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Lundie, David Charles Athanasius (2011) *The Other in the curriculum: ethnographic case studies on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of religious education in sites of value commitment and contestation in the UK*.

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The Other in the Curriculum:

ethnographic case studies on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of religious education in sites of value commitment and contestation in the UK.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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## Abstract:

Recent public debates over the place of religious education in the curriculum have focused attention on the threshold status of the subject. While the subject makes claims to an academic standing equal to others in the humanities, for many years its status in the curriculum has relied on a multiplicity of claims as to the effectiveness of religious education in preparing young people for life in a multicultural society. Beginning with an appreciation of the factors which have influenced policymakers and key theorists, this thesis traces the conflicts and controversies in the definition of the subject. Approaches to religious truth claims and cultural practices in the curriculum are evaluated with reference to prominent public critiques of the subject. Although these approaches are neither exhaustive nor exclusive, they form the basis of anxieties about the place of religious education in the curriculum. These anxieties are located within a broader crisis of multiculturalism and anxieties about the role of values in an increasingly performative and examination-driven educational environment.

Employing an ethnographic paradigm, a series of in-depth case studies were carried out in secondary schools in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England in 2009, with particular emphasis on students between the ages of 14 and 16. In the course of these case studies, two strands of data analysis emerged, with findings clustered around 10 key themes. A linguistic approach at times takes priority within the analytical framework, while other data lends itself to multimodal analysis, providing rich contextualisation for the linguistic encounters.

Focusing on four case studies, some key pedagogical approaches relating to the ways in which religious education deals with religious and cultural commitment and diversity are examined in detail. This analysis, drawing on theological and pedagogical theories, provides a richly contextualised series of findings relating to the spiritual, social and affective dimensions of religious education, in critical sites where identities and truth claims are highly valued and highly contested. The depth and authenticity called for in these contexts go beyond performative and examination-driven approaches, requiring a robust sense of teachers' professional values and identity. Key strengths emerge in observed practice which are not reflected in pedagogical literature. The empirical findings have relevance to public debate about the aims, practices and models of effectiveness in British RE.

## Contents:

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Title Page   | 1   |
| Abstract   | 2   |
| List of Figures  | 5   |
| Preface  | 7   |
| Acknowledgement  | 10  |
| Author's Declaration                                     | 12  |
| Acknowledgement of Original Sources                      | 12  |
| PART I: Theoretical Groundwork                           |     |
| Chapter 1 – Introduction                                 | 14  |
| Chapter 2 – Historical and Policy Analysis               | 23  |
| Chapter 3 – Pedagogical and Philosophical Critiques      | 50  |
| Chapter 4 – Gathering Expert Perspectives                | 69  |
| PART II: Methodology                                     |     |
| Chapter 5 – Ethnographic Approaches                      | 91  |
| Chapter 6 – Ethnographic Data                            | 102 |
| Chapter 7 – Frameworks for Analysis of Ethnographic Data | 119 |
| PART III: Analysis                                       |     |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Chapter 8 – The Cultural Domain: Place and Displacement | 137 |
| Chapter 9 – Teacher Identity, Commitment and Openness   | 154 |
| Chapter 10 – Seeing (Through,) the Student Experience   | 167 |
| Chapter 11 – Conclusion: From Policy into Practice      | 193 |
| Bibliography  | 203 |

## APPENDICES

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| A – Questions asked to the Delphi participants                            | 221 |
| B – Focus group questions to students in schools                          | 223 |
| C – Interview questions to teachers on factors influencing their teaching | 224 |
| D – Full ethnographers' observation schedule                              | 225 |

List of Figures:

Fig. 1 – initial ‘hourglass’ conceptual map, p16

Fig. 2 – models of effectiveness, p68

Fig. 3 – photographic source [G\*Brockton\*1.3], p101

Fig. 4 – participating schools, p109

Fig. 5 – application of pedagogical models to sample schools, p111

Fig. 6 – Turner’s definitions of liminal and liminoid, p121

Fig. 7 – application of Turner’s definitions to schools, p121

Fig. 8 – photographic source [I\*StAthanasius\*1.2], p125

Fig. 9 – comparative commonalities of schools in the sample, p131

Fig. 10 – photographic source [B\*Linden\*1.3], p150

Fig. 11 – photographic source [E\*StAthanasius\*4.3], p150

Fig. 12 – photographic source [B\*Dungally\*1.1], p151

Fig. 13 – photographic source [I&J\*Dungally\*4.3], p151

Fig. 14 – photographic source [B\*StAthanasius\*1.3], p152

Fig. 15 – photographic source [B\*Linden\*1.3], p152

Fig. 16 – photographic source [B\*Brockton\*1.3], p153

Fig. 17 – photographic source [B\*StAthanasius\*4.3], p153

Fig. 18 – microanalysis of text recording [J\*Linden\*3.3], pp167-170

Fig. 19 – PowerPoint slides [E\*Linden\*3.1], p171

Fig. 20 – summary of complexity of conceptual analyses of schools, p199

## Preface:

A single flower was observed, growing in a field, a cluster of exquisitely intricate blooms, so fascinating that it absorbed the observer for the whole day. It seemed of little importance to him whether there were others like it nearby, the flower itself was all. A wider survey of the field would have noticed the stampeding crowd heading toward the flower, noted barren patches empty and fallow, noted other flowers different but no less beautiful, but this was not to be, this flower alone drew the eye, it was all.

In presenting the case studies which follow, I wish to avoid the impression that the sites chosen are representative of the 24 ethnographic case studies which form the basis of the AHRC/ESRC Religion & Society Project *'Does RE Work?' an analysis of the aims, practices and models of effectiveness in Religious Education in the UK*, let alone representative of the practice of Religious Education in Britain's diverse secondary schools. What follows is like the flower in the field, a few sites rich in insight, of general interest for the ways in which they speak to the National and even global picture of anxieties about the place of religious education in the curriculum, the broader place of religion in society and the future of multicultural pluralism in a post Afghan War world<sup>1</sup>. A broader view of the field, however, would not fail to note significant areas of religious illiteracy and pedagogical practices which fail to satisfy any criteria of success proffered by theoreticians and policymakers. Some of these can be attested to by the ethnographic data, but still more by the significant number of schools in which anxiety or embarrassment about the paucity of religious education provision doubtless contributed to the refusal to participate.

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<sup>1</sup> The commonplace of referring to the world after 9/11 appears to me an inaccurate focus on a catalytic event whose consequence, in and of itself, may have been negligible were it not for the subsequent reactions on the global stage. Among these, we may note the detention of non-citizen terror suspects without trial in the UK, the judicial response to the Oldham and Bradford rioters, the authorisation of 'waterboarding' and 'extraordinary rendition' by United States security services, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, military operations carried out by the Russian Federation against largely Muslim separatist groups in the Caucasus, the riots prompted by the Danish newspaper *Jylands Posten's* publication of cartoons depicting Mohammed, the assassination of outspoken anti-Islam politician Pim Fortyn in the Netherlands and the subsequent electoral success there of Geert Wilders, militant reactions against centuries-old Christian communities in Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon and the subsequent mass emigration of Christian populations from the Middle East, the actions of French legislators in banning the wearing of Islamic face covering, or of Swiss legislators in banning the construction of minarets, or the continuing democratic revolutions and unrest across North Africa. The significance of the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 as a catalyst for this global shift does not detract from the insufficiency of 9/11 itself as providing either explanation or justification.



The broad view would also note the stampeding crowd, the drive toward performative and instrumental educational goals, market driven curriculum, resource allocations based on examination results, competition for school places driving demand for quantifiable measures of attainment, prescriptive national guidance, outcome-driven approaches to social and citizenship education, an educational agenda in which the spiritual, affective and personal dimensions of schooling are increasingly marginalised by performativity and a loss of public consensus on core values. Once again, the depth of analysis afforded to these few encounters in these few schools stands justified by the alternative vision of education which they provide, and the potential benefits thereof, toward which such isolated examples may point us.

The four case studies which form the focus of analysis here are sites of value; they demand to be excavated in their full depth, to be a totality, an end in themselves. This is not to belittle the quantity of evidence they represent – four schools, at each of which 10 days of ethnographic work was conducted, gathering between 50-100 pages of ‘scratch’ field notes per site, more than 200,000 words of written observations, besides recordings, documentary sources, photographs, and ongoing conversations with teachers and school leaders as the project progressed. Central to the ethnographic paradigm, however, is the primacy of the researcher as research instrument, the researcher as a whole person, complete with normative value attachments, personal experiences, a social being with a spiritual dimension. It is only appropriate in reporting personal research to adopt also a personalistic paradigm, and in exploring the full consequences of this for the validity of value-based research findings, it is only right to affect a shift into the first person.

I cannot claim any prior attachment to religious education as a field of study, nor can I claim to be immune to the demands of performativity and the educational market myself – my initial motivations for accepting the post of researcher on the ‘*Does RE Work?*’ project were heavily influenced by the rare confluence of funding and expertise in a field in which I had little more than a passing familiarity. Nonetheless, I have subsequently come to see religious education as perhaps the most significant battle-ground over values in the school curriculum in Britain today. As a philosophy graduate, a Catholic convert whose conversion coincided with the beginning of my doctoral studies, and someone with an ongoing interest in the human and holistic dimensions of education, these are not questions on which I find it easy to remain neutral.

What follows is, therefore, a work which itself proceeds from a position of committed openness, an empirical investigation invested with moral meanings. It is a work of faith seeking understanding, itself a theological and philosophical reflection on the political and pedagogical factors impacting the teaching of theological and philosophical reflection in our schools. As such, it is, as my supervisor James Conroy and I have recently written (Conroy & Lundie 2011), a matter of ‘nested identities’, the complex social processes of religion, education and public policy, each set within the others, each scavenging from, reorganising, and resting upon the others. Such complex overlay of interwoven strands is difficult to present as a coherent whole, at times due to the theoretical complexity of the array of academic discourses which make themselves available to be drawn upon in such an account, and at times due to the incoherence of the subject matter itself, the sometimes contradictory practices which may be observed in the classroom.

