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**Vesa Åhs**

# **WORLDVIEWS AND INTEGRATIVE EDUCATION**

A Case Study of Partially Integrative Religious Education  
and Secular Ethics Education in a Finnish Lower Secondary  
School Context

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to examine partially integrative religious and secular ethics education in the Finnish context. By studying experiences and viewpoints relating to partially integrative teaching of religious education (RE) and secular ethics in a lower secondary school context, this study aims to highlight relevant meanings and problems relating to learning in the integrative teaching of RE and secular ethics. While Finnish RE and secular ethics teaching is separative on the level of the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, some lower secondary schools have started to implement partially integrative practices, where the different curricula of RE and secular ethics are taught integratively in the same classrooms.

This study is an article-based thesis comprised of three original refereed research articles (Åhs, Poulter & Kallioniemi 2016, 2019a & 2019b). These articles investigate the views of pupils, the teachers, headteachers and the parents or guardians of the pupils relating to possibilities and issues in integrative classrooms of religious education and secular ethics. The study investigates these themes through three research questions: 1. What are the pertinent views and meanings given in relation to an integrative space of learning religions and worldviews? 2. How do pupils perceive and view an integrative space for learning in the light of their experiences? 3. How do different stakeholders in education: parents, teachers and head teachers view integrative classrooms?

The study was implemented with a mixed methods approach and a variety of different data was gathered from a total of four lower secondary schools implementing partially integrative teaching of religious education and secular ethics in the metropolitan area of Helsinki. The data of the study consists of questionnaires to pupils attending partially integrative religious and secular ethics education (N=174), individual pupil interviews (N=40), survey data from the guardians of the pupils (N=174), interviews of teachers and head teachers (N=6) and group interviews of pupils (N=38). The quantitative questionnaire data was analysed with SPSS and the qualitative data with qualitative content analysis.

The results of this study indicate that while there are many challenges in implementing integrative practices within a separative system of religious education and secular ethics, the majority of the pupils, teachers and guardians of the pupils view integrative practices as a positive phenomenon in relation to learning and dialogue about religions and worldviews. These positive views were attributed to the possibility of discussing religions and worldviews across religious education and secular ethics group boundaries, the presence of friends across these different groups, and the equality of pupils in relation to school timetables, materials and teaching arrangements. The pupils especially appreciated opportunities to hear about and discuss religious and worldview themes as they appeared in the lived lives of other pupils. These views and discussions appeared in partially integrative classrooms where inclusivity and a safe space were created and pupils were not expected or forced to present their own views but could do so of their own volition. The safe space in which to explore these themes relied on the presence of friends, teacher reflexivity and sensitivity towards various different worldview positions, and mutual attentiveness and goodwill towards the experiences of others.

The results also indicated challenges in implementing partially integrative practices. Some pupils highlighted the need for religious education and secular ethics to be taught separately. This was mainly due to the fact that in their minds a separative form of teaching could better provide knowledge about the pupils' own religion and a safe space to learn about it. In the case of pupils from secular ethics groups, an integrative form of teaching was sometimes associated with the presence of religious themes, which were largely absent in the separative classes of secular ethics. While the teachers saw that implementing integrative practices within a separative system was challenging in many respects, they highlighted that partially integrative teaching could provide new platforms for learning religions and worldviews together that a fully separative form of RE and secular ethics could not offer. The guardians saw that partially integrative teaching of religious education and secular ethics provided the pupils with a more comprehensive view of different positions regarding religions and worldviews and mirrored society more accurately, since other contexts of study and work would require the pupils to encounter many different religions and worldviews. When interpreting the results, it is necessary to take into account the partially integrative nature of the classrooms and the previous experiences of separative RE and secular ethics of pupils and parents.

Based on the research results, it could be claimed that possibilities to implement integrative teaching should be taken into consideration when developing the RE and secular ethics in lower secondary school. Reflection in relation to positionality of different religions and worldviews in the classroom seems to be important when developing and implementing such teaching.

Especially the equality of different worldviews in the classroom and noting the individuality and heterogeneity in worldviews can be seen to be important parts of this reflexivity.

*Keywords:* worldview education, religious education, secular ethics, integrative education, basic education

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### **Tiivistelmä**

Tämä väitöskirjatutkimus tarkastelee osittain integroitua uskonnon- ja elämäntiedon opetusta suomalaisessa peruskoulussa. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, mitä keskeisiä kokemuksia, merkityksiä ja mahdollisia ongelmia liitetään osittain integroidusti toteutettuun uskonnon- ja elämäntiedon opetukseen. Vaikka suomalainen uskonnon- ja elämäntiedon opetus on eriytetty eri opetussuunnitelmiin valtakunnallisella tasolla, eräät koulut toteuttavat katsomusaineiden opetusta osittain yhdistetysti peruskoulussa. Tämä tutkimus kohdistuu yläkouluun.

Tämä artikkeliväitöskirja koostuu kolmesta vertaisarvioidusta tieteellisestä julkaisusta (Åhs, Poulter & Kallioniemi 2016, 2019a & 2019b), jotka käsittelevät oppilaiden, opettajien, rehtorien ja huoltajien kokemuksia ja näkemyksiä uskonnon ja elämäntiedon osittain integroidun opetuksen mahdollisuuksista ja ongelmista. Väitöskirjan päätutkimuskysymykset ovat: 1. Millaisia näkemyksiä ja merkityksiä liitetään osittain integroituu uskonnon- ja elämäntiedon opetukseen? 2. Mitkä ovat oppilaiden näkemykset osittain integroidusta opetuksesta omien kokemustensa valossa? 3. Millaisia näkemyksiä oppilaiden huoltajilla, opettajilla ja rehtoreilla on osittain integroidusta katsomusopetuksesta?

Tutkimus toteutettiin monimenetelmällisesti ja tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin neljästä helsinkiläisestä yläkoulusta. Aineisto koostuu oppilailta kerätystä kyselyaineistosta (N=174), oppilaiden haastatteluista (N=40), oppilaiden huoltajilta kerätystä lyhyestä kyselystä (N=174), opettajien ja rehtorien haastatteluista (N=6) ja oppilaiden ryhmähaastatteluista (N=38). Kvantitatiivinen kyselyaineisto analysoitiin SPSS-ohjelman avulla ja kvalitatiivinen haastatteluaineisto laadullisella sisällönanalyysillä.

Tulokset osoittavat, että valtaosa oppilaista, huoltajista ja opettajista piti osittain integroitua uskonnon- ja elämäntiedon opetusta myönteisenä ilmiönä oppimisen ja katsomusdialogin kannalta. Opetuksen myönteiset vaikutukset liittyivät oppilaiden mahdollisuuksiin keskustella uskontoihin ja muihin katsomuksiin liittyvistä teemoista uskonnon- ja elämäntiedon opetuksen ryhmäraajat ylittäen, ystävien läsnäoloon katsomusryhmästä huolimatta

sekä oppilaiden yhdenvertaisuuteen koulun aikatauluissa, opetusmateriaaleissa ja opetuksen järjestelyissä. Oppilaat arvostivat mahdollisuuksia keskustella siitä, miten uskonnot ja muut katsomukset näkyvät muiden oppilaiden elytyssä elämässä. Nämä keskustelut olivat mahdollisia niissä integroidun opetuksen luokkahuoneissa, joissa tarjottiin turvallinen tila, jossa oppilaan ei odotettu edustavan tiettyä katsomusta vaan hän sai kertoa omista näkemyksistään omilla ehdoillaan. Oppilaat korostivat, että tämä turvallinen tila rakentui ystävien läsnäolosta, yhteisesti osoitetusta huomiosta ja arvostuksesta eri näkemyksiä kohtaan, sekä opettajan reflektiivisyydestä ja sensitiivisyydestä eri uskontoja ja katsomuksia kohtaan. Oppilaiden huoltajat ja opettajat näkivät, että kokemukset integroidusta opetuksesta voivat tarjota oppilaille monipuolisemman kuvan eri katsomuksista, täten heijastellen sitä moninaista yhteiskuntaa, johon oppilaat ovat kasvamassa.

Osittain integroidun katsomusopetuksen toteuttamisessa on myös haasteita eriytetyn uskonnon- ja elämäkatsomustiedon opetusmallin puitteissa. Osa oppilaista korosti eriytetyn uskonnon opetuksen tarvetta ja merkitystä. Näille oppilaille eriytetty opetus tarjosi enemmän tietoa heidän omasta uskonnostaan ja tilan, jossa tätä tietoa saattoi omaksua ja keskustella siitä. Osa elämäkatsomustiedon oppilaista puolestaan kertoi, että yhteinen opetus korosti enemmän uskontojen roolia ja näkyvyyttä verrattuna elämäkatsomustiedon opetukseen. Opettajat kertoivat, että osittain integroidun opetuksen toteuttaminen eriytetyn järjestelmän puitteissa oli haastavaa aikataulujen ja asiasisällön määrän vuoksi. He korostivat silti, että osittain integroitu opetus tarjosi uudenlaisen oppimisympäristön keskustella ja oppia katsomuksista, joita eriytetty opetus yksinään ei voinut tarjota. Tuloksia tulkittaessa on muistettava, että niin opettajilla, oppilailla kuin huoltajillakin on aiempia kokemuksia eriytetystä uskonnon- ja elämäkatsomustiedon opiskelusta.

Tutkimustulosten pohjalta voidaan esittää, että yläkoulun uskonnon- ja elämäkatsomustiedon opetusta kehitettäessä tulisi kiinnittää huomiota mahdollisuuksiin luoda opetusryhmärajat ylittäviä oppimismahdollisuuksia. Opetukseen liittyvä katsomusreflektiivisyys on avainasemassa tällaista opetusta järjestettäessä. Tällöin tulee kiinnittää huomiota eri katsomusten asemaan luokkahuonetilanteessa. Erityisesti oppilaiden katsomusten tasavertainen asema, yksilöllisten katsomusten huomioiminen ja katsomuksellisen monimuotoisuuden hahmottaminen ovat tällöin tärkeitä opetuksen suunnittelun ja toteutuksen lähtökohtia.

*Avainsanat:* katsomusopetus, uskonnonopetus, elämäkatsomustieto, integroitu opetus, perusopetus

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## LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

### **Study I:**

**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. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2015.1128311>

### **Study II:**

**Åhs, V., Poulter, S., & Kallioniemi, A. (2019a).** Preparing for a World of Worldviews: Parental and School Stakeholder Views on Integrative Worldview Education in a Finnish Context. *British Journal of Religious Education* 41(1), 78–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2017.1292211>

### **Study III:**

**Åhs, V., Poulter, S. & Kallioniemi, A. (2019b).** Pupils and Worldview Expression in an Integrative Classroom Context. *Journal of Religious Education* 67(3), 203-221. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-019-00088-0>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

*So sees and listens the true educator the phenomenon of life. And most clearly, he perceives it in the growing person. In listening to the sounds of young people and children and seeing their actions he will come to understand development, of which he is taking care of. All of this is done so that when the time is ripe, the educator would see her pupils singing correctly the melody of their own life. (Hollo 1952, 44)*

The quote above by renowned Finnish educational thinker J.A. Hollo offers a perspective into the fundamental purpose of education and teaching. While education prepares pupils for action in an ever more complex world, it is also pertinent to ask what is the role and place of the unique individual voice of the pupil in the means and ends of such education.

This study deals with education relating to worldviews and religions in public schools, there being various notions relating to the aims and goals of such education. This study fundamentally deals with the question of what is the purpose of religious and worldview education in today's school in Finland. The aim of the study is to explore partially integrative teaching of religious education (RE) and secular ethics or ethics (*elämäkatsomustiето* in Finnish) as a novel phenomenon in the Finnish educational landscape. Perhaps more importantly, the aim is to evaluate how the views presented relating to these classrooms can offer new tools for thinking about Finnish RE and secular ethics. This study presents research into integrative education in the Finnish context through three published research papers. While the original research deals with the views of pupils and other educational stakeholders (parents, teachers, head teachers) on integrative classrooms, the study in general aims to provide an overview of the research process relating to these research articles.

Chapter 1 looks into current key questions in RE and secular ethics from a global perspective, and gives an overview of Finnish RE and secular ethics education and the integrative forms of this education that have appeared as grass-roots level implementations in many public and private schools in Finland. Research questions are explored in Chapter 2. Theoretical starting points, methodology, ethics and an overview of the research process are examined in Chapter 3. In this study I will also highlight a number of pertinent results from the original research articles and discuss the validity of the research and its results in Chapter 4. The results and the research process itself presented many relevant themes for larger conceptual considerations about RE and secular ethics

teaching. Questions about the core concepts and approaches in RE are extremely pertinent in international contexts (e.g. Biesta et al. 2019; Flanagan 2019; Freathy & John 2018; van der Kooij et al. 2013, 2017; Valk 2009, 2017a; Wintersgill 2017) and my aim is to reflect on the results from the original refereed articles in the light of these questions in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 explores the possible practical implications of this research, indicates possibilities for further research and offers some conclusions.

While investigating pupil, teacher and parental views on integrative platforms of teaching RE and secular ethics, this study also aims to explore fundamental questions relating to learning in school RE and secular ethics. In order to understand the world, we must understand the way in which these systems of thought present and view the world. They affect people's behaviour, emotions and goals. In a global world, learning about religions and worldviews is an ever more pertinent goal. However, schooling also deals with the unique individual development of the young person and should, as the Finnish law regarding basic education formulates it, foster the development of "humanity and ethically responsible citizenship in society" (Law Regarding Basic Education 422/2012, 2§). More than knowledge is needed if ethical responsibility and citizenship in an ever more complex society is to be nurtured. How both of these goals can come about is a key question in RE and secular ethics, both subjects which explicitly consider the worldviews of individuals and communities.

## **1.1. Religions, worldviews and RE in a global context**

While the tradition of implementing religious education or worldview education varies in different countries, questions relating to how religions and different ways of viewing the world should be a part of school life are globally pertinent. Religions and worldviews are increasingly seen as important themes to explore in relation to multiculturalism in conjunction with themes such as class, ethnicity and language (Jackson 2014). In a post-secular society (Habermas 2006) religions seem increasingly present and relevant in the public space, along with the complex interplay of secular and religious positions of individuals, where a clear-cut dichotomy between these two might not be accurate in describing individual and group positions (Moberg, Nynäs, Granholm 2012, 3-6). While secularization still affects many aspects of society in the West and internationally, with many more individuals describing themselves as having no religion (Woodhead 2017), the view that religions would disappear from the world stage and public space can be seen as far too narrow (Casanova 2009, 2018).

It is debatable whether or not the current societal situation can be described as post-secular (Fordahl 2017, Taira 2014) since there is no clear consensus on

academic forums about the nature of religion and its relationship to society and politics in the current global world. Moreover, one unifying concept to grasp the many ways in which religion appears in the modern world is perhaps impossible (Fordahl 2017). It could be said that the many forms of modernity (Eisenstadt 2000) in many different contexts create different forms of religiosity. However, the resurgence of new forms of religiosity and spirituality and the renewed interest in the links between religion and politics (Fordahl 2017) paint a complex picture of the changing worldview landscape where many different processes relating to religiosity and worldviews are ongoing.

Religiosity is still present in society in many ways, whether in the plurality of religious traditions or the heterogeneity of religious identities (Utriainen, Lassander, Nynäs 2012). Plural forms of religiosity and spirituality are ever more present in Europe, the United States and globally (Hiroko, Partridge & Woodhead 2009; Karjalainen 2018; Nynäs, Illman & Martikainen 2015; Singleton, Rasmussen, Halafoff & Bouma 2019). Thus, readiness to encounter and discuss themes pertaining to religious plurality also in school education can be seen as pertinent in the light of this global and local plurality (Avest & Wielzen 2017; Biesta et al. 2019; Jackson 2014). Similarly, non-religious positions should also be viewed from a plural perspective. For example, a current report (Singleton et al. 2019) from Australia shows that as much as 52% of young people do not identify with a religious organization or denomination and identify as having no religion. Further examination reveals that these *nones* are not singularly secular, since questions relating to religions and worldviews can be extremely topical to many young people (Singleton et al. 2019). However, they do not necessarily view belonging to religious organization as the defining factor in their worldview identity (Singleton et al. 2019). Similar views from Europe (Woodhead 2017) and the United States (Pew Research Center 2019) are presented, which point to the heterogeneity within worldviews and the rise in identities in which people do not necessarily affiliate with a single organized religion or worldview.

Thus, while the traditions of exploring religious and worldview themes within schools are myriad, plurality in both local and global contexts continue to necessitate giving an education in which the pupils learn and gain tools to encounter and engage in dialogue about religions and worldviews (Jackson 2014). Internationally, there is much interest in the key concepts and approaches in RE. For example, in the British context, the recent key document Big Ideas aims to conceptualize the key issues and approaches in relation to school RE (Wintersgill 2017). Further critiqued and expanded on (Freathy & John 2018), these ideas and approaches aim to conceptualize learning about religions and worldviews in a diverse way in which both knowledge, plurality of positions and pupil and student meaning making is considered.

With the resurgence of religiosity, the advancement of secularization and new forms of spirituality, the need for dialogue and encounter between worldviews has been emphasized as one critical element in school RE (Avest & Wielzen 2017, Jackson 2014, Valk 2017a,). The Council of Europe, in its recommendation from 2008 about intercultural learning and worldviews highlights the importance of dialogue and communication in education between people from different cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds (Council of Europe 2008). As has been noted, this communication and dialogue is deemed essential for 'living together' and for the recognition of mutual human rights (Franken 2017).

However, it would seem that especially dialogue between secular and religious positions can be challenging, and that religious positions can easily be characterized as backwards or irrational ways to approach the world (Habermas 2010, Ippgrave 2016, Kittelmann Flensner 2015). At the same time, pupils with more religious worldviews can have problems negotiating between their religious identity and its relationship to secular citizenship (Berglund 2015, Francis & Penny 2017). Also, many empirical studies point to the increasing number of personal worldviews which are not associated with a single religious or non-religious tradition (Woodhead 2017, Pew Research Center 2019, Singleton 2019, Kuusisto et al. 2017). In this light, education should promote an understanding of different worldviews as relevant and existentially valid orientations in today's world, whether secular, religious or in-between (Biesta et al. 2019). It would seem that education relating to the diversity of religions and worldviews can increase mutual understanding and an appreciation of the diversity of worldviews in society (Halafoff, Arweck & Boisverth 2015). However, the question of how this education should effectively be organized and how communication and dialogue can be fostered are not simple questions to answer. It would seem that mutual study with pupils from various different religious and non-religious backgrounds is key in order to enhance the skills needed to respectfully engage in dialogue and communication (Council of Europe 2008, Jackson 2014).

Along with the need for dialogue, one clear emphasis in the current discussion about school RE is to look critically at the very concepts we use in education in relation to individual and group positions (Biesta et al. 2019, Freathy & John 2018, Jackson 1997, Poulter, Riitaoja & Kuusisto 2015, Riitaoja & Dervin 2014) and how they may either hinder or help encountering, learning and understanding different positions in relation to religions and worldviews. In a post-secular society where religious and secular positions can no longer be necessarily viewed through clear-cut distinctions (Cush 2013) as individual worldviews are intersectional in this regard, a critical look into how "religion", "religiousness", "non-religiousness" and "religious literacy" are framed and approached in education could be seen as critical (Biesta et al. 2019, Riitaoja & Dervin 2014). As Biesta and others (2019) remark in their recent exploration on religious literacy:



*The issue here comes down to how religion is conceptualized, and the dominant approaches share the tendency to characterize 'religion' and being 'religious' as an object of study. Indeed, for a long time, religion has been classified as primarily something private and separate to the public sphere of life. However, in the post-secular context there has been a reframing of religion and this could allow for the focus to be shifted away from the object of religion and onto the subject of religion. In this new way of framing things, the question of 'religion' then becomes more like what does it mean for someone to live life religiously? (p. 29)*

The current plurality of worldviews seems to necessitate a look into being religious or non-religious as themes which can be engaged in dialogue and discussion. In this approach, critical notions about how we frame religions and secular positions when engaging in discussion could be seen as of paramount importance (Biesta et al. 2019).

## **1.2 Religions and worldviews in the Finnish context**

The changes in Finnish religious and worldview landscape mirror the global changes discussed above. More generally, the societal and religious change in Finland over the past years has necessitated a look into what forms of RE could best serve the education of pupils into membership in a plural society (Ubani, Rissanen & Poulter 2019).

There has been considerable change in how issues relating to religion and worldviews are viewed in society today. While Finland has always been culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse, the questions relating to the plurality of religions and worldviews in society and the need for dialogue between different worldview positions (Rautionmaa, Illman & Latvio 2017) have increased (Illman, Ketola, Latvio & Sohlberg 2017) due to societal changes. These societal changes in relation to religions and worldviews can be viewed from three different viewpoints.

First, although multiple religious denominations have been present in the Finnish religious landscape for long periods of time (Pauha, Onniskä & Bahmanpour 2017; Weintraub 2017) and the internal diversity of traditional religious organizations such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church has always been present in various different revival movements and interpretations, the variety of religious denominations and cultures has increased considerably in Finnish society in the past few decades (Illman, Ketola, Latvio & Sohlberg 2017). This has necessitated exploration into the ways in which public school education can offer tools to encounter diversity of religions and worldviews in current society (e.g. Ubani, Rissanen & Poulter 2019).

Second, while religious denominations have often been considered when discussing worldviews, it has become increasingly pertinent to also discuss secular and non-religious worldviews and their place in learning about and encountering different positions (Ilman et al. 2017; Ylikoski 2017). Although secular positions have likewise always been a part of the diversity in Finnish worldview landscape, the number of individuals who do not belong to any religious denomination has increased in recent years and non-religious positions have become increasingly more visible in society (Ilman et al. 2017; Taira 2014). Even among members of religious denominations there are a considerable number of secularized individuals whose worldview cannot straightforwardly be categorized as religious (Ketola et al. 2017). The variety and multidimensionality in non-religious or secular worldviews has also been noted, with individuals varying considerably in how they orient themselves to, for example, spirituality, religions and religiosity (Kontala 2018). This change can also be seen on the level of school RE curricula, where the need to explore non-religious and secular worldviews in conjunction with religious worldviews has been further emphasized in the current National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCCBE 2014) when compared to previous versions of the NCCBE (NCCBE 2004).

Third, worldview diversity can be examined through the various worldview identities that individuals construct. While research seems to suggest that both religions and secular positions remain pertinent in the global landscape (Casanova 2018, Pew Research Center 2017), empirical evidence has also shown that personal positions can often be extremely heterogeneous when considering religious or non-religious positions. The views of adolescents, for example, can be much more diverse with relation to different worldview traditions, and pertinent and salient issues to one's own worldview are constructed from many different religions and worldviews in the course of the identity process (Helve 2015). Officially belonging to a certain organized religion or worldview is thus just one aspect from which to view the heterogeneity of worldviews when considering them as a phenomenon (Helve 2015; Kuusisto, Poulter & Kallioniemi 2017). Fluidity in relation to positions which might combine elements from various different religious and non-religious worldviews should thus also be considered, and when speaking about personal worldviews of individuals, religious and secular should not be viewed as necessarily opposing or exclusive positions (Nynäs, Ilman & Martikainen 2015) since both elements can be relevant to the worldview of an individual.

