

Teaching World Belief Systems

The Challenges of Teaching World Belief Systems in an Educate Together School Setting:

A Case Study

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**Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the award of the degree of Professional Master of Education, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I further declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this Institute and any other Institution or University. I agree that the Marino Institute of Education library may lend or copy the thesis, in hard or soft copy, upon request.

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Rebecca Sutton

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Abstract**

A shift is taking place in Irish primary schools throughout the country. As a result of immigration, globalisation, and the desire for change from Irish parents, Irish schools have required to examine how they approach teaching world belief systems. Through the ‘Belief Systems’ strand, in the Learn Together curriculum, Educate Together National Schools have been approaching the subject for a number of years. Therefore, the primary aim of this research project was to explore the attitudes and experiences that teachers, in one specific Educate Together school, have on teaching belief systems. The research design used was a qualitative method. The research carried out was a case-study, with semi-structured interviews taking place with several teachers from one Educate Together school in County Dublin. Grounded theory was used for data analysis. Findings indicate positive attitudes towards the Learn Together curriculum and the strong need for teacher’s awareness towards particular diversity within a qualified homogeneous setting. This study aims to inform teachers about the benefits and challenges that arise from approaching world belief systems in a qualified homogeneous primary school setting.

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### List of Acronyms

BS: Belief Systems  
CNS: Community National School  
ET: Educate Together  
LT: Learn Together

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## Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter offers an introduction to the context and motivation for this research project. It then gives an overview of the study, outlining each chapter. The research project aims to investigate the experiences of teachers with regards to the benefits and challenges of teaching world belief systems (BS) in an Educate Together (ET) School. Semi-structured interviews were carried out in one ET school in County Dublin, making this research project a case study.

### **Research Question, Motivations and Aims.**

The demographics of Irish society is continually transforming as a result of immigration and globalisation. The Irish school system has, in recent years, come under scrutiny to appropriately deal with an increasing level of multiculturalism. (Mawhinney, 2007, Department of Education and Skills, 2011) ET schools have included the teaching of BS since the introduction of their Learn Together (LT) curriculum in 2004. I was, therefore, interested to see how the teachers in these schools approached teaching BS. I arrived at the following research question: “What are the experiences of teaching world belief systems in one Educate Together school?” I am conducting my advance school placement in an Educate Together school and it felt like an ideal opportunity to research this further. This study aims to deepen my understanding of what it means to approach BS in a primary school setting and inform others about potential challenges and benefits.

Academically, this is an interesting question as there is an ongoing rhetoric regarding how BS should be approached in an ever-evolving society. Research shows the importance of opening the discussion about different BS (Banks, 2010, Cahill, 2009, Freathy & Parker, 2010). The importance of engaging critically with BS is also heavily reflected in literature (Jackson,



2013, McLaughlin, 2003). I am interested to see if this literature can correlate with the experiences of teachers within one school setting in a genuine manner.

### **Overview of Study.**

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter Two reviews the available literature associated with this research project. I will engage briefly with the history of the Irish education system and will then present a number of perspectives relating to the challenges and benefits of teaching BS both nationally and internationally. Throughout Chapter Three, I will discuss the methodologies used to address and analyse the research question. Chapter Four will discuss and analyse the data that was collected, continually linking it to relevant literature. The dissertation will conclude with Chapter Five, where I will give an outline of the major findings of my study, drawing conclusions from the research project.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

### **Introduction.**

This chapter will explore the literature that is available surrounding the topic of study. The relevant literature surrounding pluralism will be examined alongside a brief look at the history of education in Ireland. As this study is looking at teacher's experiences of teaching BS, literature available in relation to the value of ethical and religious education will also be considered. As Educate Together (ET) hold an ethos of accepting children of all faiths and none, how is multiculturalism being dealt with in an increasingly diversifying Ireland?

### **The Birth of Educate Together National Schools.**

#### *History of Education.*

Founded in 1831, the Irish national school system initially favoured a multidenominational approach. Lord Stanley hoped to unite children of different creeds through combined secular and separate religious instruction. Issues arose with the proposed school system as church bodies were not happy with the aspirations of Stanley (Coolahan et al. 2012, Akenson, 1970). This has resulted in the current state of the Irish primary school system, whereby 96% of schools are owned by religious patrons, with 90% under the Catholic Church.

#### *Pluralism in Ireland.*

The idea of pluralism is broadly explored as “respecting the otherness of others” and is defined as “a country made up of people of different faiths to co-exist without the persecution of religious minorities” (Faas et al. 2016, p. 85). The importance of exposing children to a variety of faiths in order for them to experience and understand differences in our society is therefore acknowledged.

Due to an increase in immigration since the Celtic tiger, the profile of the Irish population is changing (Smyth and Darmody, 2011). This has led to an increase in diversity and an increase of children with different BS. Fewer people identify as Catholic, reflected in the 2016 Census results, which show 78.3% of the population identifying as Catholic, a drop from 84.2% in 2011 (CSO, 2017). This represents a continual shift towards pluralism and the increased pressure Irish schools face when it comes to dealing with BS. Equate Ireland carried out research with a sample of 400 parents to gain a deeper insight into their opinions of the school system. They discovered that 71% agreed that the national council on curriculum and assessment should introduce education about all religions and BS (Equate Ireland, 2017) and 72% of parents believed that not enough progress has been made to cater for the children of Ireland.

### ***Dalkey School Project.***

Rowe (2003) discusses how the introduction of the New Curriculum, in 1971, made it increasingly difficult to remove a child from religious instruction as the integration of religious beliefs and secular instruction was carried out throughout the school day. This increased tensions and, along with the troubles in Northern Ireland, people were motivated to break down barriers between Protestant and Catholic (Hyland, 1993). This resulted in many Catholic families sending their children to Protestant schools, specifically in Dalkey, where a local Protestant school began catering for children of both faiths. However, the school patronage was unwilling to cooperate with the multi-denominational nature of the school, and parents ran into some trouble. Local parents and educationalists then established Dalkey School Project in 1978, after three years of overt opposition and constant campaigning (Hyland, 1993).

## **Human Rights Issues.**

### ***International Concern.***

The Irish school system has been raised as a human rights issue on a number of occasions. Mawhinney (2007) critiques practice of an integrated curriculum as a disrespect to religious freedom. While it is the 1971 curriculum which promotes the integration of religion into other subjects, she highlights that the current 1999 curriculum “encompasses the philosophical thrust of the 1971 document” (2007, p. 389). Mawhinney states that both the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Human rights have both suggested concern over how religion is dealt with in Irish schools and discusses how the option of opting out is not enough. While it is true that the majority of primary schools in Ireland are under a religious patronage, it predates the opening of the first Community National School and doesn’t recognise both CNS and ET schools as the fastest growing schools in the country.