It is, at times, a work of contradictions. Religious education is one of the most frequently and rapidly evolving areas of the rapidly changing world of education policy and practice, with one teacher remarking on the 5 changes to the examination syllabus she had observed in her 8 years in teaching. At the same time, religious education draws upon discourses which are far from the forefront of theological understandings. Near the beginning of my studies, I was advised to seek out the phenomenological works of Ninian Smart (1960, 1973), as being of pivotal significance to understanding the direction of contemporary British religious education – works which I was to find for sale for £1 in the clearance bins of the University of Glasgow library, outdated stock being replaced by the department of Theology, no longer forming a part of the theoretical corpus deemed of relevance to their students.

Held up by governments as a vehicle for community cohesion in an increasingly complex multicultural society, religious education is at the same the focus of heated contestation by secularists, at once determined to abolish it and to gain equal recognition within the syllabus. While paradox and contradiction are understandable features of religious experiences of the supra-rational transcendent Being, at times religious educators are far too quick to misapply theological acceptance of the divine unknowable to the merely untheorisable complexity of a subject with a complex, controversial history of *ad hoc* metamorphoses. Heaven may move us to silence with its peace, but not the Department for Education’s! I hope that what follows, despite its complexity, elucidates some small feature of a vast vista with greater clarity.

## Acknowledgement:

I wish to acknowledge the extensive support and encouragement which was provided throughout by my supervisors, Professor James Conroy and Professor Robert Davis at the University of Glasgow. The rest of the team involved in this large project have also given great support and insight throughout the research process: Professor Vivienne Baumfield, Dr Nicole Bourque, Dr Kevin Lowden and Dr Karen Wenell at the University of Glasgow, Dr Paul Gilfillan, now at Queen Margaret University, Dr Gavin Duffy and Professor Antony Gallagher at Queen's University, Belfast, and Dr Philip Barnes at King's College London. None of our work would have been possible, however, without the practical insight and organisational skill of the administrative team, Joan Ballantine, Arlene Burns and Christine Reoch, who are as ever the unsung heroes in this undertaking. Also to Richard Kerr in the IT department and Fiona Wiltshier at QSR for their help in ameliorating my own technological shortcomings.

I am also indebted to the many great Religious Education teachers I met in the course of my work, in particular to the heads of department who allowed me access to their schools and staff: Grace Cook, John Course, Brendan Dowd, Heather Johnstone, Donald McCrae, Eleisha Maton, Beth Munro, Catherine Taggart, Barbara Usher and Deborah Weston, along with all their staff, their schools' senior leadership teams, and of course the students.

The submission of a PhD can only be seen in the context of a wider engagement in academic life, and so I also acknowledge my debt to Leon Robinson and Esther Daborn in the School of Education, who gave me an entry into university teaching, to my Masters supervisor Carl Bagley at the University of Durham and to my previous employers Roger Smith and Jonathan Tanner for their support for my research-led approaches to my work at London South Bank University. To all who have co-authored with me: David Armstrong, Philip Barnes, Vivienne Baumfield, Mike Carroll, James Conroy, Robert Davis, Karim-Aly Kassam, Stephen McKinney and Kevin Williams, to Julie McAdam and the Learning and Teaching Development Fund PGDE Primary placement research team, also to the Glasgow postgraduate journal *eSharp* for giving me my first experience on an editorial board, the *British Journal of Religious Education* and *Educational Foundations* for accepting me as a peer reviewer. Numerous others have provided assistance at various points, reading, listening, offering

insights, among them Karen Calpin, Barbara Kameniar, Alan McManus, Claire McGlynn and Marie Parker-Jenkins.

PhD research is also a profoundly human endeavour, and my thanks go to my father Charles for his continuing support of a struggling student, my wonderfully devoted fiancée Tricia McLaughlin for believing in me and helping to assuage my continuing self-doubt. This research has also I hope been a spiritual labour, and I wish to thank my spiritual director Fr John Keenan for his help and advice over the past 3 years and all the officers and members of Our Lady Queen of All Nations Praesidium, Legion of Mary for keeping me grounded in reality throughout. Special thanks also to Fr John Dickson SDB and all of the Salesians of Don Bosco at Battersea for providing me with accommodation and a welcoming sense of community during my fieldwork in London schools.

This significant research project would not have been possible without the large grant from the Arts and Humanities and Economic and Social Science Research Councils' joint Religion and Society Programme.

Author's Declaration:

I declare that all of the work in this thesis was performed personally. No part of this work has been submitted for consideration as part of any other degree or award.

All material also appearing in co-authored articles is reproduced with the co-authors' permission. Material presented in this thesis has also appeared in:

Baumfield, V, Conroy, J, Davis, R and Lundie, D (2011) 'The Delphi Method: gathering expert perspectives in Religious Education' in *British Journal of Religious Education* 34.3

Barnes, LP, Conroy, J and Lundie, D (*forthcoming*) 'Policy and Practice in Religious Education in the United Kingdom: A critical and comparative review' in *Oxford Review of Education*

Conroy, J and Lundie, D (2011) 'Nested Identities: Mixed Methods for the Analysis of Complexity in Religious Education' in Woodhead, L (ed) *TITLE TBC* London, Open University Press

Conroy, J and Lundie, D (2011) 'Teacher Construction and Marshalling of Resources in Complex Curriculum Areas: An Example from the United Kingdom' a presentation for the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting

Conroy, J and Lundie, D (2010) 'A linguistic ethnography of the relationship between policy and practice in Religious Education in the UK' a presentation for the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting

Kassam, K A, Lundie, D, Charles Burgess, Sheila Dow, Darragh Hare, Carl Knight, David Lusseau, Gina Netto, Glenn Plumb, George Wilkes & Zulfikar Zhirji (*forthcoming*) "'Does Pluralism Work?'" Conversations on the definitions, applications and effectiveness of pluralist approaches held at Cornell and Strathclyde Universities' *Human Ecology*

Lundie, D (2010) 'Research Report: "Does RE Work?" an analysis of the aims, practices and models of effectiveness of Religious Education in the UK' *British Journal of Religious Education* 32.2 163-170

Lundie, D (2010) 'The contribution of Religious Education to combating intolerance - ethnographic findings in integrated contexts' a presentation for the European Conference on Educational Research

Lundie, D, Armstrong, D, McKinney, S and Williams, K (2011) 'RE in the United Kingdom and Ireland' in Barnes, LP (ed.) *Debates in RE* Oxford: Taylor & Francis.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The Religion and Society Programme is a major collaborative research initiative jointly funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Science Research Council in the United Kingdom. The Programme recognises a substantial lacuna in our understanding of the forces at work in and around the relationship between religion and culture and aims to build sustained interdisciplinary research capacity for the investigation of the relationship of religion to modern society. The programme committee expressly identified religious education as an especially promising locus for this form of enquiry, posing as a key research question:

When education systems allow for the teaching of religion in schools, what forms of religious education are seen as acceptable in educational terms? (AHRC/ESRC 2009)

Given the statutory nature of school based religious education in the UK, there are indeed interesting questions to be asked, on a philosophical level, with regard to the legal and cultural status of the practice of religious education, and equally importantly with regard to the efficacy of pedagogical approaches. The UK boasts some of the lowest rates of religious practice in the world but retains strong rhetorical attachments to the religio-spiritual impulse, not least in the guidance and legislation governing our education system. In situating this concern and its origins in public and policy discourse, this work takes as a starting point, not the contested terrain of religious education itself, but the cross-curricular requirement, stated in the National Curriculum documents for England and Wales (QCA 2004b) and mirrored by similar educational aims in Scotland and Northern Ireland, that schools actively promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of their students. The inclusion of an explicitly 'spiritual' dimension to the curriculum draws attention to an holistic aim which cannot be subsumed within a mere civic or moral education, a dimension which shall be explored in more depth in Chapter 4.

The project, entitled '*Does RE Work?*' *An analysis of the aims, practices and models of effectiveness in religious education in the UK* is part of this Programme. A three-year project, initiated in December 2007, it has subsequently been extended by a further 8 months to

develop Knowledge Transfer outcomes ensuring a professional and policy impact from the extensive findings. The project is structured around five fundamental outcomes:

- Understanding current conceptions and definitions of the term religious education, their usages in practical and professional discourse and their contested character.
- An exploration of the enactment of religious education policy and the criteria used to judge effectiveness in varied school settings across the United Kingdom.
- The development of a deep ethnography that focuses on the inner shape of teachers' and students' beliefs about both religion and religious education.
- To enhance the now substantial public conversation on whether the inclusion of religious education as a compulsory subject in the curriculum contributes to social cohesion and diversity or is constitutive of social division.
- An analysis of prevailing pedagogical practices in religious education across a range of contexts in terms of their consistency with espoused intentions and perceived impact.

A large interdisciplinary project based at the University of Glasgow, with partners at King's College London and Queen's University Belfast, the project draws upon the expertise of educationalists, theologians, anthropologists and philosophers. It sets out to track the trajectory of religious education in secondary schools in the United Kingdom from the aims and intentions represented in policy, through its enactment in classroom practice, to the estimations of its impact by students. Using a mixed methods approach, drawing upon policy analysis, philosophical approaches, actor network theory, ethnographic observations, action research and quantitative surveys, we set out to investigate the factors which determine and shape the aims and practices of religious education in secondary schools. The project was initially conceived on an hourglass model (Fig. 1) taking at the top the diverse aims, interests and intentions of policymakers, interest groups, religious communities and professionals, with enacted classroom practice forming the neck of the hourglass, leading to a range of outputs in terms of the impact on students, schools, religious communities and wider society.