From this perspective, it is extremely pertinent to ask what sort of skills and knowledge should schools offer their pupils to help them encounter and understand religious and worldview diversity in all its different forms in society? As seen in accounts of RE's goals and their historical change (e.g. Poulter 2017, 2019) in relation to citizenship, these goals have increasingly emphasized

individuality and individuals as ethical actors in society. Whether or not the emphasis on individuality is desirable, these goals can also be seen to reflect a more global orientation, where the future of the world on a larger scale is seen to be plural in various secular and religious ways which the individual should be able to encounter (Poulter 2019). Knowledge but also readiness to encounter and discuss religious and worldview issues with empathy and the provision of tools to critically examine the different views and perspectives could be seen as important goals for RE in a plural society.

### **1.3 Religious education and secular ethics in the Finnish educational context**

The Finnish educational system is rather unique when viewed from an international perspective. While perhaps best known in relation to its success in PISA scores (Väljärvi & Sulkunen 2016), where the previous high performance of Finnish pupils has been noted, the Finnish comprehensive school's main goal can be seen to be in providing all pupils with equity and quality in relation to education (Niemi 2016, 23-24). While this is somewhat true, until the late 1960s the Finnish school system was still separated into two distinct educational paths that were strongly connected to the socio-economic and academic background of pupils and their parents. In contrast to this dual system, the 1968 Basic Education Act created a mutual compulsory comprehensive school for all pupils for the first nine years of education (from ages 7 to 16) or *basic education* (Vitikka, Krokfors & Rikabi 2016). The first National Core Curriculum for this mutual basic education was created in 1970 and this document, which guides all education in the comprehensive school, has been renewed in 1985, 1994, 2004 and 2014 (Vitikka et al. 2016, 83-84).

Basic education in comprehensive school is divided into primary education in grades 1 to 6 (ages 7 to 12) and lower secondary education in grades 7 to 9 (ages 13 to 16). Qualified teachers in primary education have a master's thesis in educational sciences. In lower secondary education (ages 13 to 16), teachers have a master's thesis in the subject they teach (e.g. theology or science of religion in RE) in which studies in pedagogy and didactics are included. Thus, it could be said that Finnish teachers are highly professional and teaching is still a relatively sought after career path, which is indicated in the high number of applicants for university master's programs for teaching (Toom & Husu 2016).

The current NCCBE (2014) is an educational tool which provides the general aims, content and pedagogy for all school subjects in the comprehensive school, while the overall goals, framework, responsibilities and rights in relation to education are set in the legal framework of the current legislation (Basic

Education Act 628/1998). The NCCBE, which is created by the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)<sup>1</sup> aims for equality of teaching in all comprehensive schools across the country and it is implemented in both public or private schools (Vitikka et al. 2016). However, schools still have independence in creating a local curriculum based on the NCCBE. Municipalities, or in the case of private schools the schools themselves, create a local curriculum which follows the subjects, aims and contents of the NCCBE but can also emphasize local conditions and features (Vitikka et al. 2016, 83-86). As noted by the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Finnish educational system, which is compulsory for all children, is implemented rather similarly in relation to the goals, aims and contents across the country (EDUFI 2018a). Private schools operate under the same NCCBE but have slightly more freedom because their local curriculum is created at the school level. From basic education onwards, pupils often either apply for general (*lukio*) or vocational (*ammattikoulu*) upper secondary education. This applying is mostly based on the grades they receive at the end of basic education (EDUFI 2018a). Upper secondary education further gives the students the eligibility to continue to higher education. Most institutions providing basic and upper secondary education in Finland are publicly funded (EDUFI 2018a).

While the framework of comprehensive education thus aims to provide equality for all pupils, it is a moot point whether equity can be achieved. Studies show, for example, that intergenerational transmission of income (Sirniö 2016) and school selection (Berisha & Seppänen 2017; Kosunen & Seppänen 2015) are creating differences in relation to school performance levels across the country (Itkonen 2018), with separative lines of educational performance drawn in relation to class, income and ethnicity. Especially relevant are questions relating to how Finnishness is conceived in education, and whether or not schools and teachers have enough tools to critically reflect on the possible inclusive and exclusive mechanisms within education as the heterogeneity of languages, ethnicities, cultures and worldviews in schools is increasing (Itkonen 2018). The continuing segregation of the Finnish comprehensive school in relation to pupil backgrounds can be seen as a major challenge in the current educational landscape that enhances class divisions within society (Seppänen et al. 2015). On a smaller scale, the question about equality has also been ongoing in relation to RE and secular ethics. It has been debated whether or not the current system of RE in Finland provides pupils with equal skills and starting points in engaging with matters of religions and worldviews and provides the needed readiness to encounter worldview diversity in society today (Ubani, Rissanen & Poulter 2019).

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1 The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) operates under the Ministry of Education and culture. Its core task is to develop education at different levels in Finnish society. The Agency develops the National Core Curriculum at the state level.

Finnish RE in both basic education and upper secondary education is officially non-confessional, yet separative model of RE that is organized *according to the pupils' own religion* which offers education not only in Evangelical Lutheran and Orthodox Christianity but also in 11 different minority religions (Kallioniemi & Ubani 2016). All the different forms of RE share the same general aims and goals, but their contents and approaches vary in emphasizing the particular tradition which they are based on (NCCBE 2014). By *separative* RE, I refer to a form of religious or worldview education where pupils are separated according to some principle into different classrooms (Alberts 2007). The current separative model in Finland was redefined in the Freedom of Religion Act in 2003, which emphasized the principle of positive religious freedom. Emphasis is on the right of pupils to receive religious education or secular ethics education in line with their religious or cultural backgrounds and the wishes of their parents (Kallioniemi & Ubani 2016). Although RE continues to be organized according to the religious denomination of the pupil, as a consequence of the 2003 legal reform, *confession* as the basis of separation was changed to education according to one's *own religion* (Basic Education Act 628/1998, 13 § 454/2003). RE curricula are a part of the NCCBE and thus the aims and contents of the subject are developed by the Finnish Board of Education in cooperation with educational professionals and religious communities, while the education itself is controlled by the state (Kallioniemi & Ubani 2016).

While Finnish RE has been officially non-confessional since the 1970s, many different aspects of RE remained in at least some forms confessional until much later. The Lutheran Church inspected RE textbooks until the 1990s, and up until the 2000s teachers were required to have membership in the denomination of the RE form they taught (Ubani 2019). In relation to the background in confessionality, it could be said that even today, the Finnish RE system views confessionality in a narrow sense, as confessionality is tied merely to the practice of religion (Zilliacus 2019) but not necessarily to other forms of confessionality such as normativity in education.

*Secular ethics* or *ethics*, in Finnish *elämäkatsomustieto*, which could be literally translated as *knowledge about the outlook on life* or, put into the concepts of this study, *knowledge about one's personal worldview*, is an alternative subject to different forms of RE. Although there have been alternative subjects to RE in the Finnish educational landscape since the Freedom of Religion Act in 1923, the current subject of secular ethics was first implemented in 1985 and with the implementation of the Religious Freedom Act in 2003, was conceived as a default subject for pupils who do not belong to any religious denomination (Salmenkivi 2013, Ylikoski 2017). Secular ethics can be viewed as a subject that explores worldviews, ethics and cultures from more philosophical, sociological and anthropological starting points, with more emphasis on culture, society

and worldviews than religious outlooks on life (Koirikivi, Poulter, Salmenkivi & Kallioniemi 2019). Here, worldview questions and the unique position of pupils and their lifeworld, rather than a certain worldview background, is taken as the starting point for worldview education (Honkala 2006). In the secular ethics curriculum, the role of religious worldviews is considerably smaller than in the various RE curricula (NCCBE 2014).

While the majority form of Evangelical Lutheran RE is offered throughout Finland, different forms of RE or secular ethics are adopted in schools if there are three or more pupils from that religious background in the administrative area where teaching is being implemented, and the parents or guardians of the pupils ask for RE to be offered (EDUFI 2018b, Kallioniemi & Ubani 2016). Pupils from minority religious backgrounds can also attend secular ethics or majority RE classes if they and their parents or guardians so choose. Pupils who belong to either the Evangelical Lutheran or the Orthodox Church cannot attend secular ethics or other forms of RE, but must study according to their own RE curricula (EDUFI 2018b). The amount of RE and secular ethics teaching in lower secondary school is one lesson or hour per week for the duration of the three years in lower secondary school. Often schools arrange this amount in a way where more lessons are held per week in a single period of the school year (EDUFI 2018b).

All qualified RE and secular ethics teachers have a master's degree which includes pedagogical studies. However, teacher qualifications are tied to certain forms of RE, for example Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox or Islamic RE. Many teachers study many different RE subjects in order to be qualified to teach them. So, for example, many RE teachers have qualifications to teach both RE and secular ethics. Since the teaching is non-confessional, the teacher does not need to be a member of the religious community from that form of RE (Kallioniemi & Ubani 2016; Ubani 2019).

The Finnish model of RE is thus non-confessional but separative according to the denomination of the pupil (Sakaranaho 2013, 2019). RE in Finland can also be described as adhering to a *membership principle*, which means that the type of RE the pupils receive is defined by belonging to a certain religious community. The goal of implementing RE according to one's own religion is to offer pupils knowledge, skills and outlooks which help them to understand the religions and worldviews in the world and offer building blocks for the pupil's own worldview formation (NCCBE 2014; Kallioniemi & Ubani 2016; Ketola et al. 2017). The goal of separative RE is to begin this learning process from the religious and cultural traditions that the pupil belongs to.

The Finnish model of RE and its developing emphases can be viewed roughly through notions regarding learning about and learning from which were devised by Grimmit and Reade (1975) and further explored by Grimmit (Grimmit 2000).



The *learning about* approach emphasizes knowledge relating to worldviews and religions, while *learning from* relates to how knowledge and encounters with different ways to view the world can offer pupils tools with which to construct their own worldviews (Grimmit 2000). The third notion of *learning religion* (Kallioniemi 2007) aims for education of the pupil into a certain religious way of life. The steady shift from a confessional to a non-confessional approach in Finnish RE has necessitated the emphasis on learning about and learning from religion (Kallioniemi & Ubani 2016). Although all forms of RE have similar goals, the development of one's own identity and worldview can be seen to adhere more closely to the organized religious tradition in certain forms of RE, such as Orthodox and Catholic Christianity (Kallioniemi & Ubani 2016). As Kallioniemi (2007) notes, *learning religion*, which indicates the goal of educating pupils into a single religious way of life, has been seen to be incompatible with non-confessionality. However, being tied to certain religious traditions, the separative forms of RE can still be seen to at least some extent emphasize learning religion (Koirikivi et al. 2019). The major question in a non-confessional form of RE is how the *learning from* process is conceptualized, and what exactly pupils are learning in relation to their personal worldviews (Teece 2010).

The current NCCBE (2014) emphasizes that all forms of RE view the religious and ethical dimensions of life from the viewpoint of the development of the pupil but also from a larger societal viewpoint of educating into citizenship (Kallioniemi & Ubani 2016). These two emphases reflect the fact that RE should provide the pupil with general knowledge and literacy relating to different religions and worldviews, but also give tools for the development and evaluation of one's own identity and worldview (NCCBE 2014, 466). When compared to previous versions of the NCCBE, the current curriculum emphasizes dialogue between and within traditions (Kallioniemi & Ubani 2016). However, in relation to the separative model of RE and secular ethics, it is not always clear what levels of dialogue in relation to religious traditions or individuals (Rautionmaa et al. 2017) are being discussed. While dialogue can be framed through dialogue between religious specialists, worldview experts or theologians, dialogue can also be framed through lived encounters on an individual level (Rautionmaa et al. 2017). Whether or not this can be achieved in a separative model has been a source of debate (Rissanen et al. 2019).

Religious education and religions in the Finnish state school system can be seen to be positioned, as Ubani (2019) notes, between secularist and culturalist traditions (Ubani 2019). The way in which religion is portrayed and viewed in the educational landscape can be seen to reflect a change from a secularist framework to a more post-secular position. Here religion appears as a more diverse, complex and plural phenomenon in society and individual lives, with individual identities also situated at the intersection of the religious and the

secular (Riitaoja & Dervin 2014). In this situation the secularist discourse that has been prevalent in previous decades, and aims for an objective view of religion with religion seen as inherently a private matter, can be seen to be inadequate in the current social climate. It can be argued that whatever form RE and secular ethics take, they should aim to grasp the challenges provided by new societal and global situations (Biesta et al. 2019).

## **1.4 Current academic discussion relating to the Finnish model of RE and secular ethics**

While it is claimed that separative RE and secular ethics can provide pupils with a safe platform from which to engage with questions relating to religions and worldviews, there are problems especially in relation to encounter with other worldviews: can a separative model prepare pupils to engage in discourse and encounter on worldview issues with individuals from various different positions (Rissanen, Ubani & Poulter 2019)? The separative model is also problematic in relation to confessionality in teaching. The Finnish system can be seen to reflect a narrow definition of non-confessionality, where confessionality is merely linked to religious practice (Zilliacus 2019), which is forbidden in school RE. However, in practice, emphasis on confessionality and adherence to a certain religion can still arise in the classroom due to the nature of RE classes according to one's own religion. Normativity about how a pupil should believe, act and live can easily become a part of such RE lessons (Kimanen 2017, Zilliacus 2019).

The concept of one's own religion, which is the basis of separative RE, has also been criticized as problematic, since it merely separates pupils according to membership, rather than choice regarding worldview, and mirrors a static view of pupils' worldview identity (Zilliacus, Paulsrud & Holm 2017). Moreover, the emphasis on educating pupils into certain traditions can be seen to future-fix their religious affiliation (Zilliacus 2019), which in the context of public education could be seen as problematic. This is especially pertinent in relation to pupils from Evangelical Lutheran and Orthodox Christian backgrounds, who cannot choose to study other forms of RE or secular ethics unless they quit their membership of the said religious organizations.

Traditionally, the right to a worldview or religion in the context of school has been viewed through, for example, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 18 § 4, which emphasizes the rights of parents in relation to school religious upbringing (Mawhinney 2015). In this view, the RE implemented in schools should be in line with the worldview and worldview upbringing the pupil receives at home. However, as Mawhinney (2015) notes, the right to religion and a worldview in the school context can also be examined



through earlier parts of Article 18, which emphasize the more general rights to religion and a worldview, thus emphasizing the rights of the pupil as well (Mawhinney 2015). While separative RE can be seen to respect the freedom of religion by giving pupils an education which respects and starts from their familial tradition, this often emphasizes parental freedom whereas it remains an open question how the choice and agency of the pupil is taken into account, since both the choice to participate in certain RE groups or opt out of RE groups can be restricted in the Finnish educational system (Zilliacus 2019).

Another possibly problematic issue is the very general separative curricula of RE. For example, only one form of RE in Islam is provided, Hinduism is provided in the form of Krishna consciousness (ISKCON) RE and Buddhist RE is only offered in one form (Sakaranaho 2019), although many different branches of Christian RE are offered. Another possible issue is the separation of RE and secular ethics, which are compulsory subjects in the curriculum. While they share similarities, the background sciences, approaches and emphases of these two subjects vary (NCCBE 2014, Koirikivi et al. 2019), and it is relevant to ask whether or not it is optimal for schools to provide different forms of education and approaches to religions and worldviews to pupils simply based on their background. The separative model can be seen to enhance the possibilities for pupils to negotiate their identity in relation to both their background and citizenship and offer a safe space for especially minority pupils for identity negotiations (Rissanen 2014). However, there have been doubts whether or not the current model actually meets the goal of supporting pupil identity formation (Zilliacus 2019) since it can presuppose pupil identities and leave little room for negotiations if a fixed belonging is taken as a starting point.

Another possibly problematic feature of the current model which is tied to certain religious denominations is the possibility of opting out of RE or secular ethics altogether. Not a large percentage, a total of 1,000 to 1,500 pupils per year (approximately 0.5 to 1% of pupils) in Finland, completely opt out of school education of RE or secular ethics.<sup>2</sup> These pupils might then receive this education from a religious community or at home. This, however, is problematic since it equates school education with education in a religious community or at home, and there are no ways in which to evaluate the education these pupils receive at home or the religious community.

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2 Statistics on the number of pupils in different forms of RE and secular ethics are provided yearly in the statistical services of the Finnish National Agency for Education. [www.vipunen.fi](http://www.vipunen.fi)

## 1.5 Integrative religious or worldview education globally and in Finland

In light of the issues relating to organizing separative RE in Finland, the desire to emphasize inter-worldview learning, encounter, dialogue and to provide equal teaching for all pupils, some schools in Finland have started to implement partially integrative practices of RE and secular ethics within the current separative system. In practice, this means teaching pupils from different RE classes and secular ethics in the same classrooms and integrating the contents of the pupils' curriculums (Käpylehto 2015). These forms of implementing RE and secular ethics aim to provide pupils with more tools to encounter and understand worldview diversity by emphasizing dialogue across separative RE and secular ethics groups.

Integrative (or integrated) religious or worldview education can be defined as education on religions and worldviews in a mutual classroom without separation with regard to pupils' backgrounds (Alberts 2007). RE models in other Nordic countries are integrative and although they have variations in the contents and approaches implemented, they all aim to somehow answer the need for dialogue and encounter in a plural society with a growing number of different religions and worldviews (Bråten 2009). Swedish RE or *Knowledge of Religions (Religionskunskap)* is a compulsory school subject which is non-confessional and integrative. The goals are especially those of learning about religions and worldviews, improving cohesion in the community and developing empathy and self-reflection towards worldview matters. Although having a comparative religions and ethics approach to teaching, the Swedish model has been criticized as "marinated" in a Christian Lutheran worldview with many approaches, topics and viewpoints explicitly and implicitly being framed through this worldview (Berglund 2013). *Religionskunskap* also aims to foster the development of empathy and self-reflection regarding religions and worldviews (Brömssen & Olgaç 2010), and while positive outcomes have been noted, many challenges such as difficulties in discussing different religious and non-religious positions have been noted (Kittelmann Flensner 2015). The Norwegian and Danish models of RE are also integrative, but along with learning about various religions and worldviews, they put the emphasis on learning about the Christian worldview, since it is seen to be culturally relevant (Bråten 2015; Llorent-Bedmar & Cobano-Delgado 2014). These approaches are not without their problems and, for example, the Norwegian integrative RE model has been reconceptualized due to court decisions at the European Court of Human Rights deeming it too partial towards certain worldviews (Bråten 2009). A critical issue seems to be how to integrate both religious and non-religious worldviews into the curriculum, especially if

the school subject has an extensive history in dealing mainly with religious worldviews (Bråten & Everington 2018).

Elsewhere in Europe and most notably Britain, forms of integrative RE have also been implemented (Alberts 2007). There is extensive literature relating to British integrative RE and the various approaches that have been implemented within it. Most notable are, for example, the interpretive approach of Robert Jackson (Jackson 1997), which emphasizes an anthropologically laden approach to learning about religions and worldviews through traditions, communities and individuals. Other notable approaches are, for example, the critical realist approach of Andrew Wright, which aims to take seriously the truth claims of various religious traditions (Wright 2000), and the narrative approach of Clive and Jane Erricker, which places the existential questions of pupils at the forefront in the classroom (Erricker & Erricker 2000).

In a broader international setting, for example in Quebec, models of fully non-denominational integrative RE can be found. In the Quebecian ERC (Ethics and Religious Culture) programme, pupils study different worldviews, ethics and religious culture in a common classroom in what is called a cultural approach to RE (Quebec Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2019). This model was developed as a result of the secularization and pluralization of the education system and society at large (Gravel 2016), and the accompanying need for dialogue and readiness to act in a multicultural society. Here the role of ERC is seen as crucial in providing pupils with religious literacy but also a readiness to discuss themes and issues relating to religions and worldviews in a post-secular society (Quebec Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2019).

While RE and secular ethics in the Finnish basic education and upper secondary school contexts are still implemented according to the separative model, worldview education in early childhood education has been implemented in integrative forms since 2016 (NCCECEC 2016). The emphases of this worldview education are the worldviews present in the experiences and communities of the child. While in other educational contexts RE and secular ethics are still separative on the level of curriculum, according to empirical studies, there are positive attitudes amongst the Finnish populace towards the possibility of a mutual worldview subject in schools. According to some studies, 63% of individuals in the general populace are positive towards integrating RE and secular ethics, with the number increasing to 72% when examining those who do not belong to any religious denomination (Ketola et al. 2017).

In integrative classrooms, pupils study according to their own RE or secular ethics curriculum, but since some themes within these curricula are similar, the teaching of these topics is done simultaneously. In conjunction with this, dialogue is emphasized and mutual exploration of worldview themes takes centre stage. However, since the nature of the NCCBE is separative, there are

still many challenges in implementing these integrative classrooms (Käpylehto 2015). Although the current NCCBE (NCCBE 2014) maintains that it is possible to integrate some parts of RE or secular ethics classes when deemed appropriate in light of the different curriculums, the implementation of these integrative classrooms maintains this integration as much as possible in the context of lower secondary school education (Käpylehto 2015). Teachers need to be well versed in the different curricula of religions and cooperation between different RE and secular ethics teachers is important for a successful integration of different RE curricula in the Finnish context (Åhs, Käpylehto, Poulter & Kallioniemi 2019; Käpylehto 2015).

Since the curriculum is still separative, the integrative classrooms have separative elements, such as individual lessons or periods where pupils study separately. Also, the teachers implementing these integrative practices separate the teaching to some extent even in integrative classrooms with, for example, different tasks for the pupils (Käpylehto 2015; Åhs et al. 2019c). However, the main change in these teaching implementations is the integrative classroom, where the pupils are no longer separated according to their membership in a certain religious community. In these classrooms, the emphasis is on discussion and mutual reflection along with the contents of the curriculum of the pupils (Käpylehto 2015).

The topics studied in the integrative classrooms are derived from RE and secular ethics curricula (NCCBE 2014). In all RE curricula, there are three main topics which aim for various goals, such as giving the pupils the opportunity to reflect on their own religion and worldview, learn about different religions and worldviews and reflect upon ethical themes (NCCBE 2014, 405). The first main topic is *relationship to one's own religion*, which consists of learning about the religion which the form of RE is based on. The second topic is the *world of religions*, which consists of learning about the variety of religions and non-religious worldviews in the world and Finland with the aim of enhancing knowledge about religions and worldviews and readiness for dialogue. The third main topic is *the good life*, which consists of learning, discussing and reflecting about societal, ethical and ecological themes and the ethical dimension of worldviews (NCCBE 2014). In integrative classrooms, the second and third main topics provide most possibilities for integration, while the first topic which emphasizes the pupil's own religion is often taught separately during the integrative teaching in lower secondary school.