### ***Ireland’s Commitment to Human Rights.***

The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (2011) attempts to introduce improvements to the primary school system, emphasising Ireland’s commitment to human rights. The general aim of the forum is to address the rights of students regardless of their religious beliefs by increasing the choice of schools for parents and pupils. The role of the patronage system is recognised as important for our society but also gives an insight into the current situation in Ireland. The issue of immigration is dealt with, alongside the developing issue of Irish parents seeking broader options for schools. The forum also deals with the proposed new curriculum on education about religion and beliefs and ethics. There is currently education on various BS taking place in many schools in Ireland, however, this is not exclusively the case. The need for such education is mostly emphasised in culturally rich areas, and these schools, therefore, benefit from learning from each other, but is also important to consider in less culturally rich areas. As it currently stands, the teaching of BS can be somewhat

problematic, without appropriate training of teachers it is crucial that such topics are dealt with confidently and with a full understanding.

### ***Immigration and Globalisation***

The Toledo Guiding Principles (2007) is an international document which highlights the shift in immigration on an international level across Europe and the world, and how a clearer understanding of BS is needed. It focuses on the world as pluralistic and the need for young people to deepen their understandings in the role religion plays. If this is not achieved it can “increase the likelihood of misunderstanding, stereotyping and conflict” (ODIHR, 2007, p. 9).

Internationally, Miedema and Bertram-Troost (2008) enforce the belief that religion should be a subject which is addressed in the public domain. They recognise the consequence of globalisation and understand the teaching of world beliefs as preparation. They believe that by taking BS out of the private domain and into the public domain there is increased tolerance, by giving children a realistic outlook on our changing societies. Dhillon and Halstead (2003) echo the need to prepare children to be active members in a democratic and pluralist society. Ipgrave (2004) argues that by giving the opportunity for children to gain a deeper understanding of themselves personally, they are then more able to live peacefully in a diverse society. The Council of Europe (2014) echo this belief that religious education has the potential to promote a prejudice-free society.

On a national level, Lane (2013) explores how globalisation has changed Irish society by interconnecting Ireland with the rest of the world. Lane proposes that the recent changes to Irish society should be perceived in a positive way, contending that immigration is a form of enrichment, rather than a threat.

## **Religious Education in Primary Schools.**

### *Aims of Irish Primary Schools.*

The Revised Primary School Curriculum (1999) aims to holistically develop each child in the education system in Ireland and to “nurture the child in all dimensions of his or her life—spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical” (1999, p. 6). It also recognises children as part of an expanding and diverse society, and the important role schools and educators have in preparing children to understand the society they are a part of. Faas et al (2016) identify that schools of religious patronages are fundamentally accepting of those of other faiths, and none, and how many schools do cater for the increased diversity of students, but many are also struggling to provide alternatives for students who opt out of religious education. However, the article fails to discuss a potential way to achieve these goals of inclusion through religious education. As a solution to this, ET aim to cater for all religious beliefs, meaning less reasoning for students to be opted out of the school day, continuing to cater for ethnic and cultural diversity (Educate Together Charter, 2005).

### *Religious Education in Educate Together National Schools.*

It is also important to understand ET policies regarding teaching BS. While no faith formation takes place during the school day, they operate through the Learn Together curriculum. This consists of 4 strands; The Moral and Spiritual Strand; The Equality and Justice Strand; The Belief Systems Strand; The Ethics and Environment Strand. The aim of the curriculum is to promote respect and understanding for different value systems, to foster a sense of morality and ethics and to deal with human rights and environmental issues. The aim of the BS strand is to “develop in children a critical knowledge, understanding and awareness of the teachings of religious and non-theistic BS and how these systems relate to our shared human experience” (Learn Together, 2004, p. 35). This curriculum challenges any human rights issues as it is a fully inclusive, child-centred learning experience. The teaching and learning about

other BS promotes equality and respect in a continually diversifying Ireland but is also crucial for children to experience and learn about different traditions in areas of less diversity.

### **Approaches to Exploring World Belief Systems.**

#### ***Developing Awareness and Engaging Critically.***

While Jackson (2013) contends that BS should be approached in order to combat stereotypes and generalization, he also argues that it needs to develop a deeper insight into the BS in order to fully encourage tolerance, understanding, and respect. To achieve this, he underlines the need for opportunities for critical reflection. He believes that students should be “encouraged to consider how they arrived at their conclusions, to recognise the possibility of alternative viewpoints and to be open to the arguments of others” (2013, p. 9). Ipgrave (2004) suggests that is most meaningful when collaborative learning is taking place, where the children are engaging in religious questions and research and the teacher is available for prompting and clarifying questions.

McLaughlin (2003) also identifies the need for children to be critically engaged when it comes to learning about world faiths but recognises the challenges that teachers are faced with. He outlines the need for teachers to create a space where children can express their personal values while simultaneously being open to diverse perspectives. McLaughlin (2003) states that students need to be given ample opportunity to question BS for them to critically understand them, expressing that merely presenting the facts is not enough.

#### ***A Whole School Approach.***

Kieran (2003) explores how religion and BS should be approached, specifically in homogeneous settings, using Catholic schools as an example. While there is limited research

carried out regarding taking a ‘festival approach,’ Kieran uses religious calendars as an opportunity to approach BS. As religious festivals and celebrations are “integral to the religious beliefs and practices of faith communities” they are an appropriate opportunity as they make it relevant to the children (Kieran, 2003, p. 127). Educate Together (2002) expresses the approach that their schools take by “typically using a variety of faith festivals in the school year to promote understanding of different religious views” (Educate Together, 2002). This approach can make BS meaningful, but it is important that all BS are represented, and BS are not exoticised.

Another approach that is discussed throughout literature is making links between the school and the local community. By inviting members of the community into the school to talk about their beliefs, the children are given an opportunity to deepen their understanding of different beliefs on a personal and first-hand level. Jackson (2013) suggests using the wider religious diversity of a community as a resource. He concludes that the promotion of strong links between schools and the community contributes to social cohesion. Leganger-Krogstad (2001) emphasise the need to open a discussion about BS on a local level. Once this occurs, people will develop their understanding of the wider world.