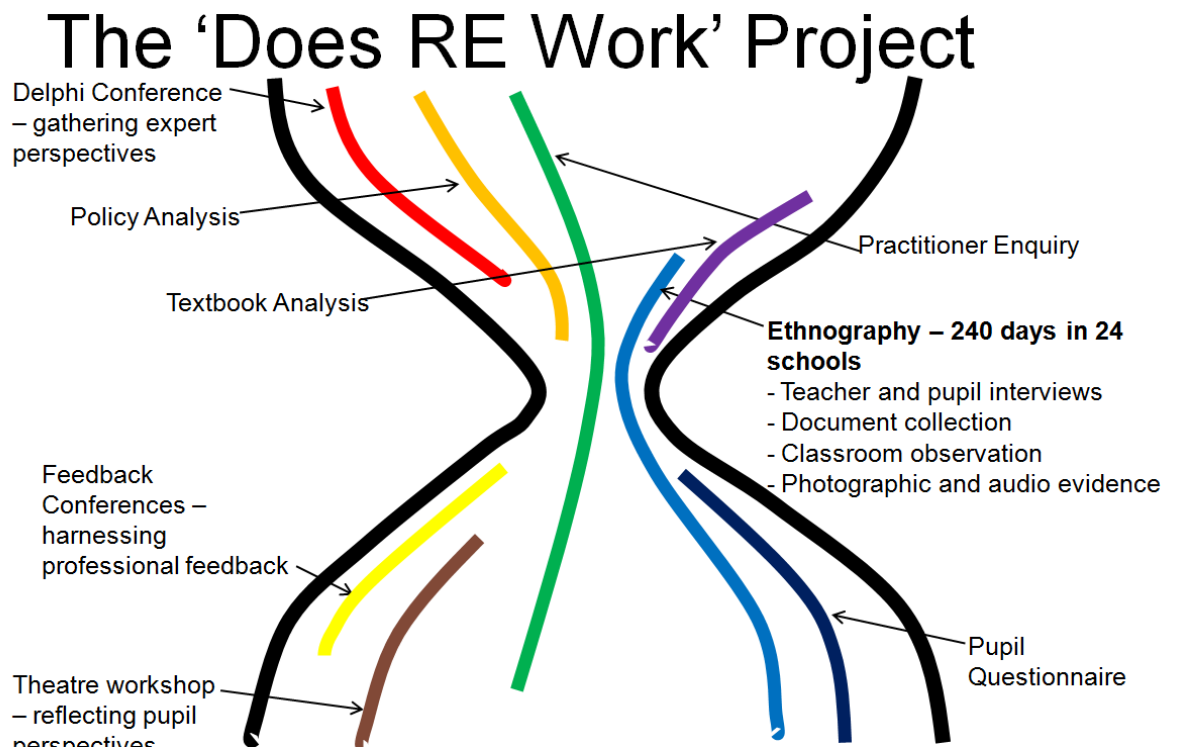


Fig. 1 – initial 'hourglass' conceptual map of the project

The project is structured around three fundamental questions:

- 1) What are the stated policy intentions for religious education in schools
- 2) How are these intentions enacted through the pedagogical practices of teachers in classrooms?
- 3) What is the impact of RE on students and how is this evaluated?

Among the wider aspects and findings of the project, not directly reported on here, concisely the project found that in general religious education offers students a positive experience and a pedagogy focused on developing discursive, reflective and deliberative skills, which makes a contribution to interpersonal awareness in a pluralist society. Briefly, the study found that religious education is often led by highly committed, thoughtful and innovative teachers, makes a positive contribution to the skills for living in a multicultural society, is flexible and often shaped around local demographic demands and needs, addresses myriad expectations within the social as well as academic aims of the school curriculum, and often stands as a counter-cultural area of the school curriculum. This counter-cultural status is positively embraced by the schools in our study (a result perhaps of consent issues connected to research sampling – at least one religious education department had to pull out after concerns were

voiced by a headteacher, concerns not unconnected to the apparent marginalisation of the subject in that school). This liminoid or threshold status leads to a foundational conflict between the demands of increasingly examination-driven performance measures, linked to teacher and student entitlement, subject status and resource allocation, and allows the subject at times to be marginalised. Religious education appears to be witnessing something of a shift away from the substantive study of religious traditions, beliefs and practices towards a more philosophical model. While this model promotes discussion and debate, it is unclear whether it enhances students' religious literacy or familiarity with religious concepts and world-views. The experiential, affective and spiritual dimensions of religious education are subject to a wide variety of practices and interpretations of success, which vary in effectiveness. More broadly, the subject is very variable in its practices and successes, heavily dependent on local priorities, management disposition and the particular skills and enthusiasm of the teacher.

Rather than focus on a single one of these questions in this thesis, the line of argument that is taken focuses on a particular dimension of religious experience, the aims, practices and experience of encounter with transcendent concepts in a particular sample of critical case studies within the project. Reflecting the totality of the project, the study sets out to trace the trajectory of religious education in these key secondary school sites from the aims and intentions represented in policy through their enactment in classroom practice to the estimations of impact by students nearing the completion of their compulsory study of the subject. Drawing on philosophical, theological and ethnographic approaches, with a particular focus on enacted classroom practice as the critical site within the critical case study, key conclusions can be attributed both to teacher agency and to important structural factors in the wider composition of the school community.

While the project employs a mixed methods approach, drawing on policy analysis, ethnography, practitioner enquiry and quantitative survey data, the data presented here is drawn almost exclusively from the first two of these. Nonetheless, the richness of ethnographic data in particular, drawing on two analytical schools – the linguistic and multimodal – provides a sufficient and valid account of the data relevant to the key research question borne out by quantitative triangulation. While taking account of the myriad studies already undertaken in the field, the project is a marked departure from a large number of quantitative studies drawing upon Likert-type scales and survey-based methods (e.g. Egan 1988; Greer and Francis 1998; Francis 2005) which undoubtedly illuminate certain attitudinal

trends but which are methodologically incapable of offering insight into the interior dimensions of the complex social phenomena of religion and education in their enacted interactions. In attempting to address this significant lacuna in the existing literature, the team opted for a more comprehensive tracing of the path from political framing, addressed in policy analysis in Chapter 2, through to the professional interpretation of policy, aided by analysis of social networks of key professionals, professional outputs such as textbooks, and by the Delphi conference reported in Chapter 4, into the observed and experienced instantiation and enactment of pedagogical practice, reported in depth in the second part of this thesis.

Taking account of the highly contested nature of religious education in the school curriculum, and the consequent impossibility of finding a singular answer to the question ‘Does RE work?’ the project foregrounds the ability to track coherent trajectories from intention, through practice, to indicators of impact. With particular reference to this thesis, this centres on indicators of the impact of student experience of the transcendent upon the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of student development. From Ninian Smart’s methodological agnosticism to John Milbank’s radical orthodoxy, the lenses trained on the study of religion are myriad and competing, enjoying no common discourse or register. How is the practice of religion to be talked about, conceptualised, studied? These and other questions circulate around the public understanding of religion perpetually, with increasingly impassioned argument in recent years. The conversation as to the nature and significance, sources, ethical and social demands, and truth claims of religions make it a uniquely complex social practice, rendered still more complex in that religious education is concerned not only about religion as a complex social practice but also the complexities of schooling and education.

Before embarking on a study of such a highly contested area of curriculum, it was necessary to understand that such a study is concerned with *nested social practices*. The life of the religious person or community is a social practice, refracted intersubjectively and interactively through complex sets of attachments, beliefs and correlated actions. These practices establish certain forms and patterns of relationships with the political, cultural and social life of the individual or community relative to the wider society. Given the wide variety of relations within and between religious communities, this inevitably creates a very complex picture of the ways in which these patterns of relationship are transacted and performed in a polity (Judge 2002). Furthermore, in what follows, we take an extraordinarily complex set of social practices such as religions, and nest them within the similarly complex set of social practices that are

education, which in turn is recursively influenced in the public domain by religious communities. Understandably, the task of unearthing sustained consensus on the aims, objectives, practices and models of religious education becomes extraordinarily challenging. To speak of nested practices, then, is not merely to suggest that religion sits within education or vice-versa, it is rather that as with a nest, built with and from the pieces of a tree, religion is itself changed by and changes its host, education, which is likewise subject to processes of nesting as it embeds itself in a polity and community of religious attachments. Adumbrated in the first part of the thesis are the myriad ways in which policy debates, professional discourse and classroom ethnography all represent the nesting of religions in education, itself nested at least partially in the religio-moral impulses of legislators, policymakers and key professionals.

In order to make sense of such complex social practices, therefore, it is necessary to define the terms and limitations of the field of study, to ask what we mean by ‘religious education’, as many practices could be advanced which make a claim to being both religious and educative. As this study concerns mainstream religious education in UK schools, the conceptual exploration will be limited to those models and practices which are broadly compatible with the common approaches as they have developed in UK state-funded schools in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including schools with and without a religious foundation and character. Even within this more limited domain a number of radically different conceptions of the aims and objectives of religious education exist, some of which have been subject to criticism in the academic literature, as well as in popular understanding on the grounds of failing to present religions fairly in their own terms (see the critiques advanced by Felderhof 2007; Wright 2000; Wright 2007a). Other conceptions have been criticised for failing to be truly educational (such as the critiques of older models of religious education advanced by Grimmer 1987; Smart 1968). In an initial philosophical analysis of such criticisms, it is necessary to ask whether there is a meaningful pedagogical domain that can be described as adequate to both the religious and educational demands of the subject.