The three main topics of the secular ethics curricula are *worldview and culture*, *ethics* and *human rights and a sustainable future* (NCCBE 2014). *Worldview and culture*, for example, consists of learning about different religious and non-religious worldviews, the concept of worldview, cultural heritage and the status of different worldviews in society. *Ethics* consists of learning the basics

of ethics, ethical theories, ethical questions in the world of adolescents and ethics and culture. *Human rights and a sustainable future* consists of themes relating to the concept of human rights, their history and implementation and different viewpoints on environmental ethics and a sustainable future (NCCBE 2014, 412-413). While the secular ethics curriculum provides three different key themes for study when compared to RE curricula, schools implementing integrative practices have created their own local curriculums in a way in which the similar themes in RE and secular ethics curricula are noted and taught integratively. As with the different curricula for RE, the secular ethics curriculum also demands a certain amount of separative teaching in order to ensure that all pupils are taught in accordance with the contents of the curriculum (Käpylehto 2015). From a curricular standpoint, the integration of different forms of RE and secular ethics provides greater challenges than simply integrating different forms of RE, since the secular ethics curriculum consists of goals and contents that differ from RE curricula. However, in the context of the schools studied, the local curriculum is constructed in a way in which similar contents from these two subjects are taught integratively.

During the research process, the new NCCBE (2014) was implemented to replace the old NCCBE (2004). Thus, the pupils in study I were still studying according to NCCBE 2004, while the pupils in study III studied according to NCCBE 2014. The main themes in RE and secular ethics between these two curricula consist of similar topics, although some changes were also applied. For example, in RE, while many themes such as world religions and worldviews, ethics and the Finnish worldview landscape are similar in these two forms of NCCBE, NCCBE 2004 had more emphasis on, for example, the scriptures and holy books of the background religion of the pupil and the history of the said religion (NCCBE 2004, 204-214). Although the NCCBE changed during the research process, since the main research interest was to explore views about learning in a mutual space, this change did not affect the orientation of the research process.

While the original research articles in this study explore the views and experiences relating to integrative classrooms, the possibilities of integrative classrooms as inclusive spaces to learn and act authentically in Finnish educational contexts have also been researched elsewhere (Ubani & Korkeakoski 2018; Ubani 2018a; Ubani 2018b). While these research projects explored integrative classrooms which were arranged as brief implementations within a school year, the research indicated that integrative classrooms could act as safe spaces to learn about worldviews. As Ubani (2019) noted when reflecting on these research projects, the pupils seemed in principle to enjoy integrative teaching and learning together and they were perhaps more willing to encounter various

different religions and worldviews than the educational structures currently permit (Ubani 2019).

Integrative classrooms can be seen to aim to strengthen the role of RE and secular ethics in educating pupils for a post-secular society where religions and worldviews should be visible in public space. The readiness to encounter, discuss and understand various religious and worldview positions has been emphasized as crucial skills in such a society (Biesta et al. 2019) and empathy towards positions other than one's own can also be seen as an important skill for school RE to provide (Poulter 2019). Separative RE has been seen to enable a safe space in which to engage in identity negotiations between religious belonging and citizenship, especially in the case of minority pupils (Rissanen 2014). However, there have been doubts whether or not an integrative space can offer a similar safe space and whether or not it is possible to integrate RE and secular ethics in a separative framework.

There has been much public and political debate regarding the implementation of RE and secular ethics in the Finnish context and the topic is very timely. While teachers of minority RE and secular ethics have often in public been against an integrative subject (Haikala 2018), a recent survey of 1,000 participants from many areas in Finland by a public service broadcasting company highlighted that 70 percent of individuals that participated were positive towards mutual integrative subject of RE and secular ethics (Mattila 2020). Recently, the current Minister of Education, Li Anderson, has emphasized the need for discussion relating to the possibility of a mutual integrative subject (Hara 2020). There has also been much debate regarding the legality, outcomes and desirability of integrating RE and secular ethics on a larger scale while the curriculum is still separative, as is the case in the schools studied. Different forms of integrative RE are currently being implemented in different parts of Finland and there have been legal cases where the forms of integrative RE have been seen to comply with the NCCBE (Alastalo 2013) and others where the teaching has been seen to endanger the rights of the pupils to receive education according to their own RE or secular ethics curriculum (Regional State Administrative Agencies 2016). There are differences in how these integrative classrooms are implemented and how well the teachers have planned the integration of different RE and secular ethics curricula.

The purpose of the research presented in this study is not to explore the legality or possibilities for integrative RE and secular ethics education. However, the classrooms provide a unique opportunity to explore how pupils who have extensive experience of separative classrooms view and experience the integrative space in relation to learning. Thus, the research in this study does not aim to explore educational outcomes or compare the educational outcomes of learning in separative or integrative classrooms but rather simply explore what pertinent

views, observations and meaning making come out of experiences in integrative classrooms. This is done by researching pupils and other school stakeholders who have previous experiences in separative forms of RE and secular ethics. By school stakeholders I refer to individuals who are in some way connected to school education. In this study valid stakeholders included pupils, the parents or guardians of the pupils, and school stakeholders, namely teachers and head teachers.

In the remainder of this study I will refer to the integrative teaching of religious education and secular ethics with the umbrella concept integrative worldview education (hence WE) (*katsomusopetus* in Finnish). I do this because the concept of integrative RE is not wide enough to include secular ethics and on a larger scale the many religious and secular worldview positions within the classrooms themselves. This umbrella term is purely used for convenience and does not refer to a new form of teaching but merely to the integrative classrooms of RE and secular ethics. But having said that, the concept of *worldview* itself is integral to this study as an analytical tool and conceptual framework with which to analyse the different positions of the pupils within the integrative classroom and their relation to larger religious or non-religious traditions.

## **1.6 Worldview as an umbrella concept to study positions in an integrative classroom**

In this thesis, I will use the concept of *worldview* (*katsomus*, *maailmankatomus* or *elämäkatsomus* in Finnish) to refer to the various religious or secular positions of pupils in the classroom. The concept is also used in the NCCBE (2014). Although *worldview* was first used at the start of the research project as a surface level inclusive concept, interest in the possibilities of the concept from the perspective of Finnish WE and in the context of the European discussion on RE became more pertinent. I will here outline basic definitions relating to worldview and the decision to use it as an inclusive concept, including both religious and non-religious views. I will, however, return to the concept and its potential as a reflective tool in the classrooms of integrative WE at the end of this study (Chapter 5).

The notion of worldview has been thoroughly explored by David Naugle in his work *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (2002). It is worth noting a few key elements in the history of the concept, as this background introduces important contextual considerations. The term *worldview* (*Weltanschauung*) was first used in German philosophy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Immanuel Kant, and since then it has garnered much interest in both philosophical and Christian theological contexts (Moreland & Craig 2003). Both Naugle (2002) and Sire (2015), who have



examined the history and definition of the concept, explore worldview from a Christian theological perspective. Especially Protestant Christian theologians (Moreland & Craig 2003) have taken an interest in the concept, although the term has of course also been used in multi-disciplinary contexts and in scientific fields such as psychology (Koltko-Rivera 2004; Nilsson 2013; Taves et al. 2018).

A 1994 paper by Apostel et al. was a landmark in worldview studies, since it was formulated from a multi-disciplinary viewpoint (Apostel et al. 1994). Since then the concept has been explored in many different disciplines and from various viewpoints. Recently, for example, worldview has been approached from the perspective of evaluating the philosophical rigour of a worldview (Vidal 2012), in education for peace, where the goal is to make different worldview positions visible and emphasize inclusivity in worldviews (Danesh 2011), in relation to the development of a personal worldview (Helve 2015), systems science (Rousseau & Billingham 2018), in relation to attitudes towards climate change (de Witt et al. 2016) and in relation to non-religious worldviews (Kontala 2018).

The concept is also used in RE and secular ethics in Finland, with a special emphasis on its application to secular ethics. However, *religion* still acts as the major conceptual starting point in RE, with pupils being divided according to their own religion. However, as seen in the current NCCBE (2014), worldview is especially used when referring to the development of pupil identity. Here, one aim of the school subject is to provide tools for pupils to develop their own worldview (NCCBE 2014, 466). The relationship between religion and worldview is, however, conceptually ambiguous, especially in relation to the relationship of the worldview and the pupil's own religion. Moreover, the contents and aims of RE emphasize religion and religious viewpoints, with the concept of worldview appearing more rarely in the curricula (NCCBE 2014). In secular ethics, the emphasis on worldview exploration is a more central starting point and the usage of concepts relating to worldviews is more pronounced (NCCBE 2014, 475-476). The concept appears in the curricula of both subjects and is tied to both the personal level of pupil worldviews and the larger framework of religious and non-religious worldview traditions. On an international scale, an integrative framework to explore both religious and non-religious worldviews is encouraged in the context of school education, since merely adding, for example, non-religious worldviews into a curriculum that has been devised to explore religions is seen as insufficient (Bråten & Everington 2018).

The concept of *worldview* can be seen to refer, in general, to the way in which individuals, groups or traditions see and understand the world and give meaning to it. It is the lens through which both religious and secular positions give meaning to the world. Often the views of Finnish philosopher Ilkka Niiniluoto (1984) are used as a starting point in worldview exploration in secular ethics, where worldviews are explored through their ontological, epistemological and



ethical aspects. In other words, worldview is a system which explains what is in the world (ontology) and how we can receive knowledge pertaining to the world (epistemology), and the larger questions in life. However, worldviews are also normative in nature in that they provide ethical evaluations of the world. More recently in the Finnish context, Kontala (2018) has explored the etymology and connotations of the worldview concept in relation to non-religious or secular worldviews and emphasizes the usefulness of the concept as an umbrella term for religious and secular worldviews.

Worldview categories are often carefully explicated and of special importance is the division into organized or interpersonal worldviews (*maailmankatsomus*) and personal worldviews (*elämäkatsomus*) (Koirikivi et al. 2019). Internationally, especially Valk (2009, 2017a, 2017b) and Miedema, van der Kooij and others (van der Kooij et al. 2013, 2015, 2017) have explored the merits of using worldview in the context of schools. They argue that worldview as a concept is an inclusive starting point, since it emphasizes the meaning making nature of all positions and the necessary notion that all positions are value laden. It can thus serve as an inclusive starting point for both secular and religious positions. Internationally the benefits of using worldview, with religion as its subcategory in the context of school RE have been noted (Miedema 2014). However, there are still various challenges to using the concept, especially with regard to translation. As van der Kooij et. al. (2013) and Bråten and Everington (2018) note, the concept is not yet as established as religion and different languages have different connotations concerning this concept (Bråten & Everington 2018, van der Kooij et. al. 2013).

The worldview concept can be used on both organized and personal levels, *organized worldviews* referring to systematized and intersubjective worldview systems such as Christianity and Islam and their various traditions, and *personal worldviews* referring to the meaning making of the religious or non-religious nature of the individual (Miedema 2014). Valk (2009, 2017b) and van der Kooij et al. (2013, 2017) consider that by decisively differentiating between the organized and personal perspectives, worldview can act as a starting point of analysis and learning in WE. Since RE and secular ethics both deal with worldview systems but also with the development of personal worldviews, the difference between these two should be highlighted. Current approaches in the Finnish literature have also explored the concept of a personal worldview in relation to its contents (e.g. Kontala 2018) and development through the life span (Helve 2015). From these perspectives, personal worldview could be defined as: *a single, comprehensive, general and explanatory system of assigning meanings to an individual's ideas and experiences* (Kontala 2018, 50). Here meaning making is emphasized as crucial in worldviews and in the ties to the experiences of the individual.

However, there is a certain ambiguity about these concepts and even on the level of the NCCBE (2014) different school subjects seem to employ the concept

in different ways. In RE, the concepts of personal and organized worldview are both referred to in relation to the worldview of the pupil (NCCBE 2014, 466), while in secular ethics the usage of personal worldview is specifically tied to the individual position of the pupil, with organized worldview referring to more general thought systems (NCCBE, 475-478). Similarly, RE curricula sometimes refer to worldviews as including religions and sometimes to both religions and worldviews, with religions being separate from the concept of worldview (NCCBE 2014). This can be seen to emphasize the importance of religious positions and worldviews, which are a key object of study (Koirikivi et al. 2019).

There are also political elements in the concepts used to define the objects of study. For example, in Norway when considering a new name for an integrative subject, the concept of worldview (*livssyn*) was heavily associated with a secular approach to religions and worldviews. According to Bråten and Everington (2018), the concept was tied to political campaigning against confessional Christian RE. Although the concept itself can be seen as inclusive, there are various ways in which it can be emphasized and interpreted (Bråten & Everington 2018). In the Finnish context, the concept is already used in both RE and secular ethics and their respective curricula. The concept is more overarching in the context of secular ethics and while used to include both religious and secular worldviews, the emphasis has also sometimes been more on secular worldviews.

The reason for the use of the concept of worldview in the original research articles relates specifically to its twofold nature. On the one hand, the concept allows for the decisive separation of organized and personal positions, which is important in the analysis of integrative classrooms with an emphasis on both learning worldview traditions but also on dialogue between pupils and their personal positions. Also, the nature of the concept as including both religious and secular views present in the classroom makes it useful. I will return to the clarifications and useful aspects of the concept in relation to the research results gained from integrative classrooms at the end of the thesis.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study investigates integrative worldview education with a twofold approach. First, the aim is to empirically investigate the views, meanings and insights of various school stakeholders regarding partially integrative WE classrooms and experiences relating to them. The other aim is to reflect on key questions about RE and secular ethics in relation to the views of stakeholders. The research questions are:

1. What are the pertinent views and meanings given in relation to an integrative space of learning about and from religions and worldviews?
2. How do pupils perceive and view an integrative space for learning in the light of their experiences?
3. How do different stakeholders in education: parents, teachers and head teachers view integrative classrooms?

The research questions are answered in the original research articles. This study will further explore the general themes arising from all the original research publications in Chapter 5. Thus, while Chapters 3 and 4 aim to shed light on the research process, methodology, ethics and key results relating to the original three research papers, the conclusions in Chapter 5 also examine the possible concepts and starting points pertinent for a mutual integrative setting of WE, thus tying the conclusions to international questions relating to WE (Flanagan 2019; Freathy & John 2018; van der Kooij et al. 2017; Valk 2017a; Wintersgill 2017).

### **3. THEORETICAL, METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In the following chapter I will outline the theoretical underpinnings of my study as well as the research process itself. Both the theoretical and methodological frameworks are based on a pragmatist framework of research in education. Pragmatism can be defined as a philosophical theory about truth and action (Morgan 2014, Schwartz 2014), which can be seen to offer relevant starting points for doing research in education (Biesta & Burbules 2003). I will examine how the pragmatist philosophical framework is conceptualized as a background for this study before examining the methodology, ethics and research procedure applied in the original research papers. As my focus is especially on pragmatism as a framework for educational research, I will rely on sources which emphasize this perspective (Biesta & Burbules 2003, Morgan 2014).

#### **3.1 Pragmatist approach to educational research and worldview education**

Pragmatism can be seen as a larger framework from which to explore educational thought and research (Morgan 2014). It is not merely a practical viewpoint from which to do research on the basis of “what works”, but rather a philosophical system which explores truth and meaning. In pragmatism, meaning cannot be given in advance of experience and thus the focus is on, for example, the action, consequences and meanings given in a social situation (Morgan 2014). In educational research, this translates especially to inquiry into the meanings, experiences and transactions between individuals (Sutinen, Pihlström & Kallioniemi 2015) in social situations. Instead of interaction, which implies a more straightforward stimulus-response relationship, transaction as a concept refers to a more mutual process of communication between at least two personalities (Sutinen et al. 2015).

Pragmatism as a philosophical approach can be traced back to the works of John Dewey, Charles Sanders Peirce and William James (Schwartz 2014). While their approaches to pragmatism differ especially in relation to how a mutual conception of truth can be achieved, all of these approaches emphasize knowledge in relation to the action of individuals. Pragmatist ideas have further been developed by various thinkers, whose works are both in line with and different from the classical pragmatists (Schwartz 2014). I will emphasize pragmatist ideas

especially in relation to doing educational research as explored by Biesta and Burbules (2003) and Morgan (2014), who emphasize pragmatist ideas in their Deweyan form, since Dewey is the pragmatist thinker perhaps most connected to education and educational thinking (Dewey 1916).

Although critics often see pragmatism as evading philosophical questions relating to the ontology and epistemology of research, or see it inevitably descending into relativism because of the emphasis on action, usability and context, there are philosophical groundings in pragmatism from which to do research (Biesta & Burbules 2003). Pragmatism does indeed de-emphasize the separation of science and everyday thought and practice and thus also the separation between educational practice and educational research, because at its core, it sees all human action as ultimately quite similar. There is no absolute qualitative difference between scientific and everyday action, but rather, they employ different instruments to explore the world. They both inquire into problems, but with a very different level of systematization and rigour (Biesta & Burbules 2003). The scientific approach employs a more rigorous and critical exploration of the world when compared to everyday observations concerning the world. When exploring, for example, science and everyday experiences, neither is 'more real' or achieves truth – the question is how their different kinds of objects of knowledge help us with the problems we face (Biesta & Burbules 2003). Thus, the use of different tools to observe, gather data and refine our view of certain phenomena are more important than an *a priori* definition of truth or knowledge. While pragmatism, at least as it is usually conceptualized, de-emphasizes questions relating to ontology and epistemology and instead emphasizes usability and context, there are ways in which to conceptualize a pragmatist approach in these terms.

A pragmatist starting point for ontology can be acquired from the classic pragmatist approach of John Dewey, whose thought reflects what Biesta and Burbules (2003) have called *transactional realism*. Here the objects of inquiry or research are something that are constructed – but they are constructed in transaction (Biesta & Burbules 2003). The object of research or inquiry is always constructed in the acting of the organism or individual in an environment. Reality does not reveal itself “as is”, but is only reachable through activity in the environment. In this sense, the ontology behind Deweyan pragmatist thinking, and some would argue, many classic pragmatist thinkers such as Peirce and James (Maxwell & Mittapalli 2015), is at its core realist, even if the reality “as is” is impossible to be perceived as an object of observation. For example, William James described himself as a realist, but like Dewey, he saw that while reality is truly there, it is our own construction based on this reality that we grasp and study in any conceivable situation (Molander 2011).

The transactional realism that Dewey emphasizes tries to go beyond the subjectivism-objectivism divide by not emphasizing the duality of the mind and the world (Dewey 1938). Instead, 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 (Biesta & Burbules 2003). As Benton and Craib (2011) put it, pragmatism also leans heavily on social constructionism and interactionism – the view that the objects of knowledge are a process. In the course of our action we negotiate meanings for the objects in our world (Benton & Craib 2011). This is in line with Deweyan transactional realism (Biesta & Burbules 2003), where experience and action are key (Dewey 1938) and where knowledge is tied to practice and action, rather than only to the mind and cognition.

Research or inquiry can and should thus aim to investigate problems which arise in practice and action. In the practical world of education, many indeterminate situations arise where it is not necessarily clear why and how something happens (Biesta & Burbules 2003). In the case of RE or WE, this could, for example, be a question about whether or not the pupils learn about different worldviews. If we then consider that pupils indeed gain knowledge and understanding from different religions and worldviews, the situation is more determined in nature. This is what many teachers do in their everyday action when indeterminate situations are transformed into determinate situations. One key tool for this in practice is evaluation, though discussion, encounter and observation are equally important in order for the teacher to determine the situation.

However, in relation to research in pragmatist terms, this is not enough. The previous approach in determining a situation only defines the action and its consequences. In order to approach knowledge in pragmatist terms, we should examine the link of action and consequences or in other words, the meanings of this link (Biesta & Burbules 2003). In the previous example, this would mean exploring the experiences and unique views of the pupils related to this learning and the meanings they give to the learning. From this, we could gather how and why they learn about religions and worldviews and how this is integrated into their understanding of the phenomena they are learning about. In other words, we approach the meanings and not only the outcomes of education.

Thus, in educational research, emphasis on inquiry into human meaning making based on experiences is key from a pragmatist perspective (Morgan 2014, Biesta & Burbules 2003). Research must inevitably explore how phenomena are given meaning and how these phenomena are present in the actions of individuals. This is because, as noted before, knowledge is a function of human action and communication (Pihlström 2011). An important part of a social scientific research project is to make the meanings constructed in transaction by the people under

study intelligible. As unique individuals and their meaning making systems, our ideas and worldviews cannot be predicted in advance (Pihlström 2011). This “irreducible pluralism”, as William James (1890/1950, 221) put it, is an important starting point for research which necessitates qualitative inquiry into the plurality of ways of viewing and being in transaction with the world and others, especially in the context of social sciences. Here, the meaning making and views based on experiences that individuals hold and the way they conceptualize learning is important. This inquiry into educational practices cannot give us a ‘truth’, because the transactive nature of social reality emphasizes change rather than stillness, but it can give us instruments with which to think and act more reflectively and critically about problems we face in educational practice (Biesta & Burbules 2003).

In terms of this research, the pragmatist starting points detailed above provide four key questions when investigating the research in the original research articles: (1) What does the research investigate and why? (2) What is the role of the researcher and research tools? (3) What is the role of theory and practice? and (4) What can the results of the research tell us?

(1) Since pragmatism emphasizes action and its consequences, research should investigate the changing situations and problems which arise in educational practice. The grass-roots implementation of integrative classrooms can be seen as problem solving relating to the problems explored in Chapter 1. The need for RE and secular ethics to develop dialogue skills in a post-secular society in which religions and worldviews should be visible and seen as objects of discourse, can be seen as one driving problem behind the integrative practices. Since such classrooms have appeared in many schools and educational settings in Finland, and their implementation is carried out on a grass-roots level, they seem to be an action which aims to solve pertinent problems in educational practice. Since pragmatism considers that all knowledge is possibly fallible and that our patterns of action must be evaluated in light of the problems at hand (Biesta & Burbules 2003), so must the ways in which WE is implemented be evaluated in light of the new challenges presented by societal change, research and practical applications. Integrative WE classrooms also provide indeterminate situations where actions, their consequences and the meanings linking them should be investigated. The research project, which began with determining the situation, aimed to investigate these meanings. The crucial questions become how does the change in environment from separative to integrative WE affect the meanings given to learning in WE, and what transactions become relevant in an integrative space of learning?

(2) In pragmatist terms, what then becomes important is how to approach the problem at hand. What is important is the collection of what Dewey called the *facts of the case* (Biesta & Burbules 2003). The collection of these facts is not



restricted by an *a priori* epistemological lens, but rather, their relevance to the problem (or research question) is far more important. The pragmatist approach thus encourages the gathering of various data, both quantitative and qualitative, which introduce different relevant facts into the case. While the action and consequences of integrative WE can be explored in many different ways, such as curriculum texts, quantitative surveys, grade points or theoretical exploration, in order to gain insight into the links between action and consequences, individual views and meanings must be investigated. Thus, this research is oriented towards the views and qualitative experiences of various stakeholders in education, or in other words, individuals who participate in action. In this research, the relevant stakeholders were seen to be the pupils, parents of the pupils and the educational professionals of the school.