### ***Teaching about, from and into religion.***

Lane (2013) analyses three ways in which teaching religious education can be at its most productive, through teaching *about*, *from* and *into* religion. He explores the Council for Europe’s efforts in promoting teaching *about* religion, which relates to learning about the facts and histories associated with BS. He understands that the benefits include the development of respect, trust, and understanding to others, yet questions whether this is sufficiently achieved. Lane fails to supply any research to show that empathy, tolerance, and respect are absent when learning *about* religion, merely stating that “knowledge in itself does not suffice to change attitudes,” (Lane, 2013, p. 25) but it is, perhaps, a good place to start. Hull (2002) echoes this



logic, disputing that learning *about* religion “makes little or no explicit contribution to the pupil’s search for moral and spiritual values” (Hull, 2002, p. 7). He does, however, recognise that it is crucial for the prevention of religious intolerance.

Hull (2002) considers how teaching *into* religion somewhat prevents the ability to teach about different religious traditions. He, therefore, favours the teaching *from* religion as he believes it prioritises the children as learners and encourages them both actively and creatively. Lane (2013) stipulates that the process generally takes place in conjunction with learning *about* religion, but mostly focuses on gaining different perspectives. This method reflects the principles of the Primary School Curriculum (1999), favouring positive learning experiences over simply gaining information and knowledge. It encourages a form of active engagement and active learning that makes it more approachable for younger children.

### **Benefits of Exploring Belief Systems.**

As previously discussed, Ireland and the world are continually changing as a result of globalisation. Due to this, there has been a shift in the rhetoric when discussing world faiths in the public sector, but what are the direct benefits believed to be associated with the teaching of different faiths and beliefs? Banks (2010) contends that it positively impacts the development of the individual, by encouraging children to understand their conscience. Jawoniyi (2012) maintains the personal development of the individual while simultaneously encouraging them to understand people of different beliefs. Jackson (2004) explores how children have the opportunity to re-affirm their own identities and beliefs through learning about different BS.

Freathy & Parker (2010) explore how education can be considered to be one of the most important factors where respect towards diversity can be nourished and in a diversifying Ireland, people need to be increasingly open and tolerant to new cultures and traditions. Cahill (2009)

recognises the key role educators have in promoting acceptance to difference, highlighting the importance of having a deep understanding of the major religious traditions.

Smyth and Darmody (2011) offer a deeper insight into exploring world religions through intercultural education. They highlight the need for schools to be continually valuing diversity. The research they carried out included interviews with students, both primary and secondary, to gain insights into student's perspectives on religious education. The results showed that ethnic minority students believed that religious education was primarily for Irish Christian students and that alternative classes for students who opt out were boring. They also didn't like being separated from their classmates as it highlights differences, instead of celebrating them. Irwin (2009) highlights the dangers of not celebrating student's cultural identities in the classroom, stating that they can suffer long-term damage as a result. Sunier (2009) highlights the important roles schools play in educating all students about, not only their own religions, but including those of their classmates as well. He explores the importance of that in order to achieve anti-discrimination policies.

Cowhey (2008) explored the different faiths in her classroom through a simple classroom conflict. She reflects on how beneficial it is for children to learn about religion from each other. She highlights the problematic issues that can arise from textbooks, as they can be unmeaningful, but instead shows how a situation in the classroom required her to deepen her knowledge and understanding of different faiths. She argues the idea of assimilation, instead of welcoming children of different faiths to learn from each other. The conclusion that was reached was that many religions share the same principles which cause both teacher and students to "re-examine cultural assumptions and consider their larger ramifications" (2008, p. 222). This essay was written from the perspective of a teacher in a very diverse school, so I am interested to discover more about how to learn from different religions in less culturally rich environments.

## **Challenges of Approaching Belief Systems.**

### ***Initial Teacher Education.***

Rowe (2003) deals with the problems educators face with receiving sufficient training to teach BS, and the constant need to be continually ensuring that the fundamental values of the schools are clear and understood. Hall and Theriot (2016) recognise the importance of training in multicultural competence throughout business, health, education and human services and highlight the need for an education system which deals with multicultural issues, to prevent ignorance and incompetence when it comes to cultural awareness.

Keane & Heinz (2015) highlight the reality that the majority of primary school teachers in Ireland are ethnically and religiously homogeneous, this means there is a greater importance for them to receive adequate training in BS that are different to their own. Jackson (2004) explores how the more knowledgeable a teacher is regarding the different beliefs in their classroom, the better they will be able to deal with it sensitively. Nieto (2013) argues that teachers are not sufficiently trained to deal with any form of diversity, including racial, religious or ethnic. She discusses the need for a deeper understanding of BS that are different to their own.

Aronson and Amatullah (2016) recognise the illiteracy about religion in the United States and I believe this reflects the current situation in Ireland, with many teachers going into the school system with little training of how to teach BS. It also highlights the implications that changes in religious diversity have on teacher training institutions and critiques the level of preparation pupil school teachers receive when it comes to religious diversity.

### ***Addressing tensions.***

It is important for schools to be able to celebrate everything that unites children as equal, while also highlighting factors that make them unique (Halstead, 2007). This can be problematic when children with private values and beliefs from home are conflicting with those of other children in their school. It is therefore imperative for schools to nurture within children an

understanding that not everyone shares the same beliefs as they do (McLaughlin, 2003). Teachers must place an equal emphasis on all BS that are existing in their classroom in order to promote inclusion and in order for children to gain different perspectives and understandings of the various faiths of their classmates.

### ***Teacher Identity.***

The population of teachers in Ireland is homogeneous, this is reflected in schools throughout the country and in Initial Teacher Education. In 2014 99% of entrants identified themselves as ‘white Irish’ (Keane and Heinz, 2015). It is therefore significant for teachers to be able to reflect upon the makeup of their own class and adapt appropriately when approaching teaching BS. Devine (2005) claims that teachers have the tendency to “bring to their work a series of discourses on ethnicity, immigration, and identity that both reflect and are influenced by the norms and values prevalent in society at large” (Devine, 2005, p. 52). It is therefore imperative that these norms are continually challenged by teachers in schools. Donnelly (2004) maintains that teachers must wholeheartedly embrace the ethos of inclusivity in school, rather than simply agree with them.

### **Conclusion.**

This chapter addressed the literature surrounding the issues relating to the teaching of BS. It began by exploring the history of the Irish education system. It is clear from the literature that globalisation and immigration are having an effect on the Irish education systems and significant and relevant changes need to be addressed. There are a number of benefits to teaching BS, but there is a gap in the literature regarding the most meaningful ways of approaching them in primary schools. The next chapter focuses on the research design and methodology.

## Chapter Three: Research Methodology

### **Introduction.**

This chapter will explain the methods used to explore the experiences of teaching BS within a specific ET school. It will explore the research question with more detail and will provide a rationale for the qualitative method of research which I have chosen. The chapter continues to discuss the researcher's positionality of the study. The chapter concludes with an outline of the ethical concerns within the research along with some of the limitations that were experienced.