Is the presentation of religions in their teleological multiplicity, independent of any educational meta-narrative either possible or desirable? Terence Copley (2005) makes the important point that education “is almost a way of life, affecting one’s responses and decisions in many situations, just like religion” (15). Is it asking the impossible to expect the two drives of education and religion to expand simultaneously within a student’s ontological circle without at least at some point coming into conflict? It would seem that the only way to avoid

such conflict is for one circle to sit within the other. The example of faith schools provides one such relationship, wherein the educational narrative sits within the narrative of faith. It could equally be argued that Smart's anthropological approach to faith represents the converse, wherein religious narratives are repackaged to fit neatly within the secular educational agenda. Such a model, however, instrumentalises religion and can only answer the charge of misrepresenting religion by pleading mitigation.

Having arrived at an understanding of the pedagogical philosophies which have developed within the legislative domain, this study demonstrates the complexities, ambiguities and lacunae in attempts to understand classroom practice in terms of a simple outworking of policy (e.g. Alberts 2010). Drawing on direct involvement with key interpreters of this legislative dimension, in particular a conference held at the inception of the project making use of the Delphi method, Chapter 4 goes on to identify key themes of consensus and dissensus, revealing that religious education in the UK has evolved far beyond the dichotomy between religious nurture and multi-faith models which still dominates much public and policy debate surrounding the subject. In this context, the definition and interpretation of key aims and models prevalent in the theoretical and policy guidance falls increasingly to the agency of the teacher, in the context of a network of professional literature and guidance, providing us with a rich context for the analysis of the aims, practices and models of effectiveness in religious education's affective, social and spiritual dimensions in the context of the critical case studies pursued in the second part of the study.

In the second part, a detailed ethnographic methodology is presented, drawing on linguistic and multimodal methodological schools, which seeks to excavate key dimensions of the student experience of religious education, its contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural lives of young people, in particular in sites where religious identity has a contested status. While much of the work to date on the affective dimensions of young people's religious experience (e.g. Goldman 1969; Hull 1982; Jackson 1997) has focused on hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches to mapping the interior experiences of young people, the project quite explicitly adopted an intersubjective ethnographic approach, in which interior experience is only inferred from its cultural context.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to define the terms of this enquiry. What follows draws on Stern's (2007) conception of 'action philosophy' – drawing on the participatory approach of action research:

To be philosophy, it is not enough simply to be an attempt to understand and to inform and be informed by activity; there must also be what Pring requires of action research: 'a context of openness, public scrutiny and criticism' (Pring 2000, 138). The embeddedness of this philosophical approach ... is therefore able to recognise... those particulars that research of all kinds ignores at its peril. (Stern 2007, 2)

A philosophy of education, if it is to meaningfully illuminate the empirical findings in the classroom must be a practical philosophy, capable of interpreting and responding to the intense public debate and scrutiny which surrounds religious education. It must also be a philosophy of pedagogy, a philosophy of the observable particulars of classroom practice. The concept of pedagogy is itself a contested term, used at times by some authors to connote the broad aims and intentions of the educational project, and by others to connote the specifics of classroom methodology and teacher practice. For the purpose of this study, the term 'aims' shall be used to connote the former, and 'practices' for the latter. The interaction between aims and practices produces models of effectiveness, combining an aim or end and the practical means by which the teacher seeks to achieve it.

In interpreting the ethnographic data, an authentic treatment of religious truth must take account of normative dimensions as well as descriptive dimensions. A normative dimension, in this understanding, is an understanding concerned with meaning, meaning as intersubjectively understood by the subjects of the ethnographic enquiry, meaning as *made* by human subjects, such a concern forbids a strict demarcation of this as a work of social science, making central the aspect of this as a work of 'action philosophy':

Science and religion deal with different aspects of existence. If one dares to overschematize for the sake of clarity, one may say that these are the aspect of fact and the aspect of meaning... Meaning is perhaps best thought of as the way in which facts connect to form what I have called world-pictures – that is the underlying systems of thought by which we order our experience. A meaningless 'brute' fact is one which we cannot fit into this system. And if the system itself falls apart, that is when we say that our life has become meaningless (Midgley 2002, 15)

Having defended the ethnographic paradigm, a series of key case study data is presented and analysed. These key cases illustrate the ways in which religious education can facilitate encounter with the transcendent Other of religious language as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal encounters with otherness. The pedagogical practices by which such encounters are achieved, and the distortions which fail to achieve encounter, are excavated and referred back to the policy and professional literature, helping to shed light on the competing definitions and conceptual frameworks which frame religious education in professional and public debate. In conclusion, it will be possible to draw out some key themes and recommendations which elucidate in a linguistically rich way one or more particular models of effectiveness, in particular around the need for confidence and commitment from teachers in order to broker transformative encounters in the classroom.

Before progressing to these empirical findings, it is necessary to define the terms of the argument and to review the extensive philosophical and theoretical debates and controversies which have long surrounded the field of religious education.

## Chapter 2: Historical and Policy Analysis

### a) Policy context

A closer examination of the policy imperatives surrounding religious education in the United Kingdom will help to develop the directions and constraints within which the philosophical considerations adumbrated above are played out in practice. Given that there are different policies and practices in the four nations that make up the single polity of the United Kingdom such an undertaking, though challenging, illuminates important trends, complexities and controversies. Indeed the tendency in some circles has been to equate religious education in the United Kingdom with religious education in England and Wales. There is undoubtedly some logic to these reductions: religious education in England and Wales is subject to common legislation, and though there are different sets of national guidelines to interpret the legislation, the fundamental origins of religious education in British school curricula hark back to legislation pre-dating, and largely unaffected by, the trend for political devolution in the 1990's. Similar legislative imperatives in all four jurisdictions were interpellated through the prism of different interest groups and educational cultures, refracting the political and social nesting of dominant religious communities in each national context.. Moreover, the intellectual moves which have shaped policy and practice in religious education in the United Kingdom (and beyond) have their genesis in the English academy, most notably the work of Ninian Smart (see Barnes 2002) and the school of Religious Studies at Lancaster University in the 1960's and 1970's. This is even true to an extent of Northern Ireland, where developments have been closely controlled, shaped and defined by local interests and trends, in particular the very high levels of adherence to Christian religious traditions (Hayes et al. 1999) and unique role of the churches in school ownership and control (Armstrong 2009).

Nonetheless, the reduction of UK religious education to the English model fails to capture the diversity of policies, aims, pedagogical models and flexible networks that characterise religious education across the UK. Such an approach also neglects the comparative element that provides the necessary starting point for addressing the strengths, weaknesses and subtle differences of aim, ethos and status specific to each country's policies and practices.

The notion of 'policy' in religious education (predicated on the assumption that it is policy which determines educational practice) does not admit of a straightforward definition which



neatly demarcates this area of the study, either from the wider field of education policy, or from the theoretical and professional dimensions of the study. Policy decisions in one area of the curriculum frequently have influence on other areas, even if indirectly so. One example of this is in the introduction of Citizenship education in Northern Ireland, with considerable overlap with many of the social and moral education goals traditionally attributed to religious education. More significantly, the recent drive for skills-based and interdisciplinary education which characterises the 2009 National Curriculum guidance for England and Wales, A Curriculum for Excellence for Scotland and the Northern Ireland Core Curriculum raises important questions for the aims and ends of religious education. Is religious education an academic subject in the humanities, to be delivered alongside history and geography and sharing a common lexicon of evaluative and analytical foci? Is religious education about a broad personal reflective approach, an aspect of the development of ‘soft skills’ to be delivered alongside citizenship and personal, social and health education? Will religious education come to be subsumed under these broader skill-sets, endangering specialist teaching? All of these anxieties emerge in the ethnographic data and from expert opinion, and require a return to the fundamental questions raised in the subsequent analysis.

On the issue of how widely the concept of ‘policy’ in religious education is to be applied, the boundary is also fluid and shifting. The most rigid and literal definition of policy would consider the statutory framework, but to limit discussion to this would provide an inadequate and distorted view of the influences that determine the nature and practice of religious education in schools. Alongside legislation there are official and semi-official agencies and documents that endeavour to shape and guide policy and practice. Beyond this are the networks of professional and public expectations and commonplaces which impose limitations within the interpretation of policy. A wider interpretation of policy is required, while admitting that there is no essential definition of its meaning that usefully demarcates in absolute terms between what must, should, may, or should not be considered under the rubric of policy. Rather than reflect further on definitions and usages, however, it will serve our purpose simply to proceed on the bases of an appeal to ostensive definition – that is, policy in religious education is defined as that which is deemed such, explicitly or implicitly by teachers, professionals and public commentators as encountered in the course of this study.

One final limitation to this study is worth mentioning. For the most part, we will ignore the role of ideology and of party politics. This is not because policy and practice in religious

education are unaffected by ideology and party politics, for they evidently are (see Brown 2002). Anyone familiar with the mounting public professions of the unique success of English religious education by prominent religious educators, in particular associated with a conception of multiculturalism advanced by the Labour governments of 1997-2010, and their subsequent, equally public critique by Conservative politicians (e.g. Cameron 2011) cannot fail to recognise an ideological dimension to these debates. The apologetic and ideological purposes served by such statements are critiqued in some depth by Barnes (2009b), but to furnish an adequate and direct analysis of the influence of party politics and ideology, which takes different forms in the different legislative contexts would be beyond the requirements of this chapter to set a policy background and context to the research questions of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, commitment and diversity.

#### b) England

In my RE lessons I have learnt to become more broadminded, to accept other people's beliefs and faiths and to not let race or religion come in the way of what you see in an individual (QCA 2004A, 6).

RE is one of my favourite subjects and the reason for that is that most of the time in lessons we discuss issues that make me look inside myself and think very deeply about the world, behaviour, my personality and my beliefs (DCSF 2010, 32).

The above statements set out, in carefully selected examples of student feedback reported in policy documents, the two dimensions of Attainment Target 2, 'learning from religions' (QCA2004a) which has come to represent such a broad scope of spiritual, moral, cultural and social entailments in curriculum development at the national level in England. Treating first of the attainment targets themselves, this learning about/learning from dichotomy is unique to religious education, and is essential to the continuing uncertainty around the aims and ends of the subject which emerge throughout this thesis.