What becomes important in the gathering of these facts are context and credibility: are the facts relevant to the problem and how have they been selected (Biesta & Burbules 2003)? Here it is the important job of the researcher to both explore the relevance of the data and also its relationship to the thoughts of the researcher himself. A pragmatist approach with its emphasis on the transactional nature of knowledge has a built-in necessity of evaluating this position. As in all kinds of human inquiry, the facts are gathered according to the ideas of the actor, or in this case, the researcher. The facts further affect the ideas of the researcher in the process of inquiry. Morgan (2014) calls this the cyclical nature of belief and action. The researcher must thus not only describe the reasons for collecting certain sorts of data, but also how this data and its interpretation has affected the research process (Morgan 2014).

(3) This all relates to the role of theory in research. In the context of this thesis, relevant preunderstandings of integrative WE arose from observations on the literature of integrative WE, where the possibility of fostering dialogue and encounter was emphasized. However, relevant theory must also arise from practice (Biesta & Burbules 2003). I have aimed to do this by framing the theoretical approach in pragmatism and investigations into the meanings which link action to consequences in integrative WE. However, various pertinent theoretical understandings of the place of worldviews and religions, as well as learning about them and the effects of integrative WE, arose during the research process itself. These then fed into the understandings of the researcher, thus focusing further research on certain elements of integrative WE (Morgan 2014). During the research process, the role of individual experiences and meaning making, and the role of transactions between individuals in WE as sources for learning arose as pertinent themes to explore both theoretically and practically. Thus, the last data sets were gathered in order to investigate this further, and relevant theoretical insights into this theme were explored. Since these further theoretical understandings arose during the research process, I have decided



to examine them in Chapter 5 while reflecting on the results from the original research.

(4) In line with pragmatist educational research, the conclusions and results on the consequences and meanings in integrative WE, and the theoretical explorations based on them should be seen as warranted assertions and intellectual instrumentalities (Biesta & Burbules 2003). These relate to the pragmatist notion of research. Since the fallibility and transactional nature of research inquiry is emphasized, the results do not aim for 'truth' or absolute validity. Thus, the results from research should be framed as *warranted assertions* and in the theoretical explorations as *intellectual instrumentalities* that can possibly guide further educational practice. Research from a pragmatist perspective can only ever show us what "has been possible in a certain situation" (Biesta & Burbules 2003, 91). The question about normativity in educational research should be examined with care, as the link between descriptivity and normativity is far from straightforward (Holma & Hyytinen 2015), and pragmatism as a research framework emphasizes precisely this point. Educational research inquiry and thus the warranted assertions in this study provide possible connections between actions and consequences. I have aimed to highlight the relationship of these two and the meanings behind consequences in integrative worldview education. The warranted assertions of research results can enable educators to approach the problems they face more intelligently, but they cannot provide rules for further action, since action always happens in unique transactions.

Scientific inquiry cannot by itself determine the value of educational undertakings. Educational practice can thus be informed by the warranted assertions or instrumentalities made by research, but they cannot become straightforward rules (Biesta & Burbules 2003). The aim of educational scientific inquiry is to make the actions of educational practitioners more aware. Research does not inform educational practice to make it more 'perfect' or 'efficient', but rather, provides insights to make educational practice more thoughtful and more aware of the different situations encountered. It is not that the results do not reflect pertinent objects of knowledge, it is that we cannot truly know what new problems and situations arise later and whether these results can answer those questions. From a pragmatist perspective, change is thus a crucial aspect to be kept in mind, especially in social reality (Biesta & Burbules 2003, Morgan 2014).

Finally, in pragmatist terms, research cannot provide a path to an unquestionable and ultimate reality (Biesta & Burbules 2003, Morgan 2014), but rather practice is seen as the fundamental place in which the assertions made by research are tested. Thus, in order for research to be fruitful, it should feed back into practice, where it is both evaluated and where it can offer intellectual instrumentalities. Whether or not the results are more largely relevant for educational practice has to be tried out in practical applications. Only if this is

the case can the warranted assertions and intellectual instrumentalities from research be transformed into actual knowledge that is tied to action.

## 3.2 Methodological considerations

In accordance with the pragmatist theoretical underpinnings of the research, a mixed methods approach in investigating integrative WE was applied in the research articles. This relates to the pragmatist view of instrumentality, where the use of different tools in order to examine the problems at hand is encouraged (Biesta & Burbules 2003). The research presented in this study uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches to determine the situation and explore the experiences and interpretations of the pupils, parents and teachers in relation to teaching and learning about worldviews. In order to examine meanings it is necessary to examine many different viewpoints. As Howe (1988) notes, classroom life and learning are far too complex to be examined with only one set of methods. We must employ a variety of tools in order to view the phenomenon more clearly (Howe 1988).

The research does not, however, employ a thorough mixed methods approach, since the quantitative survey data used in Study I was used as a preliminary exploratory tool to initiate the research project and determine the situation in relation to integrative WE. In Study I, the main interest was to examine the general situation and determine the consequences of integrative WE. The other data sets in Study I, II and III have been qualitative in nature, since our research has emphasized meanings associated with integrative worldview education rather than only the outcomes or effects of such education.

Mixed methods research (MMR) is often linked to paradigmatic problems as it uses a variety of methods with different epistemological starting points. The view mentioned by Howe at the beginning of the chapter is thus not unproblematic. In the methodological context, pragmatism is often described as an attitude of “what works”. As Rossman and Wilson (1985) describe, MMR is sometimes seen to reflect the pragmatist idea that a critical issue in methodology is that it works, that is it delivers useful data in relation to the research questions or problem (Rossman & Wilson 1985). The root issue with a pragmatist position that uses mixed methods is the so-called incompatibility thesis. The incompatibility thesis argues that quantitative and qualitative methods are at their core incompatible as research tools. This is largely because of their conflicting ontological and epistemological starting points (Howe 1988). Contrary to this, the compatibilist view of research methods starts from the point that these research methods are a continuum in which it is possible for the researcher to navigate.

Pragmatism can offer a compatibilist view into research methods based on philosophical starting points that emphasize accuracy, usability and context rather than metaphysical questions relating to ontology and epistemology (Biesta & Burbules 2003). Different research methods can be viewed as different objects which are instruments of action. In pragmatist terms, research can be seen as systematic inquiry into a situation or problem. From a pragmatist perspective, epistemology or the definition of knowledge and truth do not precede the methods in this process (Biesta & Burbules 2003). Thus, we do not need to first consider what is valid knowledge and only then proceed to select the methods accordingly. Instead, from a pragmatist perspective, the formulation of the problem at hand is far more important.

The pragmatist approach thus encourages the gathering of various facts, both quantitative and qualitative, which offer different relevant *facts* for the case. In the context of the studies presented in this thesis, the facts of the case were explored with accounts and experiences from various stakeholders rather than, for example, curriculum texts. While the curriculum offers guidelines, it is only at the experiential level of the curriculum (Bråten 2009) that we can see how a form of education is given meaning.

What becomes methodologically pertinent in a pragmatist approach is the evaluation of the position of the researcher, the research process itself, and the possibility of thinking otherwise about the results (Biesta & Burbules 2003). Since research is also action, the transactional nature of the individual and the environment also applies to the researcher and thus the exploration of the position of the researcher is warranted. I will explore this theme more closely in section 3.4, where I discuss the ethical issues related to the research. I will also emphasize the need for researcher triangulation or using multiple researchers in analysing and interpreting data in the light of researcher positionality.

### **3.3 Research data, data collection and data analysis**

The data in this study consists of five different sets of data gathered from four different lower secondary schools in the metropolitan area of Helsinki. It should be noted that the schools in the data sets implement integrative WE in different ways and to different degrees. All schools implemented the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades integratively, but varied whether or not the 8<sup>th</sup> grade of teaching was integrated entirely or not. Also, even when teaching was integrative, there were also separate portions in the teaching, which were implemented throughout the lower secondary school in the form of lessons by different teachers, separated visits to religious communities, or different tasks in integrative classrooms. All in all, the integrative portions in all schools were significantly more frequent

and numerous than separate sessions or classes. So effectively, what the data and studies reflect is partially integrative WE. However, the main focus of the data is precisely on the views and meaning making based on experiences of integrative WE and how the pupils and other stakeholders view its limitations and possibilities. All of the WE classes emphasized studying and learning together and possibilities for mutual communication and dialogue.

The first data set is questionnaire data from pupils attending integrative WE (N = 174), which was collected in the 2013 – 2014 school year. This data set was collected in a single lower secondary school in Helsinki from pupils in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades (ages 13 to 15). A more detailed account of the questionnaire and the statistical analysis with SPSS 22 are presented in the original research article (study I). This data provided some interesting starting points or in pragmatist terms, determined the situation, but did not provide much insight into the meanings and experiences of the pupils. While the pupils indicated that they generally liked integrative WE, the questionnaire did not provide answers to all pertinent questions. The questionnaire was unable to highlight the transactions and meaning making within the classrooms themselves and what might have made integrative WE successful as a learning space. Nor did the results indicate the possible problems in integrative classrooms, since not all pupils viewed the classrooms in a positive light. In light of the quantitative research data, a more qualitative approach into pupils' views was implemented in the form of individual pupil interviews. This approach aimed to explore the links between action and consequences in integrative WE, or in other words, why such a classroom might or might not be successful in relation to learning or discussion.

The second data set (study I) consists of pupil interviews (N = 40) which were collected after the interview questions (Appendix 2) were formulated based on the preliminary results from the questionnaire data. The data were collected in the timespan of 2014 to 2015. The interviews were conducted in two different lower secondary schools. One of these schools was the same as in the first data set. The pupil interview data consisted of individual interviews with 40 pupils, with the average length of an interview being 30 minutes. Pupils for the research were selected from various classes attending integrative WE. The pupils participating in the interviews were selected by the researchers and teachers from the pupils who had a written form of consent from their parents and were also willing to participate in the interviews. The goal was to get participants from both majority and minority forms of RE and secular ethics. About half of the interviewed pupils were from Evangelical Lutheran RE and the rest from various other RE and secular ethics groups.

The third data set (study II) consists of teacher and head teacher interviews (N = 6) during the 2013 – 2014 school year. These interviews were conducted in the two lower secondary schools from which the first two data sets were collected.

The average length of an interview was 60 minutes. The fourth data set (study II) consists of survey data on the parents or guardians of the pupils (N = 174) from the first school. The short survey consisted of open questions (Appendix 3) regarding integrative WE and was collected during 2014.

In light of the research results from previous data sets, the approach implemented in the third research article aimed to focus on the understanding of pupils related to the individual views and voices presented in integrative WE. Previous results had indicated that one factor which made integrative WE engaging was learning together but also learning from different interpretations and individual meaning making in relation to worldviews. In order to engage the pupils in discussing and reflecting on these questions, a group interview format was employed. These interviews took place in the autumn of 2018 in two lower secondary schools. While individual interviews, such as those in studies I and II provided insight into integrative WE, approaches which provided the pupils with more opportunities to reflect and discuss themes arising from integrative WE were the goals of this research. Two schools which implemented integrative WE, and which were unrelated to the first two schools, were selected for this research in order to expand the research and also to see whether the themes which arose in previous qualitative data sets would also be pertinent in other integrative WE classrooms. The fifth data set (study III) thus consists of group interviews of pupils (N = 38, a total of 9 group interviews) from two lower secondary schools in Helsinki. The group interview questions (Appendix 4) were constructed in the light of the earlier results and focused on the role of different worldviews in the integrative WE classroom. The questionnaire data and its analysis are explored in detail in study III.

All of the qualitative data (studies I, II and III) were analysed by means of qualitative content analysis (Drisco & Matchi 2015; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009). In line with the pragmatist framework of the research, meanings instead of forms and elements of speech, which would have necessitated a discourse analytic approach, were emphasized, and thus qualitative content analysis was deemed to be an appropriate method (Drisco & Matchi 2015). The transcribed or textual data was first read multiple times and general themes were formed according to regularities and patterns in the data. After this stage, the themes were mutually evaluated by different researchers and critically compared. Finally, a thorough reading of the data was again implemented taking into consideration these themes, which were critically examined in the light of the data. From this process, thematic categories within the data were formulated through multiple readings of the textual data. In the studies, the analysis of the interview data intersected with the theoretical ideas, and thus, resulted in new categories of understanding the phenomenon and explaining the content in light of the research questions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009).

The understandings and theoretical approaches of the researcher necessarily have an effect on the analysis as seen above. From a pragmatist perspective it would be folly to presume that, for example, in the case of qualitative analysis, the way in which the content is thematically arranged is the only objective way in which to do it. The clear focus of the research from the start was the analysis of the data in relation to the meanings related to the consequences of integrative classroom acting as a platform for dialogue and worldview learning. A different interest and research focus would quite possibly emphasize different themes and aspects in the data. However, by using researcher triangulation and comparison in three different phases, the aim was to present the data in as precise a manner as possible. This was, as emphasized in pragmatist educational research, in order to maximize the systematic and transparent nature of the research. Researcher triangulation was used in all qualitative data sets with two primary researchers first systematically categorizing the data individually according to its content into different themes. After this, the two primary researchers compared these themes and then began analysis of the textual data again, critically comparing the data with the thematic categories. After this process, a third researcher joined in to critically examine and evaluate the analysis of the other researchers and in this way the analysis was further clarified. Finally, the main patterns in the data were presented as thematic categories. The generalizability of the data is further explored in Chapter 4, where I evaluate the research results.

Along with the analysis methods, the positionality of the researcher, ethics and other pertinent factors should be considered in depth when examining the research process. Due to the limited nature of journal articles, this was not entirely possible within the original publication contexts. Research must be seen as a systematic but also a transparent type of inquiry, where it is clear how the facts and actions affect one another and the process of inquiry itself.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations and research procedure**

Examining the worldviews and worldview education of young people necessitates lengthy exploration of ethical considerations and the role of the researcher in the study. The role of reflection concerning ethical issues and the possible shortcomings of ethical consideration in educational research is often emphasized (Bourke 2017). In the following section I aim to reflect on and clarify the ethical issues related to the studies presented in this thesis.

I will first (1) examine the ethical procedures in the gathering of various data in the research. After this I will explore more general themes relating to ethics when studying children and adolescents in a school environment and how these questions relate to the current research in this thesis. I will (2) especially focus

on the agency of the individuals, (3) the position of the researcher, and (4) the publishing of the research results.

(1) The first data set (study I) consists of quantitative survey data (N=174) regarding the general opinion of the pupils on integrative WE. Before the pupils could participate in the survey, the consent for participation was confirmed by the parents of the pupils and the pupils themselves. The parents were sent a written consent form which also informed them of the research and its purpose. The surveys were completed during the school day and were collected by the homeroom teachers of the pupils. The pupils were informed before the research that they could quit participation in the research at any time if they so chose. The questionnaire data was inputted into SPSS by the researcher and every participant was given a random numeral identifier. The questionnaire did not record the pupils' names but their religious or non-religious background was noted. The data was accessible only to members of the research project. After the data was inputted into SPSS, factor analyses were performed and the final results were presented in factors, means and medians. The research article published from the data dealt only with the factors found in the data. The anonymity of the pupils was thus guaranteed.

The second data set consists of pupil interviews (N=40) with some of the pupils who participated in the survey from the first data set. Pupil and parent consent were confirmed before the start of the research and only those pupils who had permission from their parents were considered for interviews. The researcher visited different classrooms and informed the pupils of the nature and purpose of the research. Before the interviews the pupils were told that they could opt out of the research at any time if they so chose. The researchers emphasized that the pupils should answer questions based on their own opinions and that not answering questions was also a possibility.

The interviews were conducted by two researchers during school days. The homeroom and WE teachers helped organize private and convenient spaces in which to conduct the interview. Both researchers informed the pupils about the nature of the research and the possibility of opting out at any time before beginning each interview. During the transcription process the pupils were assigned a random numeral identifier which prevented identification in later stages of the research and in the research article. All parts of the interview that could indicate the identity of the pupils were not disclosed in the research article or research report. The transcribed data were analysed with content analysis by the three researchers in the research project. All data was stored at University file servers with access only by the researchers themselves.

The third data set (study II) consists of interviews of teachers (N=4) implementing integrative WE and head teachers (N=2) of the schools in question. While the teachers and head teachers are in a somewhat different position than



the pupils and parents or guardians due to their public job, the anonymity of the participants was nevertheless guaranteed in the research process. No personal details were included in the data and the questions related mostly to their jobs rather than their personal opinions or backgrounds. The interview data was stored similarly to previous data sets.

The fourth data set (study II) consists of 174 short survey answers to the parents of the pupils attending integrative WE. The participation was voluntary and the questionnaires were posted to the residences of the parents or given in person during a parents' evening at the school. Personal details such as names or occupations were not gathered. Only the worldview background of the parents was included in the questionnaire. In the process of transcription, all the participants were given random numeral identifiers.

The fifth data set (study III) posed the most significant ethical considerations since it consisted of group interviews where other pupils were also present during the interviews. 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.

(2) From an ethical standpoint, the voice of individuals and the pupils themselves should be kept in the forefront and be examined if we are to explore worldviews and worldview education accurately (Benjamin, Niemi, Kuusisto & Kallioniemi 2019). The agency and voice of children and adolescents under study should be respected and given space (Harcourt, Perry & Waller 2011) as the inclusion of pupils in the study can greatly increase the understanding of adults in regard to the effects of educational policies and arrangements (Bourke et al. 2017). In this respect, this study aims to explore the views and experiences of various stakeholders in relation to worldview education. Especially the views of the pupils themselves are important and emphasized in the data as seen in studies I and III. The meanings given to exploring worldviews are thus heavily connected to the meanings given by individuals.

With regard to the agency and voice of the participants and especially the pupils, informing the participants about the nature of the study is important (Benjamin et al. 2019). Informed consent to participate in a research is not a clear issue, especially when researching the opinions and views of children and adolescents (Comstock 2013). Since children and adolescents are much more



dependent than adults (Benjamin et al. 2019), their consent might also reflect the desire to please an adult, for example the teacher or their parents. It is extremely hard to evaluate whether or not consent is truly informed and chosen (Comstock 2013), but in the context of the studies in this thesis, several procedures were carried out in order to gain informed consent.

In the case of studies I and III, the pupils were informed of the nature of the research before asking for their consent, and again before participating in the research. The research process was described to them in as clear a way as possible as researching their opinions and views on integrative worldview education and learning in this context. The pupils were told that the research would be published, but that only the transcribed text from the interviews without any identifiers such as names, ages or locations would be disclosed in the research reports and research articles. It was also emphasized that the pupils could opt out of the research even during the interviews, in which case the interview data would not be used.

The informed consent of pupils in a school setting presents potential problems and in the context of this research, there are possible biases introduced into the sample with regard to pupils who participated. It is noted that when studying interventions, or in this case new teaching arrangements, there is a possibility that when choosing the participants for the study, those setting up the arrangements, or in this case the teachers, might want to present pupils who are positive towards the arrangements (Smith 2011). While informing pupils about the research, the researchers emphasized that the research was disconnected from the teaching itself, and that opinions expressed in the research would not affect the pupils' relationship with the teacher. However, it is possible that the school setting might have had an effect on what and how the pupils expressed their views. Hence, the help of teachers and their professionalism is paramount when researching children in a school environment (Alanko et al. 2019; Lagström et al. 2010). In the case of the studies presented in this thesis, the pupils provided a variety of different opinions concerning integrative WE and noted both the possibilities and the limitations in the teaching arrangements, thus indicating that not only pupils with positive inclinations towards the arrangements were selected.

Especially in the case of group interviews in study III, the teachers provided important knowledge with regard to pupil social relationships and helped to organize interview groups which took into account these relationships (Vaughn et al. 1996). In the interviews in study I, the researchers themselves were present in the classroom when choosing the voluntary participants for the interview study and selected among the voluntary participants, who had given their consent to participate and had also a written consent form from their parents. It is to be noted that while the aforementioned procedures were implemented, there is still a possibility of bias in the samples, since pupils who are active and ready

to discuss matters relating to WE more readily volunteer for such studies and their voices are possibly more present in the data.

The parents or guardians were informed about the studies by letters which were delivered to them along with a consent form. The parents of the pupils in study I were also informed of the research in a parent's evening at the school. The parents were also provided with contact information that could be used if they desired to discuss the research or if they had any questions with regard to the participation of the pupils (studies I and III) or their own participation (study II). In various phases of the research process, the consent to participate in the research was always asked from the parents, teachers, head teachers, and in the case of public schools, the educational administrative offices. A template of a consent form is presented in the Appendices (Appendix 5). In the case of the pupils, however, the decision to participate in the study is always ultimately the pupil's own choice (Smith 2011). This was the aim in all of the studies presented in this thesis.

In educational research with children and adolescents in general, there is a dual perspective to be considered: on the one hand, the researcher needs to respect the agency, autonomy and views of the children, and on the other, the researchers also need to understand the dependency of children and adolescents (Smith 2011). This means that while agency must be nurtured, young people are relatively more vulnerable and inexperienced and thus dependent on adults. This is why, for example, the interviews were constructed with the aim of giving space to the unique and individual voice of the pupil but also in a way that minimizes the possible effect of the researcher leading the interviews in a direction he or she sees as relevant.

The agency and dependence relationship became increasingly relevant in study III where a group interview method was applied. Group pressure and conformity are possible shortcomings in a group interview setting, especially with children or adolescents. The researchers conducting study III 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. A more detailed description of the ethical procedures in study III are presented in the original research article.

During the whole research process, it was emphasized that the participation of stakeholders is important and offers valuable data in relation to integrative WE and WE in general. Especially the importance and value of pupil participation was emphasized in studies I and III. This emphasis aimed to encourage the

pupils to express their views as well as minimize the authoritative role of the researcher (Benjamin et al. 2019). Feeling that their contribution matters and that their unique voice is important are central notions with respect to the agency of the pupil (Smith 2011).

(3) The position of the researcher himself (Benjamin et al. 2019, 142) is also an important ethical consideration. The pragmatist starting points of the study (Biesta & Burbules 2003) also necessitate reflection on the position of the researcher and the possible biases this might introduce into the study. My own background as a researcher has an obvious effect on the type of research conducted. The fact that the researcher is interested in examining integrative worldview education is in itself a value-laden position. What is important, however, is that the position of the researcher, in contrast to other value-laden positions, should be as transparent as possible, since research is by nature systematic inquiry and an action which aims at careful observations (Biesta & Burbules 2003). Explication of the position of the researcher can also help the readers of the study to evaluate the results with this in mind (Benjamin et al. 2019).

The positionality of the researcher should be explored in terms of background and possible attitudes. My own background with relation to worldviews is that of an academically oriented Western perspective. From a meta-level of worldviews, it could be said that since different worldviews give salience to different aspects in the world (Nilsson 2013), the starting point of this research focusing on individuals and worldviews is arguably a post-modern worldview position to begin with. This position could also be seen to reflect, in general, a more Western philosophical and ethical bias, since the meaning making and perspectives of an individual are emphasized. On a larger scale, this reflects the entire educational framework of Western societies such as Finland, since the development of individuals rather than the community takes a more central role in education.