### **Research Question.**

Bassey (2003) questions the purpose of educational research, concluding that it is an appropriate inquiry to inform and improve educational decisions. Throughout my research, I was interested in seeing, not only how teachers approached teaching BS within a specific school, but also what were the true values behind informing the children and how their education can be improved through the teaching of BS. The following research question emerged throughout the research process "What are the experiences of teaching world belief systems in one Educate Together school?" All ET schools undertake the LT programme which involves teaching about world BS, including those of no faith. However, little research exists as to what is the value of following this programme in terms of possible outcomes. My study aims to learn from teachers, through semi-structured interviews, what it is they understand to be the challenges and the educational value of undertaking such a programme.

**Research Design.**

Robson (1993) describes the research design as a method of transforming research questions into projects. The interdependency of the data and the methodology is an important factor to consider when deciding on a research methodology (Leedy, 1989). It is crucial to consider the nature of the data that will be collected and the way in which the research method will influence the research questions, the data, and the analysis. Based on my research question I concluded that the most appropriate method of research would be qualitative.

Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault (2015) define qualitative methods as “research that produces descriptive data – people’s own written and spoken words and observable behaviour” (2015, p. 7). This method of research was beneficial to this specific research project as it gave me the opportunity to deal with teachers on a one to one basis to get a deeper understanding of their practice. Taylor et al (2015) continue to elaborate that the method of research is mainly concerned with what meaning people, in this case, teachers, attach to things in their lives, in this case, the teaching of BS. This is echoed by Dawson (2009) who identifies it as the exploration of attitudes, behaviours, and experiences, attempting to gain an in-depth perspective. Identifying participants who can best inform the research should be considered in order to enhance the research (Morse & Field, 1998). The teachers are practitioners and are strongly engaged in their own practice, so it was beneficial to get them talking openly about their personal experiences.

The qualitative method was twofold, using a case study and semi-structured interviews. I used secondary research, including academic journals, books, online sources and research papers in order to inform my primary research.

## **Research Methodologies.**

### ***Case Study.***

According to Yin (2003), it is useful to approach research using a case study design when research questions are aimed at the “how” and “why” questions. This specific case study has the ability to show how the research problem is lived in a specific school, and in detail. All of the teachers, as well as the principal, had been teaching and working in the specific school for at least five years. This meant that they had a solid understanding of how pupils experience the programme and were fully aware of any limitations that were present within the school community. As with all primary schools in Ireland, children are given the opportunity to opt out of religious education programmes and I was interested to see whether this would apply to the LT programme.

Baxter and Jack (2008) discuss the benefits of using a case study as a method of research which can inform professional practice and “affords researchers opportunities to explore or describe a phenomenon in context” (2008, p. 544). Flyvbjerg (2006) recognises how case studies do not make claims to be statistical or reliable but argues that “learning is certainly possible” (2006, p. 224). Flyvbjerg’s research is informed by Eysenck (1976) who observed that “sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something!” (1976, p. 9). Case studies do not claim to generalise or be statistically factual, but instead, aim to allow the reader to gain a rich insight into a unique setting. By presenting this research project as a case study I hope that the reader can learn something from this particular school. By giving a thick description from delving deep into one particular place I hope to allow the development of the practice and perspectives within a specific school setting.

### *Semi-structured Interviews.*

Approaching my research question through semi-structured interviews appeared optimal to get the teachers to talk about their experiences. Crewell and Poth (2017) recognise the openness and flexibility to semi-structured interviews. By asking open-ended questions I wanted the teachers to reflect and consider how their practice is informed by their experiences and views.

The interviews were carried out both throughout the school day and after school. I had a list of three to four questions that I asked each teacher in order to get them discussing their practice. Interview questions and schedule are present in the Appendix, along with profiles of the teachers who were interviewed. As I was avoiding a survey-like interview it was important that the teachers had appropriate time to discuss their experiences and give their answers. By asking the same questions in different ways throughout the interviews, I was able to get a deeper understanding of what they felt the main values or challenges were concerning teaching BS.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis.**

On average, I found that the interviews lasted between ten and fifteen minutes. There were cases where the teachers were rushed due to after-school commitments, but mostly they took place at a relaxed pace. I then began transcribing the interviews. Initially, I found this process to be illuminating, as it gave me the opportunity to listen several times with clarity. During the interview process I had taken several mental notes and through transcribing I had the opportunity to reflect over what was really being said.

A Grounded Theory approach was applied to data analysis. Neff (1998) explores Grounded Theory as being implemented when a researcher wishes to study a process. Expectant themes are blanked out while the researcher focuses on emerging themes and concepts coming directly from the data collected. Once all my data was fully transcribed, I returned to the data and began reading and re-reading each sentence in order to highlight reoccurring elements.



Throughout this process, I coded the data by keeping notes on the concepts that were reoccurring. This could also be considered the inductive approach, a straightforward way of condensing data and establishing links (Thomas, 2006). I analysed each interview in isolation, making a list of recurring concepts.

I then further revisited the data, more deeply, building upon categories and finally concluding on several themes. I colour coded the themes and highlighted important quotes from the interviews. A thematic analysis was taken (Dawson, 2009, Braun & Clarke, 2006) in which themes emerged that were both predictable and unexpected. I continually reverted to the literature to make links with my own collected research. There were also themes which emerged that I had not previously considered. In these instances, I explored new literature to get an in-depth understanding. The themes that emerged are discussed in detail in Chapters Four and Five.

### **Limitations of Research Design.**

This is a small-scale research project and the research was conducted over a relatively short time period and, therefore, can only provide exploratory findings. The school I was carrying out the research in only had one class per year group. This meant that I was limited to only eight teachers to interview. Upon meeting with the school's principal, she concluded that the best way to go forward in terms of time management was to interview a teacher from each band.

As I carried out the research in the school I was working in, there was also a limitation as a result of overfamiliarity. This can, no doubt, also be considered a strength and a virtue (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992). I was approximating being an insider in the school, which increased the willingness for the teachers to open up comfortably. While the teachers were, for the most part, very willing to share their experiences with me, there was also a slight degree of self-consciousness when it came to recording the interviews. To combat this, I ensured the

interviews took place in neutral locations and reassured them before starting that there are no wrong answers and no pressure.