Religious education's unique policy context in English education may be categorised by tensions between local and national policy determination and tensions between attainment-driven academic goals and claims made for its significance for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Understanding the historical and legislative origins of these

tensions is essential to contextualise the observed practices and research methods adopted below.

Up until the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, religious education remained the only subject mandated by law to be taught in all schools in England and Wales. As early as the 1870 Elementary Education Act, a clause provided for compulsory religious instruction, though from its inception religious education in the ‘county school’ was to be non-denominational, not following the catechism or formulary of any one church. From the origins of state supported education, therefore, the unique character of English religious education was established – unlike the French or US education systems, religion is seen as an essential component of public education, but unlike the Irish, Spanish or Norwegian education systems, this education was not to be a nurturing in the state religion. While provision was made for parental opt-out from the outset, and distinctive provision was discussed in the debates over the 1944 Education Act, English religious education did not develop along the lines of separate provision for religious minorities as has been the case in Finland or many parts of Germany. Alongside religious education as a curriculum subject, the most significant legacy of these Christian origins in the character of the English education system is the inclusion among the cross-curricular aims of the National Curriculum of the promotion of ‘pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development’ (QCA 2004A). The compulsory nature of religious instruction, and its non-denominational character, was retained in the 1944 Education Act.

In the rapid social changes of the 1960’s and 70’s, religious instruction endured significant changes and challenges, the West Riding syllabus of 1966 introducing an experiential dimension, the Bath syllabus of 1970 introducing humanist perspectives and the Birmingham syllabus of 1975 firmly establishing a focus on other world religions (Copley 2008, 79, 100, 107). Changes in local policy became trends on a national scale, mirrored by changes in the professional community, with the Christian Education Movement which had championed religious instruction in teaching and teacher education giving ground to the newly established Association for Religious Education and the RE Council (Copley 2008, 106). By the advent of the Conservative governments of the 1980’s, it was clear that change was needed. The subject of considerable controversy during Parliamentary debate (Copley 2008, 139-144; Thompson 2001, 59), the Education Reform Act 1988 continues to provide the legal context for the practice of religious education in England and Wales. The subject is dealt with in three short

paragraphs in Section 8 and in Sections 84-88. For the most part the basic requirements and entitlements of the 1944 Education Act are reiterated: the compulsory nature of religious education and the parental right of withdrawal are both reaffirmed, for example, though a number of additional demands are made:

- (i) that any new agreed syllabus ‘shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain’ (Section 8.3)
- (ii) that Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) *must* be established and such bodies are granted extended functions, notably to grant determinations, in exceptional cases, to lift the requirement regarding the broadly Christian character of collective worship in schools (to date 230 schools in England have received determinations) and to require each Local Education Authority to set up a statutory Agreed Syllabus Conference to review the agreed syllabus every five years, and
- (iii) that the committee of the Agreed Syllabus Conference representing denominations other than the Church of England, Committee A, must also reflect the principal non-Christian religious traditions in the area.

Following the Act, debate focussed on the precise meaning of the new clauses, particularly what it meant to acknowledge that religious traditions in Britain are ‘in the main Christian’ and what it meant to ‘take account of... the other principal religions’ represented in the country. Teachers and local policymakers sought guidance on how many religions were to be studied, and what percentage of time ought to be allocated to Christianity to fulfil these requirements. In response to this the Department of Education and Science in January 1989 issued Circular 3/89, which chiefly reiterated the wording of the legislation and offered little in the way of clarification, except to express the position that it was for the Local Education Authority to determine whether a syllabus produced by its Syllabus Conference conformed to the law or not.

Against this background, the impact of theorists and key professionals in interpreting policy was pivotal. Professor John Hull, at the time editor of the *British Journal of Religious Education* and one of the most respected voices in the professional community, presented his

‘considered’ interpretation of the religious education clauses of the Act (‘considered’ because this interpretation was a significant departure from his initial interpretation – see Hull 1988, 2). He contended that the requirement for agreed syllabi to take account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in the country broke the ‘assumed Christian monopoly’ over content that still persisted in some existing local syllabi, giving legal force to multi-faith religious education of a form that had been widely practiced in Britain ‘for the past fifteen years or so’, a clear allusion to the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus *Living Together* of 1975:

There is absolutely no suggestion that religious education should be ‘Christian-based’, ‘Christian centred’ or should offer an undue emphasis upon Christianity (Hull 1989, 60)

This comment appears to turn on a fine distinction between the requirements of the act that religious education remain ‘in the main’ Christian and an ‘undue emphasis’ on Christianity. In Hull’s view, no Agreed Syllabus meets the requirement to take account of the other principal religions unless it includes reference to the teachings and practices of ‘Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, the Sikh faith, and Buddhism’ (Hull 1989, 61). With hindsight, some commentators (e.g. Thompson 2001) have seen this as an undue departure from what is, on the face of it, legislation requiring religious education to be *in the main* Christian. Nonetheless, this view has predominated - writing in 2006, Mary Hayward noted that phenomenological approaches to learning about religions rooted in the model developed in the 1970s by Smart and the Birmingham syllabus are still dominant in many agreed syllabuses in England.

Under the influence of Hull and others, the view that religious education in schools should comprise a study of these six religions quickly established itself among religious educators, receiving support in 1994 with the publication by the Department for Education of Circular 1/94 and by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority of two ‘Model’ syllabi that were intended to exemplify good practice. Model 1, entitled *Living Faiths Today* (SCAA 1994a) was phenomenological, while Model 2, *Questions and Teachings* (SCAA 1994b) focused on religious beliefs and practices. In many ways, the two models can be seen as precursors to the attainment targets ‘learning about religions’ and ‘learning from religion’. This development marked a significant shift in the interpretation of the local determination of the religious education syllabus, with a nationally negotiated syllabus, developed by bodies

representing religious education professionals and representatives of the faith communities, promulgated by the same government agency with responsibility for the National Curriculum.

The two Model syllabi have subsequently been superseded by a single *Non-Statutory National Framework* (QCA 2004b) which, while retaining the emphasis on the study of 6 major religions, also ‘recommends’ the study of a range of further traditions ‘such as the Baha’i faith, Jainism and Zoroastrianism’ and ‘secular philosophies such as humanism’ (QCA 2004b, 12) for all pupils. Recently, however, in contradistinction to the advice of the *Framework*, the 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for religious education has decided to depart from the requirement for six religions to be studied, instead making provision for the study of those religions that are deemed educationally and religiously relevant within the local context, in many cases amounting to fewer than six (Barnes 2008). More recently, the *Framework* was divided into primary and secondary *Programmes of Study* (QCDA 2007) the most significant changes to which are the standardisation of language and targets to be consistent with those of the National Curriculum, the recognition that interdisciplinary teaching of religious education through project work may be acceptable in the primary school, and the recognition (after the fact) that it may be appropriate for secondary pupils in Key Stages 4 and 5 to pursue an examined course in religious education focused entirely on philosophy and ethics. The *Programmes of Study* are published as part of the National Curriculum Handbook, albeit with a footnote pointing out their non-statutory character, representing a further move to conform religious education syllabus development to the norms of national determination common to the other compulsory subjects of the school curriculum.

Perhaps the greatest challenge which faced the *National Framework*’s authors was bringing together the two competing conceptions of religious education represented by the two previous model syllabi, and this has resulted in the two attainment targets mentioned above. Emerson-Moering (2007: 11) describes the *Framework* as ‘an “English compromise”, pragmatic, written by QCA officials... clear but flexible and inclusive with a set of values whose origins are unclear’. If the values are unclear, the terminology is familiar - the distinction between learning *about* and *from* religions was first made by Michael Grimmitt in his 1987 book *Religious Education and Human Development*. Grimmitt distinguishes between ‘learning religion’, understood as a catechetical or faith formation approach, which he deems inappropriate to the common school, ‘learning about religions’ as a phenomenological or sociological process of learning about a particular faith community’s beliefs and practices, and

‘learning from religions’ as a personal reflective approach, encouraging personal encounter with the key moral and metaphysical questions which religions seek to address. The balance achieved by the *Framework* represented a tension between the continuing strength of followers of a phenomenological school and an emerging personal-reflective approach. In practice, however, this compromise has led to some confused and unhelpful pedagogical approaches, with some local agreed syllabi separating entire lessons, or even entire semesters of work into a ‘learning about’ unit of work followed by an unrelated ‘learning from’ unit, leading at times to a lack of coherence in the subject (Ofsted 2010). In Grimmer’s model, and in the model intended by the *Framework*’s authors, learning from religions is intended to rest upon and require a background in learning about religions, with the depth of understanding gained by learning from religions intended to aid pupils in furthering their learning about religions. The idea that the cognitive, reflective and affective dimensions of religious learning can be separated has been criticised by Felderhof (2007) on the grounds that any attempt to communicate the “‘truths” of religious life’ must make a claim on the emotions and commitments of the learner (91). With these difficulties in mind, the QCDA published its *Programmes of Study* in 2007-08, intended as a supplement to the *Framework*. For the first time, the programmes of study recommend a particular pedagogy, ‘Key Concepts’, as a means to integrate the two attainment targets. Throughout this process of development, it has been widely presumed that what Grimmer terms ‘learning religion’, often used to categorise the Bible-based confessional approaches to religious instruction which predominated up until the 1970s, was no longer appropriate in the common school.