It could be said that my own position is constructed from a secular-Lutheran hegemonic position, where interest in religions and worldviews is mostly academic in nature. However, experiences about being a part of a religious community have also played an important part in the development of my own personal worldview. This background of change in attitudes and positions with regard to religions and worldviews might be a reason for an interest in the ways in which the nature of personal meaning making in relation to religions and worldviews is taken into account in forms of WE. An interest in integrative worldview education with the emphasis on dialogue can also be linked to my own academic and vocational identity as a teacher and teacher trainer at the University of Helsinki. Discussion about the forms and implementations of RE and secular ethics in the Finnish context have been ongoing for a long time, and questions about how our teaching models and approaches could be developed

in the light of pertinent questions relating to worldviews in today's society are thus inherently of interest.

Because pragmatism concerns itself heavily with the desirability of goals in relation to actions we perform, it is not enough to ask what is the most efficient way of achieving something, but it is also pertinent to ask whether or not that end is desirable in the first place. Thus, it is also necessary to examine the fundamental beliefs that the researcher has about education itself, since this orients both the nature and goals of the research interests and the interpretation of results. This can be done by exploring whether or not syntax or semantics is emphasized in relation to education. Biesta (2015), who uses the notions of syntax and semantics proposed by Bainbridge and West (2012) explores these two concepts in the context of measurements and education. If we emphasize syntax, we emphasize individuals as parts in a system, which has certain goals such as educational outcomes (Biesta 2015). However, if we emphasize semantics (Biesta 2015), we emphasize that education ultimately concerns individuals, their lives and the meanings they ascribe to things. If education is more than just a thing which produces certain outcomes such as citizens, good grades, PISA results or certain types of individuals, we have to examine the meaning making systems and the views of the individuals within. Here, both in research and in educational practice, the personal views of the individual and its value both in itself, but also as a source of learning, should be taken into account. Thus, orienting the research towards stakeholders and especially the views of the pupils in relation to worldviews emphasizes semantics as inherently important in education.

I have aimed to take researcher positionality into account by carefully examining the credibility of the research presented in this study (Chapter 4), ethical procedures (Chapter 3) and the interest and views of the researcher himself (Chapter 3). What is also important is to conceptualize the philosophical starting points from which the entire research process is oriented (Chapter 3) and the theoretical and conceptual understandings developed before, during and after the research process (Chapter 5). It is important that research aims to present many voices, which in this study has been implemented by investigating various stakeholder views and implementing researcher triangulation. However, as befits a pragmatist approach, no ultimate power positions with regard to research results or especially the interpretations of these results can be claimed.

Along with positionality, a researcher should consider what his or her relationship is in relation to the informants of the study, or in other words, what is the insider or outsider position of the researcher (Bourke et al. 2017). In the case of the research presented in this thesis, the use of multiple researchers or researcher triangulation made it possible to include many different viewpoints in the implementation of the research and the interpretation of the results (Comstock 2013). Critical reading of other researchers' inputs was an important part of the

research process in studies I, II and III. My own position as a researcher was as part insider and part outsider. As an active teacher of RE and secular ethics who was teaching during the entire length of the PhD process, schools, their customs and interacting with pupils were very familiar avenues. This experience and information helped interpret some views and situations for example in an interview situation and when analysing the data. Reflexivity regarding this position was nevertheless important, since personal experiences from teaching can also present unanalysed intuitive starting points. This is why researcher triangulation, with researchers from different starting points sharing their views in relation to the gathering and analysis of the data was important.

These positions provided both benefits and challenges in gathering and interpreting the data. One of the ethical questions relates to whether or not stakeholders feel they can relate their experiences and views to the researchers. If the situation does not feel safe or comfortable to the participants in a study, they might resort to giving answers they believe the researchers want to hear. Especially in situations where the participants feel they are not understood, they might resort to giving answers they deem socially acceptable instead of their true feelings and views (Benjamin et al. 2019, 143). More generally, the issue of social desirability is pertinent when examining the opinions and views of individuals and especially those of children and adolescents (Harcourt et al. 2011). In individual interview settings, the researchers introduced themselves to the pupils before the interviews, the interviews were held in familiar school settings and the researchers aimed to converse with each pupil before the interviews in order to create a relaxed atmosphere. In the case of group interviews, the presence of familiar pupils made the pupils more relaxed in the situation itself. Here, other issues, which relate to possible conformity of opinion are explored more carefully in study III.

One of the benefits of the outsider status of the researchers was the disconnect between the teaching of integrative WE and the research project. Especially in the case of pupils in studies I and III, it was emphasized that the project did not relate to the teaching of integrative WE in any way and that the opinions of the pupils would not affect their standing with the teacher or the school in general. On the contrary, it was emphasized that the unique voices of the pupils were especially important and that they were the experts concerning experiences and views on integrative WE. Emphasizing the importance and possible positive contribution of the pupils can be seen to encourage participation and the sharing of views and experiences relating to religions and worldviews (Benjamin et al. 2019). The unique position and valuable insights that the pupils could offer with regard to their experiences from both former separative WE and current integrative WE were emphasized in both studies I and III.

(4) Finally, it is necessary to consider the publication of the research results. There is an inherent question about power and power imbalance when publishing interpretations and results: the researcher aims to present the voice of the individuals, but in reality, it is always the meanings and interpretations of the researcher that are presented (Benjamin et al. 2019, 147). For example, the interest and interpretations of the researcher are most clearly visible in the emphases of study III, which focuses especially on the interview data regarding worldviews and lived worldviews in an integrative classroom. The other themes of the data (see study III), although quite similar to results from the interviews in study I, were not given similar attention or research interest. While this can certainly be seen as emphasizing certain voices in the data, it should be noted that all qualitative research operates in a way which emphasizes certain voices within the data gathered. Even without the theoretical interest of the researcher, the meanings relating to the encountering and discussing lived worldview experiences were a significant emphasis in the data and thus an important avenue to explore.

It should be noted that the participants also have the right to hear about the interpretations and results in the research which they are the participants (Smith 2011). In the case of studies in this thesis, the preliminary interpretations and results were shared with the teachers and head teachers to also be discussed with the pupils. The published research articles were also shared with the schools under study and were available publicly for the parents to view. It should be noted that because no identifying data from the pupils or parents was gathered, there was no way to directly contact or share research findings with them. This could be seen as one of the shortcomings in the research and much care should be put into how the interpretations of researchers could be more widely explored with the participants themselves. The best avenue for sharing preliminary results and the published articles was through the school staff and teachers who could discuss these findings with the pupils. The choice to publish research articles and thus periodically publish research results was thus a natural way to share the interpretations of the researcher. The results were also explored in seminars dedicated to educators employing integrative WE, academic articles unrelated to the PhD research project (Åhs et al. 2019a) and popular articles in different formats relating to integrative WE (Åhs 2017; Åhs et al. 2019b) in order to make the research more available.

From the perspective of pragmatist educational inquiry and ethics, it is also important to note that research results cannot claim an absolute power position and normativity in relation to practice. This means that the interpretations of the researcher cannot be claimed to straightforwardly offer normative positions which guide practice. As Holma and Hyytinen have noted (2015), the relationship between descriptivity and normativity in educational science should be examined

with care (Holma & Hyytinen 2015). In pragmatist terms, the outcomes of inquiry cannot become rules for future action in a straightforward manner. Instead, systematic inquiry into educational problems provides warranted assertions and intellectual instrumentalities (Biesta & Burbules 2003, 80), which can provide resources for dealing with problems and situations in educational practice. The current research does not aim to provide guidelines into what model of WE should be implemented or the outcomes of different forms of WE.

## **4. SUMMARY OF KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS**

In the following chapter I will present the overall results from studies I, II and III. While the original research articles themselves provide detailed quotes and exploration of the results, my aim in this chapter is to collect the relevant data points and overview the results. I will re-evaluate some of the key findings in the studies through the pragmatist framework.

### **4.1 The integrative classroom as a safe learning space**

The results from study I and III indicate that, in general, pupils see the positive possibilities and consequences of an integrative WE classroom in learning about and from different worldviews. In the data, the majority of the pupils saw that integrative WE, where mutual learning but also discussion was implemented, had positive effects on learning about worldviews. There are a number of different meanings that the pupils highlighted as relevant. As implicated in international studies, a successful form of plural WE must begin from a high-trust environment in the classroom (Conroy et al. 2013). In the context of studies presented in this thesis, it would appear that a mutual classroom can act as a safe space to discuss and learn from worldviews, regardless of the pupil's worldview background. The school atmosphere, teacher sensitivity and the actions of other pupils seem to be the most important factors in creating a space for mutual learning. For the majority of the pupils, a similar worldview background or one's own religion were not the most pertinent factors that created an optimal space for learning or discussing worldviews. There seemed to be no inherent obstacle in discussing these themes together. In the eyes of many of the pupils, the discussions could start from both similarity in mutual humanity and difference in views about the world.

Here, the concept of safe space used in the original research articles also comes under scrutiny. As noted by Flensner and Von der Lippe (2019), while the integrative classroom should be a space in which pupils feel valued and respected, that does not mean it should be a space without disagreement. As Jackson (2014) puts it, safe space in the context of RE or worldview education is a space where 'students are able to express their views and positions openly, even if these differ from those of the teacher or peers' (p. 48). This is especially important in relation to structural inequalities, stereotypes and hate speech (Flensner & Von der Lippe 2019). However, as seen in the studies, while respecting one another,



disagreements were possible and even beneficial for mutual understanding. Thus, it seems while trust and respect are important, they should not hinder the possibility of disagreeing or debate. As has been noted (Flensner & Von der Lippe 2019), education should provide safety in relation to the dignity of individuals but not intellectual safety. On the contrary, education should provide pupils with situations of discomfort, where their own preconceptions are challenged and they have to come face to face with different ways of thinking and being (Callan 2016, Flensner & Von der Lippe 2019). People disagree in relation to religions and worldviews and this should be a natural part of learning and engaging with these themes, as it seemed to be for some of the pupils in study III. This disagreement and debate did not make the classroom unsafe, but rather mirrored the living plurality in views and opinions and allowed the pupils to practice understanding and listening to differences.

In order for these transactions and learning between pupils and articulations of one's own views to emerge, there needed to be respect within the classroom. In this regard the main themes which arose from the data are not surprising. Both in studies I and III the pupils emphasized that factors such as the sensitivity and empathy of the teacher, humour, a tolerant atmosphere, motivating tasks and lessons, and the presence of friends enabled the voicing and articulating of one's views. These elements also made integrative WE enjoyable for the pupils.

The pupils in the studies focused especially on the element of learning together in an integrative classroom. This provided opportunities for peer learning, or in pragmatist terms, transactions between the pupil across different RE and secular ethics groups in relation to learning from worldviews. The teachers in study II saw that these transactions were at the heart of what was different in an integrative classroom and that this should be emphasized in an integrative classroom space. Especially when exploring topics relating to religious and non-religious worldviews, cultures and ethics, the possibilities to discuss these themes across RE and secular ethics groups were seen as positive factors.

While this was true, since the context of Finnish integrative WE is characterized by the separative curriculums of different RE forms and secular ethics (NCCBE 2014), some of the pupils found that while peer learning was an important aspect, the amount and focus of the knowledge in the mutual classroom was different from their experiences in separative classrooms. Pupils from secular ethics sometimes felt that the mutual classroom had much more focus on religious worldviews, while on the other hand pupils from RE backgrounds noted that the mutual teaching did not emphasize the role of their own religion as much. These changes were characterized by both positive and negative meanings.

Some pupils who had a more religious worldview preferred a separative approach, since they themselves valued knowledge relating to their background tradition more than learning from other worldviews or worldviews in general.

They emphasized the need to learn about the single organized religion which provided them with pertinent horizons of meaning. These pupils were present as a smaller group in all studies and came from both majority and minority forms of RE. This reflects international results (Ipgrave 2016), where especially in cases where a worldview is tied closely to a tradition, the knowledge and negotiating meanings relating to that specific tradition are seen to be most important for learning. These views reflected an emphasis on *learning religion*, with education into a tradition as important. However, the notion of learning with encounters, discussion and reflection beyond separative lines was often still deemed important, although ultimately the preference in learning emphasized knowledge of a certain tradition.

Some pupils from secular ethics classes emphasized their preference for separative secular ethics classes. Their preference was mainly on dialogue in small groups, which they were used to in these previous classes. It could be that the smaller and more intimate framework of secular ethics classes when compared to integrative classrooms was one explanatory factor for these views. Also, these pupils had doubts whether an integrative classroom would emphasize religious worldviews too much. Whether this was deemed to be the case varied amongst the pupils. There was also a very small number of pupils who considered that RE or secular ethics were not necessary as school subjects in any form whatsoever.

Bringing pupils together was mainly seen as a positive notion for learning. Many of the pupils enjoyed the presence of their friends from different RE and secular ethics classes and delighted in the opportunity to explore religious and worldview themes with them, especially when their friends were from different RE or secular ethics classrooms. As the pupils explained, this helped them contextualize and understand both the worldviews but also their friends better. The transactions made possible by the integrative space were thus highlighted. Many comments in the data related to learning from worldviews as they were linked to individual personalities, not only to abstractions. In relation to learning from worldviews, the pupils in an integrative setting seemed to emphasize this element.

When viewing the meanings related to learning from different views and opinions, communication was thus emphasized. The actions which enabled this kind of learning did not depend merely on whether or not the pupils felt like explicating their views, but depended on a rather more delicate matter of attentiveness and respect. This need for attentiveness is clearly seen in the data from study III, where pupils reflected on what was needed to encounter and have dialogue about personal worldviews. Unlike non-personal knowledge relating to organized worldviews, the meanings given by individuals are also unique and require the attention and respect of others. Individuals take great care when, how

and to whom they articulate their views. Thus, in the pupils' eyes, respect but also paying attention are necessary in these transactions and require a qualitatively different approach when compared to, for example, paying attention to a book or to a teacher's presentation. These skills could be seen as crucial for engaging worldview diversity in a post-secular framework.

The stakeholders in study II also viewed integrative classrooms especially through their possibilities for learning. This learning was often framed through what one could call "tools for diversity" or "tools for a multicultural world" as the classrooms were seen to provide pupils with necessary skills in a plural society. A central theme in the stakeholder data is the emphasis on integrative worldview education as a platform for learning to engage in and encounter diversity more readily than in a separative model of WE. The teachers emphasized that a mutual classroom can challenge the pupils and their conceptions and present them with a more plural learning environment in relation to worldviews. The pupils' parents seemed to emphasize that knowledge gained in this learning environment would help the pupil in navigating a plural world and thriving in it, but also in connecting with others in various different communities, whether private or public. Here religions and worldviews were seen as inherently important to learn from, since they were deemed essential in understanding both different organized worldviews and cultures but also different individuals. The parents' views emphasized that the positive consequences of integrative WE would come about specifically because these classrooms mirrored the world and its diversity.

The challenges in integrative classrooms as inclusive spaces to learn about worldviews are also clear based on the data. A major challenge in an integrative classroom space of many worldviews was finding a mutual language to engage in transactions. In studies I and III the pupils expressed the challenging nature of questions relating to worldviews which were seen as highly religious. The question of how to discuss themes that might prove contentious was one of these issues. It is interesting to note that themes relating to the core ontological beliefs in a worldview, for example whether one believes in a God or not, were not brought up as necessarily difficult topics. A few groups of pupils in study III even delighted in discussing the different orientations of individuals towards the similarities and differences in ontological and epistemological aspects of worldviews and saw that discussing differences in these contexts, even with heated debates, was essential to learning. However, the most challenging topics in the data related to themes concerning the ethical and practical sides of worldviews, which were intricately linked to everyday living. In the case of study I, the veils in Islamic tradition were emphasized to be, or so the pupils felt, a difficult theme to discuss.

The previous observation might have to do with the representation of religion both globally and locally. Since the representations of different worldviews are not constructed only locally and experientially, but in today's world, possibly even more so according to national and global issues visible in the news and media, certain issues might appear to be more problematic or sensitive. As has been noted (Simojoki 2016), the attitudes towards certain themes in religions and worldviews might be constructed mainly from global contexts and the debates, arguments and radical positions regarding them. The experiences regarding these themes from a local, experiential and peer-level could be seen as important learning platforms which can provide a lived and relatable position reflecting the local traditions and interpretations of different religious practices. Transactions which give experiences to base meaning making on both global and local and personal views can thus be seen as important. However, many topics will undoubtedly remain sensitive and challenging both in the eyes of the teacher, as seen in study II, and the pupils themselves. As seen in international studies of integrative WE (Kittlmann Flensner 2015), how these topics are explored is a key question in integrative WE.

## **4.2 Inclusivity and positionality in the mutual space**

A major theme which underlay all studies was worldview positionality in relation to the pupils, the teacher and the transactions in integrative classroom. The positions available for the pupils to begin learning and worldview exploration was a pertinent theme in the data. While some pupils preferred the idea of their own religion as a starting point in learning, many pupils appreciated the more general integrative starting point, where there are no presuppositions regarding the personal worldview of the pupil. Rather, the pupils could express or negotiate their personal worldview positions on their own terms in relation to the subject itself and the worldviews learned in the classroom. Thus, the transactions available for the pupils were different from those in a separative space, with more possible avenues to create meaning. As pupils in studies I and III noted, the level of the pupil's worldview and the organized worldview were sometimes equated together in separative classrooms.

Some pupils did not see this as a problem, but since there is considerable heterogeneity in the way in which pupils, their families or different traditions orient towards organized worldviews, some pupils considered that the unquestioning equation of the pupil's worldview and the organized worldview, which sometimes happened in separative classes, did not resonate with the way they understood their personal worldview. Similar views were present in both

majority and minority pupils, who appreciated the possibility for transactions from a space which they could themselves negotiate.

In the data from the pupils in studies I and III, it would seem that while the sense of safety and engagement in a classroom of integrative WE rely on many of the same things that any other school subject does, the organizational change from a separative to an integrative setting clearly necessitated a new approach in relation to the personal and organized worldviews of the pupils. The assumptions made in separative RE by categorizing pupils based on their own religion did not resonate with how some of the pupils viewed their own personal worldview.

From the position of the pupils, the integrative classroom offered more space and negotiability in relation to their worldview. From a learning perspective, the pupils also emphasized that while the platform of integrative WE did not make an inherent assumption about the personal worldview of the pupil, there was a danger that the teacher could inadvertently assume the position of the pupil and thus narrow the possibility for agency for that pupil. For example, the teacher could identify the pupil with a certain worldview tradition with questions relating to that organized worldview, hence making assumptions of religious expertise. This was not, however, the case in many of the views expressed in the studies and the teacher's high professionalism was appreciated by the pupils. Many experiences in the integrative classrooms were positive because the pupils could identify their relationship to a certain organized worldview on their own terms and of their own volition. In study I, the pupils expressed their delight in gaining a position of power in relation to defining and expressing their own traditions and thoughts relating to them. This emphasized pupil views as something inherently important to learn from.

The other challenge is the inclusivity or exclusivity towards many different worldview positions in the classroom as explored in all the studies. Here a question about the power relations of worldviews within the classroom are pertinent. The guardians of the pupils in study II saw that one of the major challenges were the possible biases of the teacher with regard to certain worldviews. The teachers themselves in study II noted that the need for self-reflection regarding their action and discourses in the classroom was much emphasized in an integrative setting. This can be seen as a positive notion, since whether or not the platform in WE is separative or integrative, the worldviews of the pupils are heterogeneous in nature and teacher positionality should be considered in relation to this. The teachers in the studies displayed a high sense of self-reflection in relation to the worldviews present in the classrooms.

The change to integrative classrooms seemed to necessitate more reflection relating to the relationship of personal and organized worldviews of the pupils and how the teacher presented different worldview traditions. The teachers in study II felt that challenging stereotypes about worldview classifications was

one of the most important things that a mutual classroom could offer along with facilitating a more nuanced picture about worldviews via discussion. The teachers saw that the main challenges related to this in integrative WE were the lack of time and the necessity for much planning. Also, the cooperation and reflection of many different RE and secular ethics teachers was needed. In a separative framework the implementation of integrative classrooms was not a straightforward matter, since all relevant curricula had to be taken into consideration. However, the teachers saw that reflection about the way they taught and discussed about worldviews was highlighted in an integrative classroom and demanded more from the teachers. This necessity to reflect on how one speaks about religions and worldviews with pupils from many different backgrounds was seen as a positive change, which enabled the teachers to approach classes with much more care. All in all, the teachers saw that integrative spaces could provide the encounters and dialogue that were lacking in separative contexts. However, they noted that integration has to be planned carefully in order for it to be successful and adhere to the curriculum of all the pupils present in the classroom. Further examination and guidelines from the Ministry of Education were also seen as desirable.

As noted by researchers from different contexts (Niens et al. 2013, Berglund 2014, Sjöborg 2015), the discourses which are used in WE settings can exclude certain worldview positions and cause feelings of alienation. While the teachers noted the need for reflection about how they approach worldviews, the same is also true for the pupils. In the original studies, the discourses relating to religious beliefs seemed sometimes to generate exclusion amongst pupils whose worldviews were religious in nature. Some of the pupils in the studies framed the personal worldview of most of the pupils in the classrooms as secular in nature and framed religious worldviews as organized systems “elsewhere”, such as India or China. These pupils considered that religions were not necessarily as present or relevant in “modern” Finland. This notion that understanding religions is relevant “out there” can be seen as a reflection of a general secularist bias in thinking. This was not very prominent in the meaning making of the pupils, but as a theme it should be noted. While these pupils saw the need to understand religious worldviews, there are clearly possibilities for exclusive elements, which affix a certain position which is “outside religiosity” as the general starting point from which to engage religions.

The challenge to provide language in which to explore secular and religious worldview positions and make them understandable to one another can be viewed as one of the bigger challenges in integrative WE. Pupil interest in personal views was also often emphasized in relation to religious worldviews, while exploring secular points of view was not emphasized as often. Relating to the previous finding, while certain religious views can be exoticized, secular worldviews, on

the other hand, can be more hidden from view and exploration. It could be that the framing of religion as something especially important to learn about and emphasizing religious literacy instead of a broader scope of questions relating to existential questions and meaning making (Biesta et al. 2019), can inadvertently make religious worldviews the “problem” to be solved and thus more pertinent to learn from. This can leave other worldview positions relatively less explored. Here there is also a pertinent question about how the positionality of all worldviews could be better emphasized and how an integrative classroom could act as an inclusive space for both religious and non-religious worldviews.

This relates to how plurality and difference is acknowledged in the classroom. As seen in the stakeholder data (study II), the platform of integrative WE might provide possibilities for encounters that start from plurality, but it can also start from a sense of similarity. On one hand, this similarity can relate to inclusivity in the mutual school setting, which was seen as a positive starting point. Indeed, both the guardians and teachers in study II saw that one of the most important aspects of integrative WE as a platform for learning was that it reflected the idea of equality in relation to school timetables, teacher availability in school, and other practical matters in relation to RE and secular ethics groups.

On the other hand, there is a need for criticism if the notion of similarity is broadened to include different worldview positions, since difference as much as similarity is to be noted. Although the pupils and other stakeholders emphasized the positive notion of similarity in relation to humanity, differences in worldviews and also in the power positions with which one engages questions about worldviews should be noted. There were few guardians who feared that the teaching would emphasize neutrality which would subsume differences in false similarity. Here again a possible secularist approach to different positions is seen as a possible danger in discourses employed in the classroom which would diminish the self-understanding and voice of religious traditions. However, it would seem that precisely the anchoring of integrative education to different worldview traditions but also lived experiences could possibly prevent a false sense of similarity and a monolithic view of religions and worldviews.