### **Researchers Positionality.**

I have been interested in how religion is dealt with in national primary schools since I was in Secondary School. I was puzzled at how, in first year, after we had made our Confirmation, we were suddenly being taught about all the other religions in the world. I thoroughly enjoyed learning about the different faiths, and none, from around the world, noticing their similarities and differences. Coming from a background where religion was of no real importance, I found myself less interested in developing my own faith, but increasingly intrigued by how other faiths are practiced.

Through travelling and living abroad, I found great benefits of gaining an understanding of people's faith. It began developing my own empathy and understanding of the people around me. I found talking to people of different faiths to be of most interest when learning about different faiths as it gave me a first-hand account of people's experiences and traditions. I believe that learning about different BS greatly enhances people's judgement and respect for diversity, which is something that is increasingly important in today's evolving society.

### **Research Context.**

The research was carried out in a co-educational, vertical, Educate Together School which is located in a South County Dublin suburb. The area is predominantly middle class and homogeneous. The religious beliefs within the school are majorly limited to Christianity and those of no faith. There are arrangements in place if a child wanted to opt out of the belief strand of ethical education, but this hasn't been an issue.

**Ethical Concerns.**

The research was carried out within the school grounds during the school day and after school. To ensure the research participant's confidentiality I ensured that the interviews took place in rooms that would not be disturbed. The teachers were also guaranteed their anonymity throughout the entire research process and were given the opportunity to opt-out if they so wished. I recorded the interviews using a Dictaphone to ensure that no outside body could gain access to the information and the interviews could not be sent anywhere after they had taken place. Each participant was given a form to sign and date which outlined all the above and all were willing to be involved. See Appendix for a copy of consent forms and all signed forms are available on request. To ensure anonymity of the school and for the purpose of the study, I have referred to it as Hazelbay school.

**Summary.**

This chapter outlined the research that was undertaken within one specific ET school. It consisted of the research question and how the research was carried out using both a case study and semi-structured interviews. I then discussed my own positionality in terms of the study. The chapter highlights the process of collecting and analysing the data and any ethical concerns that were involved in the research. It also highlights the limitations which were present throughout the study.

## Chapter Four: Discussion and Analysis

### **Introduction.**

This chapter critically analyses the data that was gathered over the course of the research project and makes links to the literature that was explored in Chapter Two. It will begin by highlighting two key characteristics of the school that emerged from the data and will then explore the themes which emerged regarding the experiences of teaching BS. The themes include a festival approach, values of teaching world religions, a changing Ireland, positivity to LT curriculum and the homogeneity of the school. The chapter will continually connect the main findings with the existing literature and will conclude by summarising the major research findings.

### **Characteristics of Hazelbay School.**

#### ***Qualified Homogeneity.***

Prior to beginning the research, I was aware that there was a level of homogeneity in Hazelbay school, which is located in a suburb in South County Dublin. In terms of the religious makeup of the student body, I concluded that it is roughly 40% Christian, 2% Hindu and 58% of no faith. I was expecting the teachers to discuss the homogeneity of the school throughout the research, but I was interested to see their understanding of what it meant for their experiences of teaching BS.

It was clear following the data analysis that the school had, in fact, a qualified homogeneity. This refers to the majority of children in the school who are religious belonging almost exclusively to a single religion, namely Roman Catholic. This qualified homogeneity means that there was very little diversity with regards to religion. However, 60% of children who identify as having no faith have parents who have been raised within Catholicism. These

children are, therefore, able to identify with language and specific texts of Christian tradition. This was a factor in homogenising, that which is not essentially, a homogeneous group.

***Particular Diversity.***

While roughly 40% of children in the school are Christian, 60% can be reasonably categorised as belonging to non-religious life philosophies. This factor has been described to me by a trusted source as perhaps the biggest non-religious proportion in an ET school. The teachers continually referred to the school as lacking in diversity, this would suggest that the particular diversity of the school was being continually dismissed. The particular diversity of the school is relatively hidden because the non-religious children still have many of the cultural aspects of Catholic tradition. As a result of, this the particular diversity can be dismissed as teachers see the qualified homogeneity as being the dominant characteristic. There was a level of blindness to the diversity that was already in the school, but the statistics heavily highlight a stark binary diversity between religious and non-religious children.

**Emerging Themes.**

Following the amount of data that was collected, it was clear that there were several similar themes that repeatedly emerged following critical analysis. The themes which will be discussed below were apparent in the majority of the interviews carried out, and if they weren't explored in great detail, they were at least alluded to by the teachers.

**Homogeneity of Hazelbay School.**

***Religious Demographic of the School.***

Throughout the discussion of their experiences, the homogeneity of the school was considered both as a strength and as a challenge. The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (2011) highlights the need for a multi-belief system in culturally diverse areas

so I was curious to see if the teachers considered the need in an area that was not culturally diverse. While the school is homogeneous, it doesn't mean that the children will not encounter different faiths, and therefore the current LT curriculum strives to deliver that system of education.

***Homogeneity as a Strength.***

When asked about challenges regarding world religions there were many teachers who initially commented on the lack of issues regarding teaching world religions. Tom specifically referred to the homogeneity of the school as a direct positive, regarding the demographics of parents in the school, stating that they “are very liberal and are very open to learning about a wide variety of BS and a wide variety of issues as well.”

Mike considered how the lack of challenges he is faced with is a direct result of the makeup of the school, which he recognised as being linked with its geographical location. He considered how the school would face greater challenges if the school had a “wider variety of religions within the makeup of the classes.” Mike felt the importance of questioning religions as well as celebrating them and concluded that certain issues with the children being able to critically consider certain BS could cause conflict if the school was more religiously diverse.

***Homogeneity as a Challenge.***

While many of the teachers initially considered there to be very little challenges they are faced with regards to world religion, through further questioning and conversation, it emerged that the homogeneity of the school was also considered a challenge by three of the teachers. All five of the teachers discussed the benefits and importance of inviting guests of different faiths into their classrooms, to get a deeper understanding of BS. The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (2014) recognise the benefits of inviting people of different beliefs as well as those with non-religious world views as it is considered “the sharing of insight, experience, belief and practice.” Cowhey (2008) echoes this by highlighting the importance of

having members of the same community learn from each other. Sharon highlighted the importance of getting the children to meet people of different faiths, considering how “it’s preventing ignorance” and how it is “crucial for them to meet people of different faiths” but also recognised how they would be “less likely to come across diversity,” observing the homogeneity of the school to be restrictive.

When asked whether people of different faiths frequently visit the school, Mike considered the benefits of having someone who is “living that, who could then pass on the knowledge, rather than someone who’s learning it second hand,” but also concluded that it is not a common occurrence that takes place in the school. Tom echoed that the lack of diversity could be considered a challenge, but concluded that they “do try, and we really do, to get people in, be it friends or people in with the community, to come in and talk.”