Part of the impetus for the compulsory study of a range of religions comes from the requirement of the 1988 Act that the composition of Committee A of the Agreed Syllabus Conference must reflect the principal non-Christian religious traditions in the area. An examination of the composition of English SACREs in 2008 illustrated the continuing local variations to which this lends itself. St Helens SACRE, for example, representing the local authority with the highest population defining as Christians in the UK (86.9% ONS Census 2001) was composed entirely of representatives of the Christian churches, 5 from the Church of England, 4 Roman Catholics and one representative of the Free Churches. By contrast, the composition of the Tower Hamlets SACRE, representing the local authority with the largest number of non-Christian religious adherents (ONS Census 2001), was much more diverse religiously: 7 Muslim representatives, 4 from the Church of England, 3 Roman Catholics, 1

representative of a black-majority Christian church, 1 Free Churches representative, 1 Jewish, 1 Buddhist, 1 Hindu and 1 Sikh representative, a total of 20 members on Committees A and B. While local determination remains in this sense a legal reality, on a number of practical levels, the influence of the *Non-Statutory National Framework* furthers the trend towards central influence and control over the religious education curriculum. The non-statutory framework copies the structure and format of the *statutory* National Curriculum for other subjects, even including level descriptors which make use of the National Curriculum 8 level scale, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency shortly before its abolition published exemplification materials which demonstrate how to assess student work using the level descriptors – these exemplification materials cover content drawn from the *National Framework*.

This trend for greater centralisation in syllabus determination is backed up by inspection and examination regimes. As the subject moves closer and closer to a position which parallels that of other subjects in the National Curriculum, the 2008 study of agreed syllabuses undertaken under the auspices of this project revealed that most hold their content in common, differing more in format and specificity than in overall direction, with a few notable exceptions. This centralising trend is further advanced by recent draft guidance (DCSF 2009, 18) which explicitly states that ‘the *Framework* and its implementation are the basis of Government policy’ and that the *Framework* should guide Agreed Syllabus Conferences in their production of a local syllabus. The 2009 guidance, intended as a successor to Circular 1/94, makes a notable departure from previous circulars in treating only of religious education, de-coupling this from collective worship. Critics of this centralising tendency note that the *Framework* is prescriptive in ways that the legislation is not, in particular around the two models of effectiveness; learning about religions and learning from religion. Central control over the content of religious education is advanced under the pretext of raising standards, and local influence reduced accordingly. Recent Ofsted reports on religious education standards (Ofsted 2010) have focused on the notion of progression in religious education and integration of the two attainment targets, mirroring the most recent addition to the *Programmes of Study* – level descriptors intended to standardise progression and key concepts, intended to bridge the two targets.

There are also a number of official and semi-official institutions and groups holding influence over what is taught and practised in religious education. Besides the curriculum bodies



referred to above, the most significant set of bodies in syllabus creation in the secondary education sector are the examination boards. An increasing number of schools, following the advice of their locally agreed syllabus, seek to provide their compulsory religious education at Key Stage 4 through the medium of a 'short-course' GCSE, comprising 50% of a standard GCSE course. The following statement from the Dorset Agree Syllabus, placing emphasis on public examinations at Key Stage 4, is typical:

Whilst there is no legal requirement that students must sit public examinations, students deserve the opportunity to have their learning in religious education accredited (Dorset Agreed Syllabus 2005)

The wider policy imperatives of English education, including increasing emphasis on examination results as determinants of school resource and status, have not failed to have an effect on religious education. These examination courses are further subject to the commercial pressures of a market in examination board provision. In 2010, for example, 3 out of 5 boards offered a GCSE option on Sikhism, one of which was only available when paired with Buddhism, while all 5 boards offered a course specifically tailored to the requirements of Roman Catholic schools' diocesan guidance on religious education, reflecting the needs of a significant sector of the market. None of the boards offer courses on any religious traditions other than the 6 identified by Hull and taken up by subsequent curriculum guidance. With league tables exerting pressure on schools, teachers and pupils to succeed in examinations, examination board approved textbooks offer teachers a level of certainty in the selection and delivery of assessed learning objectives (Jackson et al 2010). A review revealed that these textbooks focus overwhelmingly on either Christianity alone or Christianity and Islam; only one textbook includes four religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism for Edexcel). There are at least 5 approved textbooks for Catholicism, 4 for Islam, while the only examination board approved resource for the current GCSE courses on Buddhism and Sikhism is a folder of teacher guide notes from OCR, leaving teachers who wish to deviate from the market-driven majority reliant on materials which offer much less guarantee of fit with examination assessment criteria.

At Linden Girls School, for example, the head of religious education was proactively discussing with the examination board the possibility of a teachers' conference to develop exemplification materials for a GCSE option in Islam. The fact that the option had been

running for a term without the board producing any guidance materials to teachers demonstrates the examiners' concern for those options with a larger market share (Christian and Philosophy & Ethics textbooks had already appeared on the market). While this represented a significant disadvantage in comparison to these options, it was also represented as offering an opportunity for a proactive head of department to play a pre-emptive role in setting the direction the exam board would take in implementing assessment practice. Also in response to market demand, religious education is the only subject besides Citizenship education to be offered as a 'short course' GCSE, comprising half the value of a standard course. Pressures caused by examination standards are nothing new, having been remarked on by Garforth in 1961 as creating unrealistic standards in secondary religious instruction (Copley 2008).

The recent Ofsted report *Transforming Religious Education* notes the rise in examination entry as a positive development (Ofsted 2010, 5) but does not address the apparent tension experienced by many teachers between the assessed aims of religious education as an examined subject and the expectations of the subject in promoting pupils' spiritual development, except to note that the demands of assessment could at times manifest a lack of continuity between Key Stages 3 and 4. '[i]n the worst cases, this lack of continuity distorted pupils' understanding of religion and belief' (6). Ofqual standards for GCSE religious education syllabi mandate two assessment outcomes, AO1, focussing on knowledge and understanding maps neatly to attainment target 1 'learning about religions', while AO2, measures personal response and is similar to attainment target 2 (QCA 2007a, 5).

GCSE examination syllabi furnish further evidence of a move towards the increasing popularity of moral philosophy and philosophy of religion, either as a discrete unit within or the totality of a qualification in religious studies, a popularity which has only recently been recognised in the advice of the national *Programmes of Study*. The fact that such a significant trend was able to develop without recognition in the previous *Framework* nor from the vast majority of locally agreed syllabi bears witness to the influence exerted by professional imperatives operating on a level other than that of official policy in this climate of ambiguity. Arguably, the growth of philosophy in schools, more often delivered in timetabled religious education lessons than discretely, constitutes an implicit critique of the sociological/phenomenological model of post-confessional English religious education, which in many of its iterations gives scant attention to truth claims in religion and to religious morality.

The division between a religious education conceived in philosophical terms and a religious education as an aspect of personal moral education has become more pronounced in the past year or so. The place of religious education in promoting community cohesion through inter-religious understanding was a fundamental strand to the approach of the Labour governments from 1997 to 2010, as is reflected in recent guidance (DCSF 2010). The importance of religious education in encouraging tolerance and understanding is made explicit in the Non-Statutory National Framework:

Religious education encourages students to develop their sense of identity and belonging. It enables them to flourish individually within their communities and as citizens a pluralistic society and global community (QCA 2004A, 7).

The relationship between two distinct aims presented in this passage, of flourishing as an individual within a community and living within a pluralistic society is both a philosophical and practical concern inherent in the topic of this study. With the advent of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government in May 2010, a movement away from social aims towards a more academic focus in schooling has led to something of a repositioning in the public rhetoric of religious education bodies, drawing attention to the existing philosophical and theoretical complexity of the subject, typified by the argument over the exclusion of religious education from the humanities subjects essential for the proposed 'English Baccalaureate' (BBC 2011, Observer 2011).

A further significant influence on religious education in England is the increasing diversity of school provision, with the promotion of 'schools with a religious character,' voluntary aided schools, academies (see for example DCSF 2007) and more recently 'free schools', exempt from the provisions of their local authority agreed syllabus, but for which the 2009 guidance still 'recommends' the *Non-Statutory National Framework*. The Schools Census of 2005 showed that there were 1,710,400 pupils in maintained Christian schools in England, 1,770 pupils in maintained Muslim schools, 14,670 in maintained Jewish schools and 640 pupils in maintained Sikh schools (DCSF 2007:4). The 2010 guidance clarifies a number of issues around this complex area – voluntary controlled and foundation schools are still required to follow the locally agreed syllabus, as are academies of a non-religious character; voluntary aided schools must operate a double opt-out – parents may request their children be withdrawn from religious education altogether, as in the common school, but may also request their

children be withdrawn from denominational religious education and offered the local agreed syllabus instead. A number of religious organisations have established networks of academies in recent years, and while these have the freedom to establish a syllabus in keeping with their foundation, this has met with controversy in some schools (Walker 2006). In response, recent guidance (DCSF 2010) also grants Ministers a right of determination in agreeing a syllabus for religious education in academies. In the meeting of these increasingly dominant imperatives of governmental and parental control, the system established by statute, of Local Authority determination of the religious education syllabus, is increasingly elided out in practice.