### **4.3 Integrative classroom and transactions between pupils**

The major analytical focus of study III and an important element in studies I and II was the relevance of transactions with lived personal worldviews and learning from them. This did not diminish the need to learn about organized worldviews and their traditions as is seen in all data, but rather was an important contextualizing element in integrative WE that can be seen as somewhat missing



in separative WE. All the stakeholders considered that learning in plural environments emphasized worldview themes as something that can be discussed instead of keeping them hidden, which on a larger scale is seen as paramount in a post-secular society (Biesta et al. 2019). These discussions themselves were seen to be important sources for learning in a more nuanced way about religions and worldviews.

Even though learning about organized worldviews was deemed important, the pupils in the studies seemed to consider learning from the lived dimension of worldviews to be a necessary anchoring element in worldview learning and more “real” than just abstracted worldview traditions. The discussions about worldviews at the level of pupil transactions seemed to be the element that was most appreciated. However, the opportunities for discussion were not equal in all the classrooms. In some groups, where the trust in a mutual space was diminished due to bullying, social tensions, non-respectful attitudes or lack of attentiveness towards others, the pupils felt that expressing opinions or relaying experiences was difficult and the possibility for these transactions was diminished. However, in the majority of the cases explored, there seemed to be a safe and trusting environment, where mutual exploration and discussion even on the personal level was possible. There was a need for mutual respect and attentiveness between the pupils in order for discussion relating to worldviews to be fruitful in this way. In the eyes of the pupils this was related to the dynamics of the school group itself but also to the more general inclusive or exclusive atmosphere of the school itself.

Themes relating to worldviews in practice, local traditions and emotions were seen to be at the core of learning from worldviews at the personal level. These aspects helped to contextualize knowledge relating to worldviews, revealing more information but also the heterogeneity within different worldviews in how they are lived and what they can mean to individuals. Approaching personal worldviews as something valuable to learn from through discussion and not merely as abbreviations of larger worldview systems comes close to the idea of encountering irreducible pluralism inherently residing within the classroom. The pupils seemed to see the importance in encountering others as persons, not as representatives of certain worldviews. The transactions between pupils helped to contextualize views about religions and worldviews into the lived world.

In pragmatist terms, these transactions can be seen to necessitate thinking and reflection. Exploring worldview themes together seemed to anchor them into something else than mere facts. The teachers held this to be one of the main goals of integrative WE, where the pupils would at best gain appreciation and understanding of the variance and heterogeneity of worldviews. The teachers saw that by discussing and bringing attentiveness to varying experiences, stereotypes and categorizations about worldviews could be challenged. Some of the pupils highlighted the views and perspectives, which challenged their preconceptions,



as one of the key meanings in learning about worldviews. From a pragmatist perspective, this can be seen to reflect the fact that learning and knowledge are tied to action, which here is seen through transactions between pupils. Merely transferring knowledge is not enough, but rather, the actions the pupils engage in together by discussing worldviews was seen as key.

The main challenge that was apparent in the transactions are the possible biases on what worldview positions and orientations are deemed interesting or valuable to learn from. Pupils emphasized the importance of learning from lived personal worldviews in relation to different religious views but more rarely from Lutheran or secular orientations in worldviews. It could be the case that this reflects the interests of a majority position, where a Lutheran or secular background is not seen as interesting to learn from. On the other hand, here minority positions are exoticized as something interesting to learn about. This can also generate a situation where minority voices are only given space when they reflect a religious position, thus minimizing the possible worldview positions for these pupils. However, it should be noted that pupils from all backgrounds emphasized the need to contextualize worldviews to the level of the individual.

#### **4.4 Credibility of the data**

As is fitting for a pragmatist approach, and any scientific endeavour, the possible fallible nature of all results and positions must be acknowledged (Schwartz 2014, 12) and thus it is pertinent to explore the limitations and possible shortcomings of any research. While the concept of *validity* refers to more quantitative approaches in research, and as the pragmatist approach leans more to a constructivist position in epistemology, it could be said that the credibility and trustworthiness of the data and analysis should be explored (Drisco & Machi 2015). The context of the data is extremely important and the credibility should be carefully examined in this light. Generalizability is thus limited and the research should rather explore the results as warranted assertions based on restrictions in the data.

The research was conducted in the metropolitan area of Helsinki and is thus case sensitive. However, the stakeholders in the data offer extremely valuable views on integrative WE, and thus tools for thinking about the problems facing WE, since they have experiences from both separative and integrative WE. As has been noted in current academic literature (Sakaranaho 2019, Holm et al. 2019, Rissanen 2019), different geographical areas of Finland have different starting points when implementing WE. While the metropolitan area of Helsinki provides a relatively culturally diverse and plural context, where many groups of RE and secular ethics can be integrated into the same classroom, there is much less heterogeneity in RE groups especially in more rural parts of Finland.

However, this does not diminish the fact that heterogeneity on the level of the pupils should be taken into consideration even in seemingly homogenous settings of RE and secular ethics.

It should also be noted that the stakeholders and the pupils have extensive experiences of separative RE and secular ethics in primary education. As noted, the research results and opinions reflect partially integrative WE, but also a novel experience for the pupils when compared to their previous studies. This novelty can be seen to affect their views, perhaps in a positive way. While there were pupils who emphasized the previous separative model of WE as preferable, the majority of the pupils in the research emphasized the positive outcomes and learning happening in integrative classrooms.

The research also did not explore the successfulness of integrating various different curriculums of RE and secular ethics in the current cases and this should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. As has been noted, the secular ethics curriculum is somewhat different from RE curricula, and integrating these poses a significant challenge. Since the focus of the study was to explore the shift from separative to integrative WE and its implications for pupil and stakeholder experiences, the evaluation of curriculum integration in relation to learning outcomes was not in the scope of the study. However, evaluating learning outcomes and comparison with separative models of teaching could provide an important avenue for further study. However, in the current study, meanings given to the integrative space were of interest.

There is also a possibility of various latent or hidden meanings in the data. Since the topic of partially integrative WE has garnered much attention in the media, some of the pupils were certainly aware of the possible political and social implications of such teaching. Also, the views of the parents or guardians of the pupils regarding this teaching could have had a significant effect on the views of the pupils. For this reason, the interviews also had a question gauging whether or not the pupils had discussed integrative WE with their parents or friends outside school. Generally, the pupils did not seem to be very interested in the possible political connotations of the teaching and instead focused on their own experiences and thoughts.

While the warranted assertions from the research in this study thus emphasize that learning in WE without inherent pupil separation can be experienced in a positive way, care should be taken in examining all pertinent questions relating to the way in which WE is implemented. As seen in studies (Rissanen 2014), a similar background can offer pupils especially from a minority background a safe space in which to negotiate themes relating to identity and citizenship. However, it would also appear that separation of pupils can lead to future-fixed identities for pupils where negotiability with regard to many pertinent factors of identity are absent (Zilliagus 2014, 2019). Both majority and minority pupils

expressed the positive effects of integrative practices in this study, but it is not certain how much previous separative experiences affect these notions.

The data is also constricted by its temporal nature, since all the data collection points from certain stakeholders were done at certain times without follow-ups. The exception is the data in study I, where some of the same pupils participated in both the quantitative questionnaire and the qualitative interviews. However, in order to enhance the credibility of the data, a follow-up study from the same pupils would have increased the credibility of the data. Here the constraints from resources and researcher timetables while working full-time during the research were the major factors which prevented such follow-ups. Studies I and II consist of data from pupils and stakeholders who have had relatively little time to engage with integrative WE. Both the pupils and the parents or guardians had views of integrative WE from a maximum of one school semester and it could be that with time the views could change. However, the pupils in study III had more experience of integrative WE. Especially the pupils in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade had more extensive experiences relating to integrative WE.

The data is also restricted by the fact that it explores the views of stakeholders but not at the level of ethnographic observation or participatory ethnography. While two of the researchers participating in the research process observed lessons of integrative WE in relation to studies I and II, these observations were used as a hermeneutic tool to understand integrative WE classrooms rather than as explicit data. A comprehensive data set of ethnographical observations on integrative WE would provide important avenues of exploration in terms of research.

The data and observations also consider integrative WE in the context of lower secondary school education. It should be noted that interpretations of the data or its relevance must be contextualized to the context of young people who are perhaps already actively engaging in the identity process often related to this developmental stage and thus are able to reflect on the plurality of worldviews and their personal and organizational levels. The implementation of integrative WE on an earlier or later stage of education would thus necessitate an entirely different set of research questions.

All in all, these contextual considerations are important when exploring the credibility of the data. As noted before, a pragmatist position on educational research does not aim for validity in a generalizable scale. Rather, the warranted assertions in this study seem to emphasize the need for encounter and integrative learning especially in the context of lower secondary school when previous experiences of WE have been separative. Some pupils in the studies referred precisely to this fact, and emphasized that while they had extensive experiences of separative WE in previous school years, the integrative model with its emphasis on mutual exploration, discussion and critical reflection was warranted. These

caveats are extremely important when reflecting on how the results should be interpreted. They cannot be extended to reflect completely integrative WE or integrative WE that has been implemented throughout primary education.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF RESULTS

It would seem that the integrative classrooms, even within a separative system can have positive consequences for learning and pupil dialogue. While there are many possible issues relating to how an integrative model can be implemented within a separative system, such as ensuring that all pupils receive education according to their own curriculum, there are valuable insights into how encounter and dialogue could be framed in RE and secular ethics classrooms. As integrative practices across many school subjects are increasingly encouraged (NCCBE 2014), the results can indicate many relevant questions relating to teaching integrative practices in relation to RE and secular ethics. In light of the results, there are few intellectual instrumentalities to be explored both conceptually and theoretically. As noted in a pragmatist approach to research, educational research should feed back into practice by enabling reflection and giving tools for thinking about education. It is worth exploring the results from a more conceptual and theoretical perspective which, due to the limited space in journal articles, was not entirely possible within the original research publications.

The key question seems to be what positions are available at the outset when beginning an exploration of worldviews. The question about positionality in a WE classroom that was reflected in the data can be viewed from at least three different perspectives:

1. Is the positionality of all religious or non-religious starting points made clear?
2. What positions are available for the pupils or what positions are given to them from a position of power?
3. How can we conceptualize learning from individual worldview positions and dialogue between them, which was emphasized in the data?

I will now explore these three questions in the light of relevant concepts and theory by reflecting on the results from the original research and international discussion on RE, religion and worldviews.

## 5.1 Religion and non-religion: A question of inclusivity?

Approaching religious and non-religious positions in the classroom seems to necessitate an eye for plurality. As the teachers noted, the variety of pupil experiences made reflexivity about the way teachers approached individual positions a key question in integrative WE. At the outset, this relates to the question of how religious and non-religious or secular worldviews are approached and presented in the classroom. As seen in the data, while the pupils were interested in hearing about various different positions and worldviews, the emphasis of interest often concerned religious worldviews. Especially pupils from a secular ethics background worried that religious themes and worldviews would get most of the emphasis in the classroom. Approaching secular positions through negation and in contrast to religion, and framing religion as the main topic to consider introduces certain emphases when approaching worldviews.

As noted in influential RE documents in the British context, such as Key Ideas (Wintersgill 2017) and their commentaries (Freathy & John 2018), one of the key goals in integrative education is the understanding of one's rootedness to a particular position and its accompanying limitations. From here, 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). For this to happen, there should be a critical look into how the starting points of such education offer opportunities to understand this positionality and rootedness.

As explored by critics of the concept of religion (Fitzgerald 2000), we should be critical about how we approach religiosity and non-religiosity. When investigating religions and, for example, categorizing them as something which has to do with the Transcendent or supernatural, we inadvertently create the other position, or in this case, the non-religious/secular. Although the demarcation of these two views according to the belief in supernatural might be factually correct, it creates the secular position through negation of the religious position, such as in atheism. In this case, religion is inhabited by transcendent values and realities, while its flipside "the secular" is imbued with reality and factuality. This also characterizes atheism and agnosticism through "negative identities" (Taves et al. 2018) in relation to religion and sees religion as the starting point in worldview exploration. Thus, religious and non-religious are easily pitted against each other as the irrational and rational, the untrue and the factual, since secular is seen through the absence of religious beliefs instead of the ontological, epistemological and ethical positions within worldviews. As seen in studies, some secular positions are indeed characterized by individuals themselves primarily through contrasting their worldview with religion (Kontala 2018, 219-221) but

secular or non-religious positions are not necessarily emphasized through this absence and a wide range of worldviews can be seen under the category of non-religion (Kontala 2018, Singleton et al. 2019).

The construction of both religious and non-religious as concepts is extensively explored in post-colonial thought, where religion as a phenomenon is seen to be constructed from a decidedly Western position, with historical developments from the Enlightenment onwards (Fitzgerald 2000, Poulter et al. 2015). Essentializing notions with regard to religiosity can mask the differences inherent within and between religious traditions (Komulainen 2011) and can also inherently frame religion as positional, non-factual and irrational (Fitzgerald 2000). In this Western and secularist outlook, the position which is thus more “real”, “without” something, is framed as the desirable position of negotiations. As remarked by Casanova (2009): “Secularity, being without religion, by contrast tends to become increasingly the default option, which can be naively experienced as natural and, thus, no longer in need of justification.” (Casanova 2009, 1053). Furthermore, *secularism* as emphasized by Casanova (2009, 2012), is a position which emphasizes the secular position as real and factual and as a something that has “overcome” the irrationality of belief by reason, thus highlighting secularity’s superiority to religious beliefs, which are deemed to belong to the past (Casanova 2012, 31-33).

Thus, instead of focusing on the meaning making nature of all different positions at the outset, the emphasized conceptual starting point on religion, which is imbued, for example, with beliefs, rituals and dogmas, implicitly maintains that their absence in the non-religious makes that position more factual and compounds the belief “that the secular is simply the real world seen aright in its self-evident factuality” (Fitzgerald 2000, 15). The notion of the neutrality and even superiority of the secular can deem it to be a position which has been achieved without existential choice (Casanova 2012) and merely as the default position one should take in modernity. As seen in studies relating to integrative RE in the Swedish context, an unexplored bias of secularism, which might be reflected in teacher and pupil discourses that paint secular positions as neutral and objective while religious views are seen as irrational, creates a hegemony within the classroom where encounter and dialogue are not possible (Kittelman Flensern 2015). However, systems of values and systems of thought are necessarily transcendent and have elements which are not reducible to the “real”. They are not merely methods such as science or reflections of nature itself, but are teleological in nature and imbue the world with different meanings. This could be one departure point for reflection in an integrative setting where both religious, non-religious and worldviews in between should be given space.

Especially in relation to reflexivity about teacher and pupil positions, considerations about how positions such as religious or non-religious are

constructed and how the intersectionality of individual positions is taken to account could be deemed important. More inclusive concepts, such as worldviews that aim to express the individual and systemic levels in both religious and secular positions through their meaning making could thus be considered. This is not to deny the massive importance of religion at its different levels and in individual lives. However, there should be care in how it is conceptualized as a starting point when approaching individual and collective positions. These reflections matter to both separative and integrative forms of teaching, since even seemingly homogenous groups of RE harbour a wider variety of worldviews. The integrative space seemed to necessitate teacher reflexivity about pupil positions when the teachers had previously taught separative classes. When looking at the data from the pupils and their views, this reflexivity could be seen as an important tool for whatever form of WE is implemented.

The emphasis on viewing both religious and non-religious positions through questions relating to worldviews has been emphasized in Finnish educational documents for quite some time, with the usage of terms such as *education relating to worldviews* (NCCBE 2004, NCCBE 2014). Here, positions relating to ideology, politics or lifestyle, with their own ontological and epistemological starting points, can be seen to characterize secular individual positions rather than the absence of religion (Koirikivi et al. 2019). However, worldview as a concept, while more extensively used in secular ethics (NCCBE 2014), has still relatively little usage in the contexts of RE and as a starting point of reflection and education. It is often paired with the concept of religion, but is still often seen as something separate, with religion as another category (NCCBE 2014). Recently, in the Finnish context worldview has been emphasized as an inclusive concept for exploring religious and non-religious worldviews (Helve 2015; Kantola 2018; Koirikivi et al. 2019). I believe the concept has relevance in school exploration of religions and worldviews and could be conceptualized as an inclusive starting point in educational contexts in RE as well as secular ethics, where the concept is already used more extensively.

## **5.2 Organized and personal positions in the classroom**

Another factor which was highlighted in the data were the multiple possible positions that the pupils could take in relation to organized worldviews in light of their own experiences or the views of their local communities. Giving space for communal but also individual voices in the classroom seemed to be important and the pupils generally enjoyed a position where they could engage in transactions with unique individual voices.



As Cherblanc notes (2018) while examining integrative WE in Quebec, starting from a textbook organized perspective on religion, which might not reflect the worldviews of the pupils in the classroom, can lead to perplexing situations where the idealized and organized version of a worldview that the teacher presents is taken as the normative correct form of a worldview, even when it might differ from the lived worldview of the pupils and their community (Cherblanc 2018). As highlighted by Kittelmann Flensner (2015) in the Swedish context, this notion of where “a tradition speaks and the pupils listen” (Lehmann, 2008, p. 312) should be looked at critically in both integrative and separative settings. Here, a power imbalance is created and the views of the pupil can be marginalized. As Conroy and others (2013) note in the British context, a teacher who only aims to present the idealized version of a religion (in the case of the quote, Islam) can dismiss pupil experience and variance, and thus: “a disconnect can be seen between the students’ understanding of Islam in its cultural and traditional context, and the teachers’ description” (p. 136). There is a crucial question here relating to the worldview positions available to the pupil. The tools and concepts that the teacher uses and approaches learning with have an important impact on learning and how the teacher views pupil positions.

If the personal position of the pupil is seen to “lack” something or be an incomplete version of a worldview, it orients the exploration of personal worldviews as something that aim at a future fixed set of “questions” derived from organized worldviews to which an individual must find an answer. In the context of education and reflexivity within, it might be more fruitful to explore personal worldviews as a process with its own unique features that the pupil engages in and a view that gives agency for the pupils to seek and articulate meaning. Also, as explored by Kontala (2018) at the level of the individual, change, dynamism and situationality must also be seen to be inherent in worldviews (Kontala 2018, 40-45).

Approaches in the British integrative RE context have aimed to solve this problem in many ways. Many approaches (Alberts 2007) aim to account for the criticisms towards the concept of religion and especially take note of the heterogeneous and varied nature of religion in the lived lives of individuals and communities. This is also emphasized in current research on lived religion in the study of religions and theology (Ammermann 2016; Utriainen 2018) when compared to the official orthodoxies presented by religious authorities and traditions. As Teece (2010) notes, already in the approaches provided by Grimmit and Reade (1975), the position of the pupil and her individual views were of paramount importance. In the British context the shift from confessional to non-confessional RE, which demanded the contextualization of RE in educational rather than religious terms, necessitated an approach which took seriously the growing individual and her development (Teece 2010). For example, the

approaches of Jackson (1997), Wright (2000) and Erricker (2000) all aim to conceptualize learning in relation to both organized and personal positions, with local communities as also an important source for learning. There is much to engage with in these approaches. However, as they approach individual meaning making mainly through the religious vernacular, such as religion, faith and belief, there is a question whether or not they can be inclusive enough in relation to different worldview positions.

The results from studies I, II and III emphasize that worldview learning, which is tied to individual positions and individual views and also the possibilities of negotiating worldview questions without essentialization seem to be important for many pupils. In the context of WE, this means plurality as a starting point in a pragmatist sense. This does not mean that the community, faith tradition and traditions do not play a part in the meaning making of an individual. Individual worldviews need to be connected to social, cultural and political frameworks (Helve 2015), and not only seen as individual constructions. Critical views about how organized worldviews affect individual positions and the world should be recognized. This is essential in seeing how different worldview positions are treated and seen differently, and how some worldview positions gain power positions with their epistemologies taken for granted, as seen in the secular-Lutheran position and in secularist discourse.

However, the starting point in the personal positions here refers to the meanings given by the individual. Categorizing and assuming pupil positions should be looked at critically in light of the research results. In WE it is important to explore but also find avenues of thinking otherwise and critically towards various forms of representing worldviews. From a Human Rights perspective it is necessary to ask “who speaks for” a religion or worldview. Especially in the light of feminist theory, the critical question of individual identity at the intersection of official worldview traditions and individual identities is extremely important to consider: what positions are available for individual pupils and their identity (Young 2015)? This provides necessary tools for critical thinking and as Seigfried (1996) notes from a pragmatist feminist perspective, when emphasizing experience and action, we can also critically examine the notion that change is inferior to a fixed reality (Seigfried 1996). This mode of viewing worldviews and learning from them prefers to introduce pupils to the complexity of the world rather than to simplify it (Alberts 2007, 73).

While giving space for pupil worldview negotiations, of equal importance are voices which position themselves within a tradition. Pupil and parental views in the data also reflected a notion about the importance of adhering to a single tradition. The notion of organized and personal worldview positions as distinct from one another certainly reflects Western notions relating to the construction of one’s own position in the world. While not exactly reflecting

what Peter Berger called the *heretical imperative* of modernized society (Berger 1980), where deviance, individual choice and thus “heresy” when compared to religious traditions is the way in which modernity views religion, the notion of separating personal and organized worldviews reflects a view that these two can be separated.

However, as noted by Adam Seligman (2000), we should not take authority and community lightly when examining the possibilities for individual positions, especially when examining religious traditions and the possibility of positioning oneself in a classroom where these themes are navigated. It is not necessarily the individual, but the community and tradition in many contexts that gives moral authority and direction to a worldview instead of the existential validation of an individual (Seligman 2000). As seen in different studies, it can be precisely authority and the given nature of a worldview system, especially with religious individuals, that orients a whole way of life (Jakelic 2016; Ipgrave 2016). Here, one does not discuss worldviews and their construction but rather a way of life in religion. For these individuals, a worldview is not about construction but about discovery: something traditional instead of something new. Here safety is also derived from mutual worldviews in the classroom or learning space (Ipgrave 2016). This notion has been linked especially with Islamic worldviews and Islamic education (Rissanen 2014), but on a larger scale to religious traditions, where truth can be seen as discovered, revealed or given, not constructed (Wright 2000). In the original research papers (studies I and III), some of the pupils in integrative classrooms explicitly referred to the knowledge relating to certain religious traditions as the reason for preferring a separative form of teaching: one needs to discover the worldview one was born into, not eclectically explore many other avenues because they are not as relevant.