Keane and Heinz (2015) discuss the level of homogeneity within the population of Irish teachers. It is important for teachers to not only be aware of what their own homogeneity means, but to also have a deep understanding of how the level of homogeneity can affect a class. Clearly, from the analysis that was carried out, the school understood there to be a level of homogeneity, but perhaps lacked a level of criticality to recognise the particular diversity.

### **A Festival Approach.**

As this research project was a case study I wanted to get a deeper understanding of how this particular school approaches the BS strand in the LT curriculum. Based on the interviews that were carried out it was clear that the school took a festival approach to teaching world religions. Four of the teachers discussed how they would use main festivals in the religious calendar to introduce certain religions and explore them deeper from there.

***Benefits of a whole school approach.***

Research shows the benefits of taking a whole school approach when it comes to the teaching of world religions as children become more and more familiar with how certain BS are celebrated (Kieran, 2003). In addition to approaching BS through a festival approach, second class performs a play which covers five religions and is performed to the whole school and the parents. Sharon, the 2<sup>nd</sup> class teacher, discussed the benefits of showing the production to the parents as it gives them an insight into the learning.

***Prioritising religions.***

I found throughout my research that the teachers put great emphasis on the different celebrations and festivals from the major world religions. Eid, Christmas, Hanukah, and Diwali were the festivals that were brought up the most frequently which led to the conclusion that the teachers were inclined to highly prioritise religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism. As no teacher directly alluded to celebrating any festival that represents those of no religious belief, such as atheism or humanism, it suggests potential limitations of this approach, as all BS do not get an equal introduction through festivals. This relates directly back to the particular diversity within the school, and how it becomes overshadowed by the qualified homogeneity.

***Making it meaningful.***

While most of the teachers interviewed referred specifically to a festival approach to teaching BS throughout the year, one teacher discussed the importance of asking parents what they celebrate at home. Carmel, the Junior Infants teacher, explained that “at the beginning of the year, [she] give[s] out a questionnaire and get[s] the parents to fill out, if there’s anything they celebrate at home, so without asking directly what faith they are, be it all or none, it’s just what they celebrate.” She highlighted the benefit of introducing world religions on a personal level to younger children as “it’s coming from the children’s voice and involving the parents.”



While there are limitations of this approach in a homogeneous school, as it relies heavily on some level of diversity in order to introduce certain religions, she also recognised the importance of making it meaningful “rather than saying ‘ok, today we’re going to talk about Buddhism,’ because to them, it’s too far removed.” Carmel also suggested that by introducing different celebrations that are coming from the children’s home, it introduces that “everyone has a choice about the faith they’re in” while also recognising the importance of celebrating all faiths.

***Limitations of a festival approach.***

While approaching world BS can be seen to be a positive thing, by introducing the children to different faiths in a relevant and meaningful way, there are also a number of limitations. Some of these have been previously mentioned, such as the qualified homogeneity of the school not reflecting the binary of diversity. In addition to this, the broad curriculum and sheer volume of religious festivals can be a limitation as it is a struggle to adequately explore all of the religions through festivals. Mike spoke briefly about this challenge, stating that “it’s very hard to get around to every one of them throughout the year.” This leaves a question of whether the children make adequate progress in their knowledge of the different BS. There is also a tendency to look at religion as exotic, by exclusively highlighting the celebrations.

**A Changing Ireland.**

***Comparison to denominational schools.***

Many teachers felt there were no great fundamental differences between how world beliefs are approached within an ET school and a denominational school, however, a sizeable number of teachers interviewed did contrast their own experiences quite considerably. In ET schools, through the LT curriculum, all religions and BS are presented as being a cultural phenomenon that all children should know or learn. Some teachers felt that this was not the case

in denominational schools where they had experience. Mike, in particular, compared his experiences in ET with his experience of teaching in a Catholic school. He found the Alive-O programme to be outdated and found the children “weren’t really engaged in it.” Tom believed the ethos of all the schools he has worked in to be largely similar, be it Catholic or ET, he did allude to faith formation as “being told or being fed something.”

Carmel discussed her experiences in a Catholic school that had a greater mix of faiths in the classroom. She explained that when [they] would all talk about God, they would all talk about their own Gods, which was lovely, because we were able to do that, and I wasn’t saying ‘well actually I’m talking about this God.’ She considered how this would not have always been the case because it would have been less likely to come across classrooms with a wide variety of faiths, but also because it is a newer, modern way of thinking.

#### ***Teacher’s own educational history.***

Each of the teachers referred to their own educational experiences in comparison with their experiences of working in an ET environment. All the interviewees alluded to their experiences of faith formation which was heavily influenced by the Catholic church. Mike referred to being “institutionalised,” explaining how he wasn’t informed about any of the other BS in school. Sharon examines her experience from school explaining that “when [she] was growing up, it was only, there was only the one, [she] didn’t know about any of the other ones.” This was echoed by Mike who reflected about his youth where “you’re Catholic and you go to mass every Sunday and other things are out there, but you don’t really find out about them, or you don’t feel like you need to.” Carmel considered how Ireland has changed in terms of exploring world religions by comparing her education which she referred to as “the old-fashioned way where you ask a question and the priest, or the teacher gives you an answer.” It is important for teachers to be continually critical of their own religious history and identity in order to appropriately address the particular diversity within the school.

The literature heavily suggests there is a severe lack of initial teacher education when it comes to teaching different BS (Rowe, 2003, Aronson and Amatullah, 2016). However, only one of the teachers alluded to it as being a direct issue that they are faced with. Most of the teachers reflected on their earlier practice and did note that most of their information was gathered through self-research, this reflects Nieto's (2013) argument that teachers do not have sufficient training in the subject. The teachers also discussed continually building an understanding of the different BS as their careers progressed, it was clear that they were continually learning and felt the need to continually develop their knowledge. Jackson (2004) recognised the development of teacher's knowledge as being a crucial factor in teacher's ability to deal with issues regarding religion sensitively.

### ***Globalisation.***

As Starkey (2012) observes, education is both socialising and liberating and is intended to help children understand ways of reading the world. It is, therefore, increasingly relevant to be accommodating lessons to support students learning about world BS (Miedema and Bertram-Troost, 2008). Teachers in Hazelbay recognised the need for children to have an awareness and understanding of different BS to cater for Ireland's developing relationship with the rest of the world. Considering her own childhood, Carmel recalled how "you just had friends that were Catholic and you all go to church and all of that." She then proceeded to recognise the change that has occurred which has resulted in having "friends from all around the world." Deborah similarly noticed the distinct shift from when she was growing up and expressed the importance of learning about different faiths "especially now, people go all over the world."