In a joint statement in 2006, leaders of the main faith communities endorsed the values of the *QCA Framework* and the importance for religious education of promoting community cohesion and pupils' spiritual development (Ekklesia 2006). The two largest providers of faith schooling in England – the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church – have adopted the principle of *additionality* in their syllabus guidelines, that is, they seek to ensure that religious education in their schools achieves all of the aims set out in the *Non-Statutory National Framework*, while incorporating them within a wider religious education framework which seeks to develop students' religious learning in line with the aims and faith commitments of the school. The Church of England's additional aims were enumerated as follows:

In Church of England schools RE also helps students:

- (a) engage with the living faith
- (b) understand how religious faith can provide a vision to sustain and develop their spiritual life
- (c) develop a sense of themselves as significant, unique and valued
- (d) become active citizens, understanding and serving their neighbour (National Society n/d, 12)

Interestingly, in enumerating the Key Concepts set out in the *Programmes of Study* and their application in an Anglican context, the Church of England advice and guidance suggests that the first 3 Key Concepts are 'predominantly learning *about* religion' with the latter 3 'predominantly learning *from* religion' (National Society n/d 12-13), aptly illustrating the ability of mediating bodies to entirely misinterpret the aims of the new pedagogy in the interests of continuity. While the Roman Catholic Church's advice and guidance on religious

education shares the broad principle of additionality, the form taken by the Catholic guidance is somewhat different. While the Church of England's advice is very ostensibly additional, reproducing the goals of the *Framework* then appending four more, the Catholic approach has been to reinterpret and present the key aims of the *Framework* from within a perspective compatible with Catholic social teaching on education. While acknowledging the changes that have taken place, and officially endorsing the new guidance, the Church has retained its *Icons* scheme of work, first published in 2001 (Martin 2001), though many schools supplement this material with other activities. The Catholic Church has also made explicit the desire for all pupils in Catholic schools to take accredited examinations (GCSEs and A-Levels) in religious education at Key Stages 4 and 5, with all examination boards responding to this by offering a syllabus tailored to the Catholic tradition.

Arrangements for inspecting religious education in schools with a religious character (Section 48 inspection) fall within the bounds of the religious organisation sponsoring the school, and the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church and Board of Deputies of British Jews have formal education bodies in place to conduct such inspections. The increasing diversity of the state sector, combined with the market forces of examination board choice have tended to create a multiplicity of interpretations of the core national guidance. The contribution of church schools to the teaching of Christianity may come to the fore in coming years, as state schools seek to respond to inspectors concerns around 'specific weaknesses in the teaching about Christianity' including a lack of depth and systematic study (Ofsted 2010, 6) a concern also raised by a recent review of classroom resources (Jackson et al 2010). Similar concerns, however, have been put forward by some within the churches about their own provision in this key area (O'Donoghue 2008).

In the 15 years since the publication of Circular 1/94, the prevalent trend in religious education in England has been for a greater centralisation of 'strong' advice and guidance for the subject – guidance backed up by examination and inspection regimes, moving ever closer to a position of equivocation with the subjects in the National Curriculum. The government's recent stated intent to scale back 'initiatives on PSHE, Citizenship and RE' (Gove 2010) may see the increasing importance for religious education of relying on its credentials as an examined academic subject in the humanities, distanced from its former 'soft skills' bedfellows. Nonetheless, the history of the development of religious education in England has shown the effectiveness of some locally agreed approaches in influencing the national picture. The

Birmingham Agreed Syllabus of 1975 has already been cited as perhaps the most prominent example. The ‘Key Concepts’ pedagogy adopted by the *Programmes of Study* was also borrowed from a similar pedagogy, ‘Conceptual Enquiry’ which was pioneered in the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus and subsequently adopted by Porstmouth, Southampton, Westminster and others. As well as the influence of agreed syllabi, the success of materials and examination syllabi developed in philosophy and ethics demonstrates the impact of para-legislative meso-level developments through which professional networks serve to disseminate innovations in practice.

#### c) Wales

The common character which English and Welsh religious education had previously shared was ended with the publication in 2008 of the Welsh Assembly government’s *National Exemplar Framework for Religious Education*. The Welsh *Exemplar Framework* enumerates three core skills for religious education in place of the English two: engaging with fundamental questions, exploring religious beliefs, teachings and practice(s) and expressing personal responses. This approach represents a similar move to that of Key Concepts in England, seeking as far as possible to bring out the ‘learning from’ dimension of religious education as a component of all learning in the subject, as opposed to a separate activity. While the Welsh *Exemplar Framework* refers to ‘Christianity and the other principal religions’, no other religions are named. It must be borne in mind, however, that this *Framework* comes in the wake of 20 years of common policies and practices with England, and that the legislative context of local authority determination as mandated in the 1988 Act remains in place.

#### d) Scotland

Religious education in Scotland is, as in so many things, both like England and Wales and unlike them. It is like England and Wales inasmuch as it draws on the same intellectual resources for policymaking. This was seen most explicitly in the inheritance of the phenomenological approaches which emerged out of Lancaster University and Schools Council Working Paper 36 (1969). In their implementation, however, these resources have been embedded in the culture of Scottish education very differently. Legislatively, the Scottish context is distinct – as in England, the establishment of state education with the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act could not have been accomplished without the cooperation of the

major Protestant churches, which surrendered their schools to state control – in Scotland’s case however this was precipitated by heated debate during the Great Disruption (during which the Free Church of Scotland separated itself from the established Church of Scotland) over the quality and content of education in the churches’ schools (Davis and O’Hagan 2007). While Davis and O’Hagan have presented this change as a loss of control by the Protestant churches, Protestant clergy continued to play a significant role in the elected School Boards from 1872 onwards, with around 40 Protestant clergy serving on Education Authorities in the Strathclyde region as late as 1975 (Douglas 1985). From this early stage, Scottish religious education was a legal requirement, with headteachers obligated to report to the Secretary of State on the provision of Religious Education (and no other subject) until 1990. Yet while England’s legislation had avoided the thorny issue of denominational differences by mandating that religious education should follow no one church’s formulary, Scotland’s answer to the same controversy was to exempt religious education from inspection, an exemption which continued until 1983. As Darling (1980) has pointed out, the historical absence of any proper or appropriate inspection regime or framework for curriculum development in religious education relegated the subject to the periphery of curriculum priorities for the majority of school leaders.

Throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s the churches remained firmly wedded to the notion of confessional religious education in common schools in Scotland, leading to an anachronistic situation ill-suited to the broader currents of secularisation in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Scotland. This situation changed with the establishment by the Secretary of State for Scotland of a committee under the chairmanship of Professor Millar. The resulting 1972 report *Moral and Religious Education in Scottish Schools*, commonly referred to as the Millar Report was a catalyst for change in late twentieth century religious education (Millar 1972). The report drew attention to the fact that religious education was poorly resourced, very limited in scope, with a lack of imagination and motivation and an almost exclusive emphasis on Bible study. There was an almost total absence of specialist teachers, often insufficient time, no examinations and no inspection.

Prior to the Miller Report and its consequently established Committee, the *Scottish Central Committee on Religious Education* (SCCORE) it was not possible to qualify as a specialist teacher of religious education in Scotland – such a qualification was only established in 1974, and by 1976 there were 149 full-time staff in Scottish schools with religious education as their

main teaching subject (SCCORE 1978, 25). The Millar Report aimed to loosen the claims of Presbyterian Christianity on the teaching of religious education, but faced challenges from the prevailing attitudes of politicians and other public figures. While the passage of time has witnessed the diminution of Christian content in religious education in non-denominational schools, strong attachment to a link between religion and morality endures in Scottish curriculum guidance.

The absence of specialist teachers did not denote a lack of commitment by politicians or public bodies to the teaching of religious education. There was a baseline assumption that the important obligations of the educational community to nurturing religious belief was a *sine qua non* of the system as a whole and could not be left to a sub-group of specialists. Reflecting a decline in Protestant Christianity in Scotland, however, sufficient levels of religious literacy necessary for meaningful engagement by teachers were often lacking, meaning in practice that in many parts of Scotland religious education was ignored. Moreover, the cultural, ethnic and religious landscape of Scotland was changing, giving way both to broad secularism and the growth of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities in cities such as Glasgow (Maan 1992).

While the legacy of Presbyterianism and its hold over public institutions in Scotland's history had a bearing on the ways in which British trends were enacted in Scotland, it must also be borne in mind that a substantial Roman Catholic constituency has held and continues to hold considerable political independence in educational matters, despite continuous attacks on religious schooling in Scotland as divisive (Conroy 2001; Conroy and McGrath 2007; Davis 2008; McKinney 2008a; McKinney 2009). In a possibly unique accommodation between state and organised religion, the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act awarded Roman Catholic schools full state-funding, while allowing these schools to retain their denominational status, follow their own religious education syllabus and approve their own teachers (Anderson 2008, 210). The state-funded sector in Scotland is thus composed of a binary divide between a non-denominational and state-funded denominational schooling practically synonymous with Roman Catholic schools (with the exception of one Jewish primary and a handful of Episcopalian schools) (McKinney 2008b, 258). Of Scotland's 375 secondary schools, 53 belong to the Roman Catholic denominational sector.

The Millar report and the subsequent SCCORE documents (*Bulletin 1* and *Bulletin 2*) proposed some radical changes in terms of the rationale, aims and models of religious



education (SCCORE 1978; 1981). The title of the subject was amended to Religious and Moral Education (RME) to reflect moral viewpoints not based on a religious perspective. The new subject aimed to explore the search for meaning as articulated in religion and explore this under three main themes: Preserving the historical and institutional influence of Christianity, Christianity remained the first theme; to this was added World Religions and pupils' search for meaning, reflecting broader changes in Scottish society, as well as broad changes in pedagogical theory, not ignoring those changes South of the border. Specialist teachers were to be trained in RME at all levels, and examinations followed in Religious Studies at Ordinary Grade in 1982 and Higher Grade in 1985 (Nixon 2009). The qualified specialist teacher of RME began to be recognised as an important addition to the non-denominational secondary school, with the rapid increase in professional status consolidated by the Education (Scotland) Act of 1980 which provided a legal guarantee of the right of children to receive 'instruction in religion', though as with England a right of parental withdrawal remains. More recently, as many schools have moved away from departmental structures towards a faculty organisational system, there have been concerns about the retention of religious education specialism as teachers are subsumed into faculties of Humanities or Social Sciences.

