education is to deliver WE that expands outside the emphasis on qualification and socialization. Communication of the experienced and lived dimension of religion and worldviews leads us to the area of shared meaning making which is why pupils find it a personally relevant and interesting dimension of WE.

A challenge in an integrative setting when exploring personal worldviews is overcoming the secular/religious divide. In the data the pupils sometimes referred to religious ways of life and religious outlooks as something that are somewhere else and not that important to young people. Also, as seen in previous research (Kimanen and Poulter 2018), the secular position can achieve a status of false neutrality in the classroom, thus making religious positions ‘exotic’ topics, while the secular positions go unanalysed. These positions can create exclusion of the more religious pupils since the secular position is viewed as the norm (Berglund 2017). As Habermas (2010) notes, in a postsecular society where religion gains more visibility, the need to express religious themes through secular language is key. As seen in the data, the learning facilitated through encountering religion in personal worldviews as a messy, individual and heterogeneous phenomenon could offer one way for the more secular pupils to see the importance and meaning of religion for individuals in the everyday rather than seeing religion as something extranormal removed from individual lives.

However, Habermas (2010) emphasizes that a postsecular society also demands certain attitudes from secular positions: “the liberal state must also expect its secular citizens, in exercising their role as citizens, not to treat religious expressions as simply irrational” (Habermas 2010). As the school offers common basic education for all, it is the crucial platform where attitudes and behaviour towards other worldviews are formed. As seen in the studies of von Brömssen and Olgaç (2010), Sjöborg (2015) and Berglund (2017), the challenge that a worldview education must overcome is to frame religious lives as valid and meaningful worldviews which are compatible with modern society. We would argue that approaching religious ways of life also through their lived aspects as belief, habit, practice and emotion is a valid approach in solving this problem. In conjunction with this, the emphasis on personal worldviews, in which there is often a mix of secular values and religious or spiritual beliefs (Taves et al. 2018) can perhaps help bridge this divide. Ultimately, whether in the context of WE or school in general, religious positions and questions should be explored and be visible in order to avoid *religion-blindness* (Rissanen 2019), which seeks to avoid questions relating to religious issues. As noted in influential RE documents such as Signposts (Jackson 2014), religions should not be merely reduced to parts of culture or only “explored through practices, artifacts and buildings” (p. 21). Religions should also be seen through the beliefs, values and emotions of individuals. This requires valuing the perspectives and human dignity of others and seeing other worldviews as existentially valid (Jackson 2014).

What has been said before connects with the so-called Big Ideas in religious education as formulated in the British context by Wintersgill (2017) and critiqued and developed



further by Freathy and John (2019). One of these ideas is the reflexivity and positionality of the individual. From understanding one's rootedness to a particular position with its limitations, one can learn to respect the multiple ways in which individuals orient themselves to the world. As Freathy and Davis note, the starting point of a Multi-Faith RE should not be a certain fixed tradition or the aim for a neutral space but rather a potential dialogical space of multiplicity and plurality (Freathy and Davis 2018). This has the potential to both encourage the reflexivity of the individual's unique position and increase empathy towards other ways of being. As reflected in the data, we also need to focus on the plurality of individuals, their worldviews and their existential truths as they reflect and construct personal worldviews in transaction with their environment. It is necessary for this reflexivity to anchor into the personal worldview and thus into both secular and religious positions, beliefs and practices. For some, worldviews can appear as family traditions, for others they are sources of emotion and meaning, explicitly chosen beliefs or largely irrelevant thought systems. Because individuals harbour a wide variety of positions regarding worldviews and their relationship to their presumed own religion can be mixed, we cannot assume that a certain worldview and its premises can offer all pupils an understanding of concepts such as sacred, meaningful and existentially valid. It is through encountering worldviews with other individuals that an understanding of what is meaningful or sacred for individuals can come to fruition.

While the current Finnish NCCBE (2014) emphasizes the role of learning from worldviews in terms of identity and reflection upon questions of worldviews, it is often unclear how this would come about. We propose that an important part of learning from worldviews is the exploration and reflection of worldviews present in the classroom and traditions through their lived dimensions. The integrative setting might make this more apparent, but it is of course also possible in a separative setting. However, the separative setting proposes similarity in worldviews of pupils according to their background and can confuse the pupils as well as the teacher on whether organized or personal worldviews are being examined in the classroom (Zilliacus 2019). We should see pupils' worldviews as constructed of many meanings of which some are religious and others are non-religious, and yet others are in-between. By turning more of our attention to the worldviews of pupils, their personal meanings and the construction process of worldviews, learning from worldviews and religions can play a more central role in worldview education. However, whether or not this approach is emphasized in integrative or separative settings is another matter. Also the heterogeneity in various geographical areas of Finland is an important aspect to consider (Holm et al. 2019; Rissanen et al. 2019).

The way in which teachers approach religion and worldviews as concepts should be carefully examined: who do we ascribe the power to define what a certain religion or worldview is? How is this definition related to the heterogeneous lived dimension of individual worldviews? What elements of religions or worldviews are emphasized or diminished in this approach? In an integrative classroom the world religions approach alone or the absolute separation of secular and religious become deficient in taking into account the lived (Ammerman 2016), experienced and personal levels of worldviews (Miedema 2017), which is also apparent to the pupils themselves. Thus, the framing of the key concepts of religion and worldviews themselves and how the teacher approaches them should take centre stage in planning integrative WE. The lived, existential, psychological, personal and sociological aspects of religions and worldviews should take on a bigger role if we are to aim for a truly inclusive integrative education that also empowers the individual to explore worldviews as they are lived personally and communicatively. In order to explore and reflect upon the lived dimensions of a worldview, what is required is for the pupils to

feel safe and respected, which is fostered by the teacher and the pupils alike. We are not idealistic about the possibilities of such a classroom in the everyday school life with its various practical and social challenges, but it should be one that we can strive towards.

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