Lane (2013) concludes how the recent shifts in Irish society should be portrayed in school in a positive way. Many teachers also alluded to the significance of portraying religion in a positive way to tackle potential negativity that can become involved in the rhetoric of certain religions. The Council for Europe (2014) encourage teachers to involve education of different

beliefs to promote a prejudice-free society. Deborah suggests that by exploring BS with young children “it takes the badness, or unfamiliarity away.” Carmel also alluded to the fear that can be associated with religion and the importance of exploring it with younger children “especially with what’s going on on the telly, and of these things, and words being put out there.” She added that children shouldn’t only be exposed to the negativity of religion, but also taught that “religion is a positive thing, that it’s a thing that people believe in.”

### **Values of Teaching World Belief Systems.**

#### *Values reflected in the children.*

A recurring value that appeared throughout my analysis was the importance of teaching BS in order to promote respect for others. Mike, in particular, observed how “it gives them a greater degree of respect for others as well, because if they have more of an understanding of what other’s beliefs are, then they obviously are more respectful.” He reflected on how adults can sometimes lack an understanding of the beliefs of world religions, which leads to ignorance of how to treat people. This ignorance is therefore directly targeted through giving children the opportunity to explore different BS. The prevention of ignorance was echoed by Deborah, who put a great emphasis on the development of understanding towards not only countries all over the world but also towards people in general. She also stressed how respect can be developed by understanding what other’s beliefs are.

Research shows that a not only a greater understanding of others can be explored through learning about BS, but also a greater understanding of oneself (Banks, 2010, Jackson, 2004, Jawoniyi, 2012). It is therefore crucial for teachers to give their students the opportunity to reflect on themselves as individuals. One of the values that was highlighted by Tom was the significance of giving children a voice and opening their minds. He discussed the problems children are faced with in terms of their exposure to negative associations in the media of

religions and stressed the importance of creating a space where the children can learn more about different faiths and become more open-minded. Mike echoed this by discussing the importance of the children to have the opportunity to learn about other faiths, Sharon further outlined this by suggesting that if they didn't learn it in school it would be harder for them to know and understand the complexities of different BS.

Three of the teachers directly alluded to the confusion some children feel as they explore world BS. Sharon, who also teaches religious instruction, explained that this confusion stems from a conflict of faith coming from home. She concluded that the children are given the opportunity to question their faith, rather than just believing something at face value. She continued to explore how, through questioning their faith in a multi-belief setting, the children's faith can become more meaningful, as they develop a greater understanding of their own personal beliefs. Carmel reflected on a moment of conflict when one child expressed their belief that there was no God, which resulted in some children becoming upset. She presented the children's confusion as a perfect opportunity for parents and teachers to enable children, of any age, to explore what they believe in and to begin to develop an understanding of other beliefs.

While the teachers reflected on the positive outcomes of teaching world BS, it was also clear that they found the children in their classes were extremely motivated and engaged when it came to exploring them in school. Mike compared his time teaching the Alive-O programme with teaching the LT curriculum and found that the children are "just more inquisitive, interested, more enthusiastic about it." Carmel compared teaching just one BS within a curricular area with only learning about Ireland in Geography, adding that "the children love exploring the other countries, they love exploring other religions." It was clear that the teachers facilitated an environment of active learning to foster the children's enthusiasm for learning about different BS.

### ***Benefits of Learn Together.***

The school operates a value of the month system which promotes certain values, honesty, freedom, love for example, throughout the course of each month. Many of the teachers alluded to how these values can be clearly portrayed through teaching a multitude of faiths. Mike acknowledged that “each religion has something, you know, that you can take out of it that’s of benefit, there’s values in all of them.” Deborah explored how the value system put in place made the belief strand more meaningful to the children, as they are continually “making links between what they’re learning about and what they see in the school.”

Several teachers recognised the impact of teaching world religions through story in order for the children to relate to the religion being taught on a personal level. Carmel discussed how, through reading a variety of stories from different faiths, the children are given an opportunity to choose a message from the story and relate it to the morals and values of the month. Sharon observed how teaching values through story doesn’t have to be focusing on one particular God and how “you can do that through any story.” Deborah also observed children making links between religious stories and the school’s value of the month system, expressing that “the children make links between what they’re learning about and what they see in the school.”

### ***Development throughout the school.***

It was clear throughout my analysis how the school's approach to the strand of BS developed as the children get older. As I spoke with a variety of teachers ranging from Junior Infants to sixth class it was interesting to see how the teachers approached the subject in meaningful and age-appropriate ways to develop the values of teaching world religions. Carmel discussed the limitations of discussion due to age in Junior Infants but highlighting that the children will have questions at any age. She also discussed the importance of the development of an awareness about the vocabulary associated with particular faiths and BS.

As the children develop and get older it was clear that there was a greater emphasis put on questioning BS and the development of their critical thinking. The importance of engaging with world beliefs critically is heavily alluded to throughout the literature (Jackson, 2013, McLaughlin, 2003). This shift appeared to occur in third class and continued up to 6<sup>th</sup> class. Mike, the 4<sup>th</sup> class teacher stressed the importance of giving the children the opportunity to question religion in a school setting, stating that “I think it’s important that everything is on the table, like, so, every religion should be questioned as much as celebrated, because it’s good to question.” Tom elaborated on how he approaches it in 6<sup>th</sup> class by “getting the children to really critically examine them, em, to look at them on a very factual basis and culturally or critically examine the belief system, as well as just learning about them.” It was clear that by how the school approached the subject, each age group were developing the values that were being instilled in them.

### **Summary.**

This chapter presented an analysis of the collected data. The themes which emerged throughout the data analysis were discussed and linked to the existing literature from Chapter Two. The themes included: A festival approach, changing Ireland, the homogeneity of Hazelbay school and the values of teaching BS. The major findings of the research project include the importance of an awareness to the level of diversity/homogeneity, the positive social development as a result of learning about BS and how the approach taken by schools needs to portray a level of equality. These findings will be elaborated in Chapter Five, which will conclude the research project, along with recommendations for policy and practice.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

This final chapter aims to summarise the analysed data found in Chapter Four. The findings, based on an amalgam of themes which emerged, will then be discussed. The chapter will then conclude with several recommendations for policy and practice.