As Jakelic writes, conceiving of religion or worldview not as a choice, but as a given and an important building block of identity should be considered especially in relation to several religious traditions: one does not choose but rather is born into these traditions (Jakelic 2016). This notion of an individual worldview as given and tied to tradition, which must be discovered through study and revelation is important to keep in mind when discussing possible positions (Wright 2000). However, as noted by Conroy and others (2013) in their lengthy exploration of integrative RE in the British context, a successful form of school RE must present the pupils with complexity and unfamiliarity, where effective pedagogies draw “upon a committed pluralism, which actively values difference, complexity and change, enabling diverse groups to work together to realize a common good without putting aside their fundamental character” (p. 129). Even the positions that, for example, Jakelic calls *collectivistic religions* (Jakelic 2016), where a personal worldview is not a matter of negotiation or seeking, tie worldviews into living and a total way of life. These positions among others and the ways

of conceptualizing both individuals and their relation to traditions and systems of thought are extremely important to understand and discuss.

It would seem to be necessary to reflect critically on how teaching provides pupils with opportunities to negotiate and express their worldviews and how positions can be assumed *a priori*. In relation to the results from the original studies, it would seem that discussing worldviews together at their personal level can, at best, anchor individual religiosity and worldviews into what they mean to an individual. Here we get to the final notion about positionality within the classroom, namely, the nature of pupil meaning making and learning from it in transactions.

### 5.3 Learning from personal worldviews

It would seem that one of the most important aspects of “learning from” in relation to religions and worldviews in the data came from transactions at the personal level. While the classrooms varied in how they provided possibilities for discussion especially because of the classroom atmosphere, the majority of pupils expressed the desire to learn and engage in encounters with various views and positions in relation to worldviews.

As has been noted in European studies regarding diversity and differences, especially exclusive truth claims are often seen as obstacles for dialogue (Knauth et al. 2008). The pupils in the original studies emphasized the need to understand these differences at the level of personal positions, but maintained that this exploration demanded an attentive and accepting atmosphere from other pupils and the teachers. This could reflect a notion that by learning through discussion at the level of personal worldviews, they are encountered with much less criticism than organized worldviews. As seen in the Swedish context (Kittelmann Flenser 2015, 258-265), the notions about individual validity and the personal lived nature of a worldview allow pupils to encounter views as lived and tied to persons, rather than only a more critical and distanced look into an organized form of a worldview. From a pragmatist perspective the role of reflection and thinking emerge when practical or intellectual habits can no longer answer the situation at hand (Schwartz 2014, 11). Encountering a lived experience that might deviate from a generalized version of an organized worldview necessitates reflection and in the case of the pupils in studies I and III provides more avenues to understand the diversities of worldviews.

This emphasizes the need for encountering worldviews, where not only knowledge but human encounter, dialogue and reflection can aim to broaden the individual’s worldview. There were echoes of this in the data from integrative classrooms, where pupils desired to reflect on the emotions and lived validity

within worldviews. Respect, empathy, encounter or as expressed in one of the studies, *attentiveness*, was thus encouraged rather than only distanced cognitive exploration of worldviews.

Mutual worldview exploration on the level of persons and encounter has relevance for the development of an individual's worldview. As Nilsson (2013) notes from a psychological perspective:

*Solitary life experiences and reflection do, however, not by itself have nearly as much potential to increase worldview awareness as does the encounter with other worldviews. Worldview encounters have the potential to make the person more aware of the fact that his or her own worldview, like everybody else's, provides only a limited vision of reality and that such limited visions strongly condition every person's experiences and actions, which, in turn, has the potential to promote understanding, tolerance, and respect. By demonstrating how differences of opinion boil down to fundamental differences in worldview assumptions and values, it can also help a person to understand the core tenets of his or her own worldview as contrasted to those of others. (p. 90)*

This quote necessitates exploration of personal worldviews from the final perspective of how, while often implicit and unarticulated, their articulation and communication can help individuals orient themselves in a world of worldviews. Encounter of different positions and ways of thinking is deemed necessary in order to develop one's own worldview and respect towards others (Nilsson 2013; Koltko-Rivera 2004). Here, the teacher's own personal worldview is but one position, and exploring and noting the implicit notions within it can be seen as extremely important reflective tools for the teacher.

If we look at the issue from a pragmatist point of view and emphasize the importance of transactions in the classroom (Sutinen et al. 2015), agency and process in personal worldviews should be emphasized. In relation to religions and worldviews in WE as examined by Sutinen and others (2015), different worldview positions can be seen to be different kinds of inquiries into the world and its meaning (Sutinen et al. 2015). Since a pragmatist position emphasizes an interactionist position, no position with regard to worldviews can be seen as neutral or non-value-laden. All positions, whether secular or religious or in-between, aim to construe meaning in interaction with the environment. By using the pragmatist viewpoint that emphasizes knowledge as action and the individual meanings created in transaction with the environment, we can make sense of worldviews not as only cognitive structures, but also as lived, often implicit and even conflicting structures. They must also be seen as negotiated in time and place by individuals who are engaged in action. The understanding of worldviews and

their impact on individuals can thus be fostered in communication with others. While scientific and institutional knowledge relating to worldviews can offer other instrumentalities with which to explore them, starting from existing worldview plurality in individuals could act as a starting point in integrative educational setting. The idea of plurality within worldviews has been noted already in the key works of Skeie (1995) and Jackson (2004). Jackson, for example, in his interpretive approach (1997, 2004) emphasizes the need for RE to begin from both the individual questions of pupils but also the existing plurality within worldviews and traditions.

These emphases on the personal worldview of the individual should also be expanded to consider the transactions happening in the classroom as seen in the results of the original research articles. Emphasizing worldviews as thus, there is potential in viewing the personal meaning making of individuals as sources of learning along with traditions and organized worldviews (Avest & Wielzen 2017). As Rautionmaa and others (2017) explicate, worldview dialogue can be viewed on many different levels, whether we are speaking of discursive dialogue where worldviews are examined academically, human dialogue, where encounter happens at the level of individuals seeking understanding on an existential level, secular dialogue, where cooperation and encounter aim to achieve a solution to a problem or spiritual dialogue, or where the mutual encounter happens through, for example, multireligious rituals (Rautionmaa et al. 2017). It would seem that learning through human dialogue and the encountering of individual meaning making was one of the most important aspects of meaning given to learning in an integrative classroom.

If pupils are to take seriously the beliefs of others and “identify believers as living in the same contemporary world as themselves” (Conroy et al. 2013, 119), it could be argued that learning religions and worldviews must also happen through encounter, not only through academic study. It could be argued that an understanding of pluralism and difference cannot appear out of surface level knowledge or thought experiments tasking one to “being the Other”. This might relate to how learning from discourse on personal worldviews seemed to have an intrinsic value in the experiences in integrative classrooms: here the worldviews were tied to individual meaning making, emotions and motivations. As seen in the studies, while some pupils put inherent relevance in emphasizing a single background tradition, most of the pupils seemed to find relevance in discussing worldview matters together at this stage in their education.

## 5.4 Worldview as a tool for reflection?

In relation to the three different views about positionality and the research results, I would claim that one inherently important aspect of reflection in an integrative classroom is the worldview reflexivity of both teacher and pupils. A worldview, which can be seen to act as an inclusive concept in relation to religious and non-religious positions, includes both organized and personal levels and does not make an inherent division between secular and religious points of view, could act as the basis for this reflection. This concept, which is already somewhat in use on the level of the NCCBE (2014) and especially in secular ethics, could provide one way to enhance the understanding of positionality in relation to religions and worldviews. I will now consider a few key elements in the concept of worldview that could be pertinent in relation to the research results and conceptual questions explored earlier in this chapter.

While worldviews have been explored following many avenues (e.g. Aerts et al. 1994; Kontala 2018; Naugle 2002; Niiniluoto 1984; Nilsson 2013; Sire 2015; Vidal 2012), there is relatively little exploration of the concept in multicultural educational literature (Poulter et al. 2015), where interest towards religion and religious diversity is better represented. However, interest in the concept has been emerging in the international academic discussion in relation to education (e.g. van der Kooij et al. 2015, 2017; Selcuk & Valk 2012; Valk 2017) as diverse and non-essentializing ways in which to reflect on the plurality of worldviews, and the positionality of all starting points becomes pertinent in a post-secular framework (Riitaola & Dervin 2014). While the concept itself in relation to worldview diversity and as an educational starting point has been emphasized in Finnish secular ethics tradition (Honkala 2006; Salmenkivi 2013; Salmenkivi, Elo, Tomperi & Ahola-Luttilla 2007) there is relatively little academic exploration of the concept in relation to educational settings.

The best-known worldview model in WE is probably that of Ninian Smart who, while focusing on religious worldviews, offers a dimensional model which explores worldviews from the perspective of doctrines, narratives, ethics, rituals and experience (Smart 2000). This model has been heavily criticized (e.g. Fitzgerald 2000, Owens 2011) since it seems to model all religions or worldviews from a rather Western, and especially Christian or Abrahamic religions' point of view. Other examples for worldview exploration have been offered. De Witt et al. (2016), who have created an evaluation tool for exploring worldviews, operationalize worldviews through *ontology* (what exists), *epistemology* (nature and sources of knowledge), *axiology* (theory of values), *anthropology* (conception of humanity) and *societal vision* (view of society and its future) (De Witt et al. 2016). Similarly, Rousseau and Billingham (2018) propose that central worldview components are: *ontology*, *metaphysics*, *cosmology of nature* (view of nature),



*cosmology of persons* (views about the nature of humanity and individuals), *axiology, praxeology* (conceptions about correct action) and *epistemology* (Rousseau & Billingham 2018). Further, Vidal (2012), using the model proposed by Apostel, Aerts and others (1994), proposes that worldviews can be viewed as aiming to answer questions relating to: *ontology, explanation* (view of the past), *prediction* (model of the future), *axiology, praxeology, epistemology* and the general notion of where to start looking for answers to these questions (Vidal 2012).

From a more holistic perspective, in Swedish integrative RE the concept of *livsåskådning* has been used. This concept can be translated into the English concept of worldview, but also into, for example, life-view, view of life, life philosophy or life understanding (Kittelmann Flensner 2015, 75-78). This concept emphasizes both religions and secular worldviews as phenomena which aim to make meaning from the world and answer the large questions humans have about life, death and so on (Alberts 2007, 236-245). This approach clearly aims for a more inclusive concept even to worldviews that are secular, since meaning making is emphasized. Other related concepts which aim to include religions and other worldviews such as *existential configurations* (Gustavsson 2020) or *life interpretations (livstolkning)* (Ristiniemi, Skeie & Sporre 2018) have been used in the Nordic context. All of these concepts emphasize the subject of WE starting from the process nature of the existential questions of pupils (Gustavsson 2020). The concept of worldview has been explored in the Swedish context (Gunnarsson 2008) and used especially in the context of *life-questions* pedagogy, which emphasizes the existential questions of pupils as the starting point of learning (Hartman 1994). Although these approaches emphasize the meaning making level of the individual, the starting point of reflection is usually the academic studies of religion approach to religion and the dichotomous relationship of religious and non-religious worldviews that can create emphases of secularism (Kittelmann Flensner 2015).

If critically examined, the concept of worldview has been seen to offer too narrow a look into religious positions (Gustavsson 2020). If the emphasis of the concept is on its cognitive elements, as the term view would suggest, emotions, corporeality and lived experience, which are paramount to the understanding of religions and many other positions, cannot be accounted for (Gunnarsson 2008). However, it could be argued that the worldview concept can emphasize these elements. Another issue in the worldview concept is its varied nature in definitions. Some even see its vagueness as an asset, with many possible avenues to explore (Sire 2015). However, in the context of school WE and education, it is necessary to further anchor the concept. This can be done in relation to the more hermeneutic tradition in philosophy, which can be dated back to Kant and



Dilthey, or in the more recent approaches in, for example, empirical psychology (Nilsson 2013, Taves et al. 2018, 2019).

The categories and definitions relating to worldviews as noted above could also act as important tools for analysis in school WE. Empirical evidence suggests that analysing and learning about worldviews through their components can make sense of worldviews themselves but also of the deep-seated debates and arguments relating to current events which have roots in the fundamental notions in worldviews (De Witt et al. 2016). Moreover, these analytical categories are inclusive and interdisciplinary in nature and can aim to explore different cultural, religious and non-religious positions (Murphy 2017). With the concept, the positionality of all starting points is emphasized and their construction, rather than definitions through absence is emphasized.

Also of importance is reflection on the organized and personal levels of worldviews. Valk (2009, 2017b) and van der Kooij et al. (2013, 2017) see that by decisively differentiating between the nature of organized and personal perspectives, a worldview can act as a starting point of analysis and learning in WE. The phenomenological approach and emphasis on knowledge should be paired with analysis on the level of personal worldviews, and as van der Kooij et al. (2013) remark:

*When concentrating on organized worldviews only, the personal worldviews of pupils or that of their parents might be ignored. If one agrees with the idea that one of the core concerns of schools is the formation of a student's personal identity (De Ruyter 2007, Miedema and Bertram-Troost 2008) attention for personal worldview in education is a consequence. (pp. 223-224)*

However, the need for the exploration of organized worldviews is also encouraged. Valk (2017b) sees the need to emphasize organized worldviews as systems in WE, because along with individuals, they affect societies, nations, groups and the power relations between them. They are not only the raw materials from which individuals construct their individual worldviews but also entities which affect the world around us (Valk 2017b). However, the important question is the emphasis and conceptualization of the level of worldviews with that of individuals. As Vidal (2012) articulates:

*even if a worldview is ultimately carried by an individual, we should also not forget to analyse higher levels of systems or organizations with the relevant analysis at that level. Of course, this higher analysis has to be in fine reintegrated in a worldview of an individual. (p. 7)*

As seen in the data, learning in relation to discussions about personal worldviews was highlighted as important. Current psychological theories see personal worldview as linked to or at least closely adhering to individual personality (Nilsson 2013), thus linking it more generally to the development of pupil personality and identity. The eclectic and more idiosyncratic nature of personal worldviews is emphasized in many views (van der Kooij et al. 2017, Valk 2017b, Flanagan 2019), and many characterize its nature as a “bricolage”, which emphasizes the possibility of mixing ideas eclectically from different traditions and salient perspectives (van der Kooij et al. 2013; Flanagan 2019). Whatever the case, emphasizing the processual and negotiable nature of personal worldviews seems to be necessary in the light of results about the possible heterogeneity within individual worldviews (Singleton et al. 2019). Taves et al. (2018), for example, claim that by noting the views which ground the worldview process to the human condition and evolutionary theory, we can use an approach which:

*upends the usual top-down approaches that assume that the highly developed and systematized worldviews of philosophers and theologians are the standard from which “lived worldviews” have departed. Working from the bottom up, it makes more sense to think of worldviews as explicitly articulated and elaborated on a need-to-know basis not only in response to “crises of meaning,” but also in light of local views of what should be passed on to whom and in what manner. If this is the case, then lived worldviews may be more fragmentary, episodic, and situation dependent than formal, systematized worldviews would lead us to expect. (p. 9)*

Generally, personal worldviews can be seen to arise from the internal drive to seek meaning in the world and in existence (Nilsson 2013, 80-81), which then orients everyday life. This drive to see things as meaningful or find an interpretive lens through which to make sense of the world, is seen to be inherently human (Koltko-Rivera 2004) and underscores both religious and secular starting points. Worldviews as lived are situational, since different situations and different problems make it necessary to articulate or reflect on one’s worldview. This process nature of worldviews is an extremely important notion when considering the worldviews of young people in the context of school. Instead of future-fixed or ready-made starting points, change and development should also be emphasized.

Similar emphases about the fundamental role of meaning making in personal worldviews have also been explored in theological contexts. As an example, Jeremy Fowler (1981) sees meaning making as faith, which underlies both religious and non-religious individual positions (Fowler 1981; Newman 2004). Fowler conceptualizes positions which develop from individual *faith* as *religious* or *spiritual*, with spiritual understood as living according to one’s faith, which

does not necessarily entail religion (Fowler 1981). However, as explored above, it could be argued that in order to include differing positions, we need concepts relating to meaning making which are interdisciplinary in nature in order to better include positions of a secular nature as well. A more inclusive notion could perhaps be found in the different relationships a personal worldview can have to an organized worldview.

Personal worldviews could be seen as interpretive systems which are tied to life and living, which seemed to be one of the inherently important aspects to benefit from integrative classrooms. The ties of worldview to both meaning and thus emotions and motivations, and on the other hand lived practice were highlighted as important to learn from. Nilsson (2013), while exploring psychological views about worldviews expresses this lived dimension, quoting Wilhelm Dilthey:

*worldviews are not just abstract structures that exist prior to experience, like Kant's (1790/1987) usage of 'worldview' suggested, or ones that change through intellectual considerations as many others thought (see Naugle, 2002), but also ones that are molded by, and in part constituted by, real emotionally and existentially valid "lived experience" (Dilthey, 1890/1957). (p. 74)*

Thus, whether or not we are aware of it or not, our worldviews inform our actions (Valk 2017b). As Vidal proposes, most have, at any given time, only an intuitive grasp and representations of their worldviews that orient them generally towards meaning and ethical decisions (Vidal 2012). However, when confronted with questions, behaviour or events that are contrary to these enacted patterns, it often becomes necessary to articulate or defend one's worldview (Taves et al. 2018). Sensitivity when exploring worldviews in a classroom is thus necessitated, since personal worldviews elicit strong emotions and are articulated situationally on a need-to-know basis. This is important and underlines the need for a learning environment where individuals feel safe to begin to articulate their views, which can often be implicit in nature. Also, some of the pupils highlighted that worldviews did create arguments and debate because of their different nature. However, in an inclusive space these arguments could also bring forth mutual understanding. The need for safe learning environments to articulate opinions and worldviews was seen in all the classrooms, where the sensitivity of the teacher and the attentive nature of other pupils were a prerequisite for learning at the personal level to happen.

Even though worldview construction is a process which lasts an entire lifetime (Helve 2015), there seems to be interest in discussing worldview questions among peers in school, even though one's own worldview is not necessarily articulated.

Community is key in constructing one's worldview and while parental and other social communities provide other important avenues for worldview construction, the voices in the studies indicate the possibility of a school acting as a community of plural values and worldviews, where dialogical interaction, which is also important to worldview development (Helve 2015), can happen. Speaking and hearing about worldview matters that are pertinent to the lived life, goals and emotions of adolescents seemed to be of inherent interest.

## 6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the research had the following implications relating to the original research questions. First, the meanings that were highlighted in relation to successful learning in an integrative space related to many things. If the classroom provided a space of safety and respect, allowed pupils to negotiate their own worldview positions, and allowed pupils to engage in discourse related to worldviews, integrative classrooms were seen as positive for learning about and from worldviews. Negotiating worldview positions referred to both the fact that pupils could articulate their own ideas and that there were no assumptions regarding their personal worldview.

Second, the majority of pupils in the original studies viewed integrative classrooms in a positive light. The major factors contributing to this were the presence of friends, equality in school arrangements and teaching materials, and the possibility of learning together regardless of RE and secular ethics group affiliation. On the other hand, it should be noted that not all pupils were positive towards these arrangements. These pupils were often more neutral in relation to an integrative space and preferred separative RE or secular ethics. In explaining this, they referred to the importance of religious conviction and emphasized knowledge about a certain religion to be important in the case of RE. In the case of secular ethics, these pupils preferred the more intimate and often smaller groups and their discussions that were found in secular ethics groups.

Third, the majority of parents viewed integrative classrooms in a positive light. They highlighted the possibilities of integrative classrooms to enhance an understanding of plurality and skills for 'living together' and offer important tools for pupils growing up into membership in a plural society. Some parents highlighted the possible dangers in integrative teaching, especially in relation to partiality towards certain worldviews in the classroom. The teachers and headteachers highlighted the amount of work relating to integrative classrooms when the larger model of RE and secular ethics is still separative, but on the whole they very much appreciated the opportunities that integrative classrooms could offer.

It should be noted that the results or conclusions from educational research, whether quantitative or qualitative cannot be straightforwardly seen as normative (Holma & Hyytinen 2015). Research of this kind in general is far more descriptive and thus normative guidelines must be derived in the process of evaluation and deliberation. In the case of the studies presented in this research and the conceptual explorations on worldview, they aim to give intellectual instrumentalities, which can possibly guide future action (Biesta & Burbules 2003).

## 6.1 Practical implications

The results from the studies presented in this research seem to emphasize the need to at least to some extent allow pupils to discuss, analyse and communicate across the separative lines of Finnish WE today. It would appear that the pupils in this study mirror the thoughts presented in international settings, where religions or worldviews are not seen primarily as dividing phenomena, but rather that by discussing and encountering them together, one can learn respect and thus achieve the social goals of RE or WE better than in a completely separative model. Here, the way in which Arweck (2016) characterizes pupils from a plural UK school is in line with the pupils in the original research articles:

*Thus, different religious views and practices did not create lines of division, but brought out positive values in young people, such as tolerance, flexibility and accommodation. (p. 134)*

This is especially clear in that the pupils appreciated religions and meaning being tied to personalities: seeing and treating others as individuals and unique persons rather than at the outset as representatives of worldview traditions seemed to be emphasized in the data. Mutual exploration, where pupils encounter others as essentially persons, seems to be the norm also in religious and worldview topics. While some pupils emphasized the pertinent nature of knowledge relating to one's own background, the large-scale sentiment in the data was one where there was no inherent obstacle to discussing worldviews together. The transactions between pupils were one of the most important meanings given to the positive consequences of integrative WE.

The implications of the original research are that partially integrative implementations of RE and secular ethics can offer a platform with which to at least some extent encounter variety and plurality in worldviews and enhance encounter. However, this emphasis does not automatically appear out of a certain form of organizing WE but is instead an active curricular, pedagogic and didactic choice which should be considered. It would seem that some sort of integrative practices have a possibility of enhancing the goal of gaining understanding about the variety of positions between and within religions and worldviews, which is a goal articulated in the NCCBE (NCCBE 2014), but many considerations have to be noted in order for this to come about. Thus, integrative RE and secular ethics education is not a synonym for *inclusive* integrative education (Ubani 2018a). With appropriate knowledge, attitude and skills teachers can form a bond of respect between them and their pupils (Jackson and Everington 2016).

Inclusivity can only appear if reflexivity, attentive and empathic atmosphere, cooperation and pedagogically and didactically meaningful decisions about

learning in relation to religions and worldviews are considered. An integrative approach cannot in itself provide these, but it could provide an avenue for inclusive and dialogical education as seen in the data of the original studies. Especially the effort which is given to these integrative implementations seems to be crucial, and merely arranging them in order to, for example, make it easier to arrange RE and secular ethics groups education or as an economic decision is not encouraged, as also noted elsewhere regarding integrative teaching (Ubani 2019). Pedagogical and didactic care and cooperation between RE and secular ethics teachers and the competence of the teachers implementing integrative WE seem to be crucial. Teacher positionality, teacher discourses and the possibility to engage with interest and attention to all different positions in the classroom are pertinent issues which have to be acknowledged. Also, as the teachers in study II remarked, possibilities for integrating forms of RE or secular ethics, although somewhat alluded to in the current NCCBE, should be more carefully examined and given guidelines for from higher levels of educational organization, such as the Ministry of Education.