### **Research Question and Summary of Data Analysis.**

This research project sought to explore the experiences of teaching world BS in an ET school. In Chapter Four I identified the following themes: the homogeneity of the school, relating to the religious, or non-religious makeup of the school; the values of teaching BS, referring to reasons behind teaching the BS strand within the LT curriculum; a festival approach, which is the approach Hazelbay school takes with regard to teaching BS; a changing Ireland, which considers how globalisation has changed the way we can potentially experience BS. However, I would like to draw some things together from these four themes collectively.

The teaching of world BS must take place in a setting where children feel comfortable and safe in order for them to develop their understanding, respect and awareness of other cultures and religions. Findings indicate that the teachers in this school continually strive to create a space where children feel comfortable discussing things that make people different, as well as recognising things that bring them together.

It was clear that teachers felt comfortable when it came to teaching about the different BS. Contrary to literature (Rowe, 2003, Nieto, 2013) they didn't regard the lack of initial teacher training as a direct drawback and instead focused on enhancing their knowledge themselves. The teachers acknowledge the homogeneity of the school, but also expressed that the children are still liable to confusion in such a setting.



**Major Findings.**

Based on the data analysis in Chapter Four I will now assert the following findings from the research project.

1. There is a good correlation between the general principles of ET and the specific aims and goals of teaching BS in the manner espoused in the LT curriculum. It would appear that this is very satisfactory from the teacher's perspective in terms of learning, parental support and their own teacher identities and emerging perspectives.
2. Hazelbay school is a qualified homogeneous setting, which lacks an element of obvious diversity. The particular diversity was not adequately recognised within the school system. This issue would appear to be down an absence of criticality on the teacher's own behalves, perhaps attributable to their own religious and cultural identifications. Teachers need to be cognisant of the level of homogeneity of the children within their own class, as it brings with it a certain set of challenges.
3. Teachers in the school made continual direct links between teaching world BS and the positive social development of their students. Through witnessing attitudes of respect, empathy, awareness, and open-mindedness, the teachers highlighted the importance of giving them the opportunity of awareness, rather than producing ignorance.

Largely I found great concurrence with the literature of teaching world religions. While there is ample research done on the topic based on culturally diverse settings, it was interesting to gain an understanding of teaching world BS in a qualified homogeneous setting. I, therefore, found a couple of small anomalies between the literature and my research project.

**Recommendations for Policy and Practice.**

I will now make a number of recommendations based on the data generated during this research project. It would be beneficial to student teachers to experience more exposure about how to teach religious beliefs, that are not their own, when in apparently homogeneous schools. This is relevant in both denomination and multi-denominational schools. Teachers must be continually critical towards the level of diversity or homogeneity within their classes and schools. When approaching world BS in any setting it is also important that a balance is kept throughout the year. BS should not be exoticised exclusively through festivals but should be explored meaningfully by learning *from* BS. This can be achieved by inviting members of the community who are of different BS to talk to the children.

My theory of practice has been informed by both the research literature and the research project. I have been alerted to a number of issues with regard to teaching BS in a primary school as a result of this study. As a teacher, I will continue to educate myself on different world beliefs in order to enhance my daily teaching of BS. I understand that to ensure my class experiences a meaningful approach to belief systems it is beneficial to invite members of the community into my classroom to discuss their beliefs and traditions. I will constantly remind myself of the importance of understanding the pupils within my class and adapt and facilitate meaningful experiences of world BS.

**Closing Comments.**

Ireland is, no doubt, evolving and we are becoming continually connected with the world around us. With this level of globalisation, comes great responsibility to prevent ignorance, racism, and prejudice through education. This research project began by critically reviewing the relevant literature with regards to approaching world belief systems in the classroom. The methodology that was carried out was then examined. Through a qualitative

research methodology, I interviewed a number of teachers from Hazelbay school, which gave me an informed insight into the theories of practice within a specific school. This research project has explored the approaches that a number of teachers in that school take and highlights the values and challenges that are associated with doing so. The data collected shows that the BS strand of the LT curriculum is an effective framework for exploring various BS and this research project highlights the significance of understanding the level of diversity within each individual classroom.

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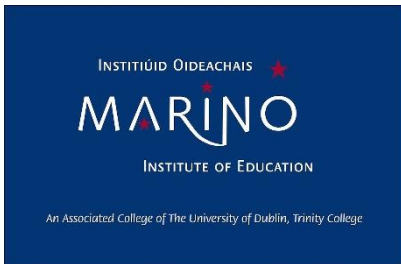
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**Appendix A: Ethics Form****Letter of Consent (Teachers)**

Dear Teacher,

My name is Rebecca Sutton. I am a Professional Masters of Education student at Marino Institute of Education. As part of my course I am required to complete a research project. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, which primarily aims to investigate your experiences of teaching world religions in an Educate Together school.

I hope to gain a deeper insight into the experiences teacher have and any challenges and/or benefits that may occur when it comes to dealing with world religions. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to take part in an audio-recorded interview. The interview will take approximately 10-15 minutes. This will take place at your convenience on the school grounds. The interview will be entirely confidential, and the information gathered will be treated with privacy and anonymity. No information about you or the school will be revealed in the research. Information will be stored safely with access only available to the research team and examiners and it will all be destroyed after 13 months.

You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to and you can withdraw from the study at any time, without reason. If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me.

Finally, thank you for taking the time to read this.

Researcher contact details: [rsuttonpme16@momail.mie.ie](mailto:rsuttonpme16@momail.mie.ie) and 0857664939

Supervisor contact details: [fintanmccutcheon@gmail.com](mailto:fintanmccutcheon@gmail.com)

Agreement:

The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B: Schedule of Interviews**

**Question One:** How do you approach teaching world belief systems in your class?

**Question Two:** What are the challenges of teaching world belief systems?

**Question Three:** What are the benefits of teaching world belief systems?

## Appendix C: Teacher Profiles

### **Carmel:**

Carmel is the Junior Infants teacher. She has been teaching for seven years, five of those have been in an Educate Together School. Prior to Educate Together school she worked in a Catholic school. She teaches the religious instruction class after school to those making their first communion.

### **Sharon:**

Sharon has been teaching for eight years, all of which have been in an Educate Together setting. She is currently the Second Class teacher. She also teaches religious instruction to those who are preparing for their confirmation.

### **Deborah:**

Deborah teaches Third Class. She has been working in Educate Together schools for five years and has worked in Catholic schools prior to that. She studied to become a teacher in the U.K. and has experience in teaching in denominational schools there.

### **Mike:**

Mike is the current Fourth Class teacher. He has been working within Educate Together for seven years. Prior to that he spent three years working in a Catholic school. He has also taught in a variety of schools in London.

### **Tom:**

Tom teaches Sixth Class. He has been working in an Educate Together school for four years and has experience working in Catholic schools.