The notions relating to the nature of personal worldviews and its' place in a classroom of integrative WE can offer important starting points for reflection and action for WE teachers whether the model of WE is separative or integrative. Perspectives of lived worldviews and the “messy” lived plurality of worldviews should perhaps also play an important part in learning about worldviews. This cannot be the whole curriculum and substantive knowledge is paramount in whatever form of WE is implemented, but as Conroy and others (2013) note about personal meaning making and encountering: “such encounters are necessary, erupting into the mundane, if students are to be challenged to take seriously the beliefs of others, and likewise to recognize the strangeness of their own position” (Conroy et al. 2013, 129).

While lived difference in ways to see the world are always present in the encounters in society and school and life, the school subjects of RE and secular ethics deal explicitly with the ways in which traditions, communities and individuals conceptualize the world. Here it is possible to learn about and from different beliefs, values and existential positions both in the large frame of traditions, but also in the lived world of individuals. An analogue presented by Cherblanc (2018), when critically examining ethical and worldview education in Quebec is poignant: much like an impressionist painting when viewed from afar, religions and worldviews in their communal and organized forms present a unified picture. However, the closer we get to the picture, the more we see that individual lines, colors and forms do not necessarily conform to the larger picture but present their own unique and individual character. It could be argued that religions and worldviews should be examined in both of these forms (Cherblanc 2018).



It would seem that the worldview identity of individuals in Finland (Kuusisto et al. 2017) and elsewhere (Singleton et al. 2019; Woodhead 2017) does not necessarily conform to a simple religious/non-religious (Kontala 2018) polarity but is far more diverse. Thus, more inclusive starting points and concepts need to be considered in order to fully realize this lived variety instead of forcing the lived worldviews of individuals into a divide which might not present itself as at all relevant. Singleton and others (2019), for example, have categorized the worldview identity of Australian teenagers into six different types varying from religiously committed to seekers, spiritual, non-committed and other positions (Singleton 2019). As the heterogeneity in the worldview landscape of Finnish teenagers and adolescents seems to reflect a similar plurality, there is a need to critically reflect what starting points school education offers for different positions and worldviews.

However, in light of the research presented in this thesis, the inclusion of pupils' own worldview positions into the classroom cannot be emphasized as a prerequisite or requirement. The teacher can encourage mutual reflection relating to worldview themes, but even from a legal perspective, necessitating the voicing of one's personal matters is not to be encouraged. I would argue that there also needs to be silent apprehension without straightforward answers to different ways of seeing the world, which must also play a part in such a classroom, where thinking together about seeing the world is important.

Many prominent pragmatist thinkers believe that while education is based on history and sciences informing individuals and their experiences, the experiences of the individual should also act as a starting point for education which should provide a space for a diversity of different experiences to appear (Greene 1988). Since religious education and worldview education deal explicitly with the ethics, beliefs and meaning making of people, it should explore this notion with great care. The central questions are: What is the starting point of worldview education and how do the materials and teaching methods reflect the different voices in relation to worldviews? Is there space for different and contrasting positions and how are they received in the classroom? How are different worldviews presented and is there space for variation and different interpretations? What is the role of pupil agency in defining their own worldviews?

Whether the context of WE is separative or integrative, the questions above can work as a good frame of reflection. The positionality and orientation of the teaching materials and teacher discourses should also be examined carefully: what positions and views do they present either explicitly or implicitly? Are lived experiences available or is a monolithic understanding of various traditions created? Is criticism towards concepts such as religion and non-religious presented and communicated? How do teachers view the heterogeneity of RE and secular ethics groups even in seemingly homogeneous settings? The

last question is especially pertinent in a Finnish setting if we are to enhance transactions in the classroom. The heterogeneous nature of pupil worldviews even in seemingly homogenous group settings of WE could be seen as an important starting point to discuss and learn about worldviews. As noted by pragmatist thinkers, an approach that emphasizes experience and action can give voice to different perspectives.

Religious literacy, or I would argue on a larger scale, worldview literacy, is paramount in today's world as argued by Biesta and others (2019). They argue that understanding and discussing religions on a larger scale and linking it to lived lives is important:

*Religion and belief are key parts of the lives of a majority of people around the world, and as such there is a shared need to be able to speak with others in a way which appreciates and recognizes this. (p. 21)*

However, Biesta and others (2019) also argue that the process towards religious literacy has often emphasized the need to understand religions in relation to belief and practice, with echoes of a Smartian dimensional approach, thus neglecting existential dimensions of religion and the question what does it mean to live a religious life in many different contexts (Biesta et al. 2019)? As Panjwani and Revell (2018) note, insufficient attention has been paid to the internal diversity of all religious traditions and different ways of being religious (Panjwani & Revell 2018). Thus, the key question in school WE might not at the outset be about how many or what religions to learn about to gain literacy in religions, but rather, how to understand the various ways in which religious conviction can matter to an individual or community (Biesta et al. 2019). Transactions between pupils across different RE and secular ethics groups could be seen to offer elements for *worldview cultivation* (Ubani 2013), which refers to the educational aim of cultivating appreciation and insight into one's own worldview but also the worldviews of others in society.

While meaning in religions and worldviews is part of the contents and aims of the current NCCBE (2014), it is necessary to ask whether or not pupils truly achieve some kind of understanding or learning from worldviews, or merely come out of the classroom having learned the outward signs and symbols of a religious or worldview tradition. 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), but seen through the meanings and emotions they are linked to (Jackson 2014). As Patricia 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 related to

religion and on a larger scale, worldviews. This is also an increasingly pertinent question with regard to pupils who are not straightforwardly associated with an organized worldview: What is the place of the worldview of these pupils if the starting point is purely on traditions and does their meaning making have a space in the classroom? Are these personal worldviews seen as aberrations, deviations of only personal validity or perhaps seen as purely neutral starting points? It could be claimed that none of the above can work as a starting point for exploring worldviews and religions, but a more meaningful and inclusive platform of exploration should be offered.

## **6.2 Possibilities for further research**

I will outline some possible pertinent research avenues to further explore the phenomenon of integrative WE in the Finnish context. Since the data in this study are context sensitive and focus especially on the meanings and views expressed by the stakeholders, large-scale quantitative data sets from different areas in Finland where integrative WE is implemented could provide important views into the educational outcomes and general attitudes towards integrative WE. Also, the possibility of comparing different types of integrative WE and their implementation should be taken into consideration.

As has been noted (Rissanen 2014, 2019), separative classrooms can be seen to enhance opportunities to negotiate identities in a safe space. However, separation according to religious background can also be seen to essentialize positions and make religion the fundamental dividing factor in identity positions (Zilliacus 2019). While pupils in the original research articles emphasized the need for a space in which there were no inherent assumptions with regard to their religious identity, some pupils felt that a separative model was preferable. However, pupils from both majority and minority forms of RE emphasized a preference for separative lessons, and we should be careful not to make assumptions with regard to the need for separative or integrative implementations merely based on pupil group belongings. The original research emphasized teacher sensitivity, the presence of friends and the general school atmosphere in allowing different voices to be heard as paramount in creating a mutual safe space. More research in different settings is needed in order to explore this question further in both majority and minority contexts. Safe spaces to negotiate themes such as worldviews, identity and nationality are important and it should be further examined what pertinent factors create such spaces in schools. RE or secular ethics classes might offer such spaces, but on a larger scale we should aim for the entirety of the educational space to be inclusive for multiple worldviews. This

necessitates a critical look at the traditions and practices of the entire school in relation to exclusion, inclusion, othering and possible essentialization.

Another avenue of research would be to explore pupil attitudes and readiness to encounter diversity when comparing separative and integrative forms of RE and secular ethics. While the Finnish model of RE and secular ethics is unique, it would be pertinent to compare attitudes of pupils receiving separative and integrative education regarding religions and worldviews. The current research did not emphasize outcomes of education, so further exploration on how the integrative platform affects not only learning but also attitudes could merit further exploration.

Another topic for research would be the way in which RE and secular ethics teachers implementing integrative WE have integrated parts of the separative curriculums. This would be interesting from the perspective of values and “powerful knowledge” in RE and secular ethics. What interpretations are made in relation to these school subjects and what contents in RE and secular ethics are emphasized during integration? As noted by Koirikivi and others (2019), although RE and secular ethics maintain many similarities, there is still much variance at the level of the NCCBE.

Integrative WE has also been debated in both academic and public contexts. Discourse analysis of these different debates and views could offer interesting avenues to explore prevailing discourses relating to WE, its purpose and goals in Finnish society today. This debate could also be examined through the notion of powerful knowledge or perhaps the way in which the debate centres around notions of religion, non-religion or worldviews. Also, investigation of power positions and whose voices are most prominent relating to WE and its implementation in this discussion would be pertinent topics to explore.

Lastly, the usage of the worldview concept and its history in the Finnish tradition should be more closely examined. Many prominent thinkers have delved into the concept of worldviews but we also need to examine its usage in relation to education and within the educational context. There is already international exploration of this concept (Flanagan 2019; Valk 2012; van der Kooij et al. 2013, 2017), but in relation to the Finnish context and its history, more academic exploration could be warranted. Worldviews and their contents have been explored in the Finnish context (e.g. Helve 2015, Kontala 2018) but the relationship of the concept to, for example, identity or personality could be more clearly defined (Nilsson 2013).

## 6.3 Conclusions

As society is becoming increasingly plural in many different ways, as explored in Chapter 1, the question of how to engage in learning about and from a variety of different ways of being and knowing should be raised. Inter-worldview education can emphasize “aiming at the personal meaning making and meaning giving of the children and youngsters” (Miedema 2017, 29) and reveal different orientations. The stakeholders in the original studies often considered that learning and discussing together can lead to a more rounded view about plurality in society and increase readiness to encounter differences in society. RE or WE can play an important part in citizenship education, where educating for citizenship not only emphasizes knowledge and skills in a *learning about* fashion, but also in an approach which emphasizes articulating, discussing and learning about the meaning making and positionality of both oneself and others (Poulter 2019). Emphasizing the need for mutual transactions across predetermined worldview boundaries can be seen to at least some extent serve these goals. As emphasized in the Swedish context (Kittelmann Flensern 2015), while an academic approach to religions is important in providing analytical tools, the subject must also aim for more than a surface level understanding of religions and worldviews, where understanding meaning making and meaning in religions and worldviews on both the personal and the societal levels could be seen as central aims.

Relating personal worldviews to meaning making could emphasize the role of exploring worldviews from the viewpoint of purposeful learning and purposeful education (Tirri & Kuusisto 2016) and emphasize WE as an important platform for encountering, articulating and viewing different ways to see the world and meaningfulness in it. However, this also ties worldview education to the more general aims of education as aiming for the holistic development of the individual, or *Bildung* (Tirri 2011; Tirri & Kuusisto 2016), which can be seen to be the general framework in Nordic educational systems (Toom et al. 2015). Emphasizing general worldview exploration and organized and personal meaning making, WE in whatever model it is presented, could play an important role in the holistic education of the individual. Historically, these subjects have been seen as crucial in fostering ethical attitudes and growing up into humanity (Koirikivi et al. 2019). Instead of being relegated as a subject which deals with “all things religious” and somewhat being somewhat marginalized (Ubani 2019), RE and secular ethics could emphasize their critical role in enhancing readiness to encounter and engage in worldview diversity and supporting meaning making and purposefulness in the development of pupils. However, this would require more research into how this mutual worldview exploration could come about and whether or not such a starting point is practically plausible. The high professionalism of Finnish RE and secular ethics teachers in relation to the

reflexivity of their own position and the positions of others can be seen to offer good starting points for this exploration (Niemi, Toom & Kallioniemi 2015).

However, the notion of how to organize WE is not merely a question of learning, and it includes many different positions that need considering. For example, the pupils themselves, parents, educational institutions, religious organizations and the state all negotiate in relation to the form of WE. As has been noted (Rissanen 2014), it might be that a single approach of organizing RE and secular ethics for everyone should be examined critically. Heterogeneous starting points in different areas of Finland create different salient perspectives for worldview education to explore (Holm et al. 2019). However, in order to maintain equality in relation to education and enhance the Finnish ideal of mutual education for all (Niemi, Toom & Kallioniemi 2015), problems relating to inequality in RE and secular ethics should be critically examined. In the end, the way in which RE and secular ethics are implemented and what perspectives are valued is a political decision with social, educational, cultural and religious dimensions. It should be carefully considered what is the role of a mutual school in relation to learning about and from worldviews. However, in whatever form WE is implemented, it could be argued that the agency and voice of the pupils should also be given a space to be heard.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1. Questionnaire to pupils regarding partially integrative religious education and worldviews in school (study I)

Dear pupil,

In the following questionnaire you will be presented with various statements relating to religion, school and mutual religious education and secular ethics teaching (integrative worldview education). Your answers will be confidential and anonymous and no participant can be identified when the answers are analysed. All answers are highly valuable.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, but instead, we are interested how you perceive and think about these topics. Please answer all the questions. Read the questions carefully and **mark the option that best reflects your opinion with a cross:**

### 1. Background information

#### Gender

Girl  Boy

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#### Grade

7<sup>th</sup> grade  8<sup>th</sup> grade

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#### Age

12  13  14  15

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#### I mostly see myself as:

- a. Non-religious
- b. Christian
- c. Muslim
- d. Hindu
- e. Buddhist
- f. Jehova's Witness
- g. Mormon
- h. other, please write \_\_\_\_\_



**2. In the next section we will ask you about your experiences in integrative classrooms of RE and secular ethics (= worldview education). Please answer the questions based on what you think about integrative teaching of RE and secular ethics. Choose the option that best reflects your opinion on a scale from 5 (completely agree) to 1 (completely disagree). Please choose only one option.**

**Experiences from integrative teaching**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Integrative worldview education should be taught in every school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Integrative worldview education is an essential part of a broad and balanced curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Integrative worldview education in school helps me understand my religion or worldview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Integrative worldview education helps people in my school respect other people's beliefs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Integrative worldview education helps me understand different religions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I learn new things about my religion or worldview in Integrative worldview education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collective worship (e.g. assemblies with a theme) should be held in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What I learn about my religion or worldview in school differs from what I learn at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel it is safe to study in Integrative worldview education lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Integrative worldview education lessons help me think about ethics (questions about right and wrong)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching in Integrative worldview education lessons does not provide me enough information about my own religion or worldview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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**Statements relating to integrated worldview education**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Integrative worldview education should be optional	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is no need for the subject of Integrative worldview education. All we need to know about religion is covered by other school subjects (e.g. literature, history et.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worldview education should be taught sometimes in an Integrated group and sometimes in groups according to which religions the students belong to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worldview education should be taught together, whatever differences there might be in students' religious or non-religious backgrounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should study Worldview education separately in groups according to their own worldview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In school students should be able to discuss about religious matters and worldviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should receive objective information about religions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should learn what the different religions teach	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should learn the importance of religion for dealing with problems in society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should receive guidance in constructing their worldview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I fear that other students are prejudiced against my worldviews or religion in Integrative worldview education lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel it would be safer to study only with students having the same religious background as myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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**3. In the next section we will ask a few questions about the relationship of school and religion. Please answer according to your own views on a scale from 5 (completely agree) to 1 (completely disagree).**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Religious dietary customs should be considered in school lunches	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should be allowed to wear in school small symbols (e.g. necklace) that are related to religious or other convictions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should be allowed to wear in school noticeable symbols (e.g. headscarf, headwear) that are related to religious or other convictions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should be allowed to be absent from school due to religious holy days or festivals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should be able to decline to take part in certain lessons due to their religious convictions (e.g. PE classes when dancing is involved)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schools should offer their students venues for private prayer or quiet meditation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voluntary activities related to religion (e.g. prayer during breaks could be part of everyday school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students should be able to discuss religious issues in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religions(s) should not be present at school at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Thank you!**

## Appendix 2. Interview template for individual pupil interviews (study I)

Interviews start with general talk about the school-day. The researcher reminds the pupil about the purpose of the research, anonymity, possibility to opt out and publication of the research before commencing interview recording.

### Theme 1. Experiences from mutual RE and secular ethics classrooms

1. What has it been like to study RE and secular ethics this year?
2. Do you like mutual RE and secular ethics lessons and how do you feel about studying together with everyone?
3. How do you feel about studying separately from time to time?
4. What is the teacher's role in the mutual classroom? Does the teacher facilitate discussion in the classroom?

Sub-questions:

- How do you feel about the mutual teaching? What kind of challenges or possibilities does it provide? What kind of good or bad aspects are there in these classrooms?
- If you compare the current teaching to your previous experiences, what kind of things would you highlight?
- How does the actions of the teacher matter in a mutual classroom? Does the teacher notice all pupils equally?
- What kind of an atmosphere do you think would be preferable in a mutual classroom? Who is responsible in creating this atmosphere?

### Theme 2. Learning

1. What have you learned in the mutual classes? Are the topics important? What topics should have been explored more in your opinion?
2. What did you learn about different worldviews in the mutual classroom?

Sub-questions:

- What things did you miss in the mutual classroom (when compared to previous experiences)?
- Did you feel motivated to learn in the mutual classroom?
- Are there other places where you learn about religions and worldviews? What is your preferable learning style?
- Do you need information about religions and worldviews?
- What do you think is important to learn in RE or secular ethics?
- Did you do any visits or were there visitors?
- Did you learn or discuss about personal worldviews?

### Theme 3. Integrative teaching and safe space

1. Can everyone participate in the mutual classroom? Are there differences among pupils?
2. Has there been arguments or conflicts? If so, how were they solved?

Sub-questions:

- Do you think all pupils have equal opportunities to speak in the classroom? Have some opinions been downplayed?
- What does RE or secular ethics provide for the pupil?
- Are all religions and worldviews equal?
- Who can speak about their experiences and opinions or are some opinions sidelined in the classroom?
- What do the mutual classes demand from pupils from different RE and secular ethics classes?

#### **Theme 4. Othering / marginalization**

Onko katsomukselliseen vähemmistöön kuuluvia koulussasi? Miten ne näkyvät koulussa tai tunneilla?

1. Are there religious or worldview minorities in your school? How are these different groups present in your school?
2. Do you feel like you belong to a majority or minority and in what way? How do you feel in classroom of RE and secular ethics?
3. Do you think that the integrative practices enhances or makes it more difficult to have dialogue about religions and worldviews between the majoritu and minority?

#### **Theme 5. Own religion / worldview**

1. Do you feel it is important that classes of RE or secular ethics teach you about your own religion or worldview?
2. Do you think that RE or secular ethics classes help you think about your worldview or life-question (ethics, choices, future etc.)?

#### **Theme 6. Home, peers and community**

1. Do you get to talk about religions or worldview with your peers and what sort of situations?
2. Where do you encounter other religions or worldviews?
3. Do you think a mutual RE and secular ethics subject can help adolescents understand other religions and worldviews?

Sub-questions:

- How do peers effect the way you think about religions and worldviews?
- Are there many different religions and worldviews in your peer group/community and do you discuss about these themes?
- Have you talked about the mutual classrooms at home?
- Have you been following discussions relating to the mutual teaching?
- Would you like to continue studying partially integratively or return to a separative model?

**Appendix 3. Open questions to parents or guardians of the pupils (study II)**

- 1) What benefits do you see in integrating different RE and secular ethics classes whenever the curriculum enables this to be done?
- 2) What possible challenges or negatives do you see in integrating different RE and secular ethics classes whenever the curriculum enables this to be done?
- 3) What benefits do you see in the pupils getting to know some content in other RE and/or secular ethics curricula?
- 4) What challenges or negatives do you see in the pupils getting to know some content in other RE and/or secular ethics curricula?
- 5) Other comments relating to mutual integrative teaching of RE and secular ethics

#### Appendix 4. Group interview template (study III)

Interviews start with general talk about the school-day. The researchers once again remind the pupils about the purpose of the research, anonymity, possibility to opt out and publication of the research before commencing interview recording.

##### 1. First set of questions: integrated teaching

###### a. How do you feel about the integrative classrooms?

- probe: what activities have you done (e.g. group work, discussion, visiting or visitors)
- probe: what have you discussed about in the classroom?
- probe: what have you specifically enjoyed and what have you disliked?

###### b. Have the pupils participated in the classroom?

- probe: have you been studying alone or in groups?
- probe: have the pupils been able to voice their own views or opinions?

###### d. How does the integrative teaching differ from earlier experiences?

- probe: teacher's role in classroom
- probe: pupil role in classroom?

###### e. What do you see as important aspects of RE and secular ethics?

- probe: would you prefer to study some subjects separately?

##### 2. Second set of question: religion and worldviews in the classroom

###### a. How have religions and worldviews been learned about?

- probe: have you used textbooks?
- probe: have you discussed about them?
- probe: have there been agreements or disagreements in the classroom?

###### b. What kind of discussions have you had about religions and worldviews?

- probe: what were the discussions like? Do you remember a specific discussion?
- probe: how do you feel about someone telling their personal views or experiences relating to a religion or worldview?
- probe: should the school be a place to discuss these things?
- probe: what things have been of special interest in these discussion?

###### c. How has the teacher oriented towards different views, religions and worldviews?

- probe: do you feel like some subjects were avoided?
- probe: do you feel that some topics are more prominent than others?

###### d. Do you feel that there has been enough topics relating to both religious and secular worldviews in the classroom?



## Appendix 5. Template of consent form

Dear madam/sir,

the following information relates to a research project that is being conducted in XXXX lower secondary school. The research is being conducted by researchers from The Faculty of Educational Sciences in the University of Helsinki. We would be grateful if you would have the time to read the following introduction, and consider the possibility of allowing your child participate in the research study.

We are researching the mutual and integrated classes of religious education and secular ethics that are being taught in XXXX lower secondary school. Our research project has been investigating these integrated classrooms in different schools in Helsinki, and our current aim is to collect data relating to pupil experiences of these classes.

In the current research we are investigating pupil experiences with group interviews. In practice, this means that two researchers from our project discuss the mutual classes with pupil groups of 3 to 5 participants. The researchers are doctoral student Vesa Åhs and university lecturer Saila Poulter. The head of the research project is professor and faculty vice dean Arto Kallioniemi.

The purpose of these interviews is to let the pupils freely tell and discuss about their own experiences relating to the mutual classes of religious education and secular ethics. The group discussions, which will each take approximately 30 to 60 minutes, will be carried out during the school day.

The only data gathered from the discussions are audio recordings. Other information such as names, ages or other private information are not gathered at any time in the research. The researchers will transform the audio recordings to written form, and in the process, anonymize every participant. After the recordings have been thus transformed, the recordings will be destroyed. It will be impossible to recognize any participants to the study in the final research report and research article.

We will ask the pupils for their permission to participate in the study. Also, consent of the parent or guardian of the child is necessary before participating in the research. Below you will find the option to either allow or disallow your child to participate in the research. The participants can also withdraw from the study at any time.

The research topic is very timely and important. The research data gathered is important, because it reflects the experiences and opinions of the pupils, who are the ones receiving the education. The data gathered is an important part of our larger research project on partially integrated teaching of religious education and secular ethics.

I will gladly answer any questions you might have relating to our research,

Sincerely on behalf of the research team,

Vesa Åhs

Doctoral student, University of Helsinki

Pupil \_\_\_\_\_

Is allowed

Is not allowed

to participate in the group interviews

Signature of parent / guardian of the pupil

\_\_\_\_\_