In 1983, HM Inspectorate began to inspect religious education provision in both non-denominational and denominational/Catholic schools, although inspectorial reports could comment only on issues of pedagogy and not substance (Nixon 2009). The reasons behind the late advent of an inspection regime are complex and rooted in the unique culture and history of Scotland. Besides the reasons already adumbrated as to the failure to develop a professional specialism in religious education, the durability of the dual structure of Catholic and non-denominational sectors is significant. For many years the Catholic Church jealously guarded control over its religious education curriculum, the Church's approach to religious education, *The Approach to RE in the Catholic Secondary School* (1974) was the response of the Church hierarchy to the *General Catechetical Directory* (1971) and outlined a confessional and Christocentric vision for religious education. Nonetheless, similar patterns of resource shortage and lack of teacher confidence in the post-Vatican II Catholic schooling sector lend striking parallels to the Millar report. In a relatively small polity such as Scotland, the strong personal relationships between senior figures in HMI and the Catholic Church's diocesan religious education advisers smoothed the path for mandatory inspection across both sectors.

The 1990's saw further developments in the convergence of religious education provision in the two sectors. Scottish Office Education Department Circular 6/91 (SOED 1991) re-emphasised the 'fundamental place in the curriculum' which RME occupied. Further consolidation occurred with the provision of the *5-14* curriculum for Scotland. A response to the National Curriculum in England, *5-14* was not legally statutory. In reality, however, inspection by HMI depended on a perception that the guidelines did indeed carry mandatory force. For a teacher to stand out against the Inspectorate and justify significant deviation from the guidance would demand intellectual and political resources beyond those that can reasonably be expected of any individual teacher. The development of religious education within the new curriculum architecture purported to offer religious education equal status to other subject areas, although notably it remained a separate discipline, with a specified time allocation (10% in primary schools, 5% in early secondary) and was not included in 'Environmental Studies' with history, geography and modern studies. Retaining the broad thrust of the Millar report, the subject title was Religious and Moral Education. In spite of the priority granted in legislation and guidance, a 2001 Inspectorate report observed that:

[i]n some schools RME received inadequate attention resulting in pupils displaying a superficial understanding of the issues they were studying. In 30% of departments, pupils followed a course designed by the school, local education authority or the religious authority. The majority of these were judged to be good. Common weaknesses in S3/S4 courses included the following

- \* too little support to pupils to see the relevance of the course
- \* too few opportunities for pupils to discuss the essential features of belief and morality associated with different religions and other stances for living; and
- \*an over emphasis on worksheets which led to slow progress and lack of interest and challenge. (HMIe 2001)

There were further changes in public examinations as the Higher examination became the more encompassing Higher Still (SQA 2000). These changes, like the move to Standard Grade, were designed to create a more inclusive examination system. Within the Higher Still framework, Religious Studies became Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) (Nixon 2008). The change in nomenclature reflected the increasing, though contested,

diversification within the subject. Examination provision, however, fundamentally distinguishes Scotland from the other UK jurisdictions – examinations in religious education are much less common – in part a consequence of the more significant time allocation for a standard grade qualification (approx. 1/8 of the school week) than a GCSE, and in part the result of a less league-table dominated education system North of the border. In the non-denominational sector, there is rarely the will to force a full Standard Grade qualification on all students, while in the Catholic sector, where religious education forms a significant part of the timetable, examinations are not pursued due to the perceived incompatibility of the Catholic religious education syllabus with the philosophical focus of the SQA's single RMPS syllabus. As in England, philosophy has experienced a growing popularity in the Higher syllabus, although this has been more commonly delivered through a discrete subject, Higher Philosophy, rather than in RMPS.

In fundamental contradistinction to other jurisdictions has been the ambiguous formal recognition given to major religious groupings and their representatives in curriculum development. While Catholics and Presbyterians, amongst others, sat on the Government 5-14 Working Group, they were not 'representatives', unlike the situation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Hence, while the then Scottish Office may have assumed that having communicant members of the Catholic church on the working group implied institutional agreement, this was not to be the case, and the Catholic Church decided to walk away from the development of a common document late in the process, arguing that the aims, content and intentions were at odds with the Catholic tradition. The Church produced their own parallel 5-14 guidelines, stressing the relationship of morality to religion (Scottish Office Education Department/ Scottish Catholic Education Service 1994).

This situation of parallel provision within a common structure has been retained in the recent development of A Curriculum for Excellence (LTS 2010). The underlying approach of CfE is to provide a more flexible and better connected curriculum, while retaining the breadth and depth associated with the Scottish educational tradition. The expectations for learning and progression are expressed within a series of experiences and outcomes, contained within curriculum organisers, which are intended to be inter-connected and contribute to developing the four capacities (successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors – bearing some similarity to the National Curriculum for England, but without explicit mention of a 'spiritual' dimension – LTS 2011).

RME (and its parallel RERC – religious education in Roman Catholic schools) is one of the eight curriculum organisers. Christianity remains a separate element from World Religions, although a vociferous lobby argued against this in the consultation period on CfE. A smaller lobby for greater focus on philosophy mirrors a secularising trend in recent consultations on religious observance in Scottish schools (unpublished research undertaken by Gilfillan and Aitken, 2008). Personal Search has been replaced by the less controversial Development of Beliefs and Values in the three aims of RME. The RERC guidelines, organised under eight faith-centric strands, are arguably a more entrenched return to a catechetical model of effectiveness (although pedagogical practices remain contemporary) for the Catholic denominational sector.

In summary, it may be said that similar currents of thought in multi-faith religious education, similar moves from confessional approaches towards personal meaning making and similar trends for centralisation of advice and guidance on school curriculum may be observed in Scotland as in England and Wales. In contrast, however, Scotland retains a strong binary divide between state denominational (Roman Catholic) and non-denominational education sectors in the sphere of religious education, although the curriculum in the Catholic sector is identical to other state funded schools in all other areas. Furthermore, Scotland's resistance to market-like structures in school and examination choice has cast these developments in a more homogenous educational context. With the exception of Catholic schooling, Scotland's religious education has developed largely in response to a singular rapidly secularising culture retaining institutional and historical allegiances to Presbyterian Christianity, in contrast to the diverse localised influences which achieved the 'English compromise' although the intellectual origins of the phenomenological model of English religious education have exerted considerable influence North of the border.

#### d) Northern Ireland

For some secularist commentators (Dawkins 2006; Grayling 2007), Northern Ireland's Troubles are the epitome of the errors of religious education, displaying all that can go wrong with education in religion and education by religious communities. Nonetheless, Northern Ireland's history, like the other component nations of the UK, is one in which the churches and their schools have historically found themselves at the forefront of efforts to extend the intellectual and moral benefits of schooling to their populations.

Religious education policy and practice takes a distinctive form in Northern Ireland, in part determined by the historical and continuing significance of Christianity. Levels of Christian religious affiliation have historically been and remain high, 46% of the population identifying themselves as Protestant and 40% as Catholic in the 2001 census, revealing more enduring attachment to religious affiliations and practices than the rest of the United Kingdom. Research reveals that the majority of young people continue to identify with religious identity, a 2003 survey of 15-17 year olds (Mitchell 2006; 21-37) indicated that 88% regarded themselves as belonging to a religious tradition. The adherents of non-Christian religious traditions amount to 0.3% of the overall population and only 0.55% of school students (Northern Ireland Department of Education School Census 2009/10).

Numerous theorists have sought to trace the legislative trajectory of religious education in Northern Ireland, both before and after the establishment of the state in 1921 (see Akenson 1973; Armstrong 2009; Barnes 2004; McGrath 2000), in particular the continuing influence of the churches in the governance and religious curriculum of schools. While Lord Londonderry the founding Education Minister of the newly established polity, sought to exclude religious instruction from publicly funded education in the 1923 Education Act, this was quickly repealed, with the Protestant churches (the Church of Ireland, Methodist Church and Presbyterian Church, which transferred their schools to state control) securing 'simple Bible instruction' in an Act of 1925, although not before this attempt at quashing sectarian tensions had backfired, leading to the Catholic Church retaining control of its schools, instituting a bipartite divide as in Scotland. While the provision of compulsory religious education in schools is long-standing, it was only in the 1990s that a statutory religious education syllabus was specified. The Church of Ireland, along with the Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches were invited by the Department of Education to draw up a 'core' syllabus for use in the province's controlled, voluntary and integrated sectors (Gallagher and Lundy 2006, 173-175) that is to say, across all sectors in receipt of government funds. Until the late 1980s there was little legislation on the content or form of religious education. Catholic schools pursued confessional, catechetical education centring on preparation for the Sacraments, while Protestant-majority state schools provided 'undenominational religious instruction based upon the Christian scriptures' as required by the 1947 Education Act in Northern Ireland. This legal approach towards religious education, allowing for innovation within limits reflective of evolving social attitudes changed in the late 1980s when the UK government indicated that the

process of educational reform initiated by the 1988 Education Reform Act in England and Wales would be extended to Northern Ireland.

In contrast to England and Wales, the churches mounted initial opposition to the proposed reforms, perhaps mindful of the secularising effect of anti-sectarian intentions in Lord Londonderry's day, only finally agreeing on condition that religious education was granted a statutory programme, bringing it into line with other 'foundation' subjects. The four largest churches were invited, under the terms of the Education Reform Order (Northern Ireland) of 1989 to draw up a suitable programme for all schools to follow, a Working Group was established and its proposed *Core Syllabus for Religious Education* was given statutory force by Parliamentary Order in 1992. This initial syllabus focused exclusively on the study of Christianity, and was organised under three attainment targets: 'The Revelation of God', 'The Christian Church' and 'Morality' (Barnes 1997). The syllabus essentially provided a list of content to be covered as students progressed through the educational system, but was not intended to provide a complete programme for religious education, taking into account that the *Core Syllabus* was intended to be applicable across the various sectors of the Northern Ireland education system.

To briefly address the diversity and terminology of Northern Ireland's educational institutions: controlled schools are wholly owned and run by Education and Library Boards, equivalent to England's Local Education Authorities, and therefore traditionally comprised the 'state' sector of education, attended in the main by students from the Protestant community. The 'transferring' Protestant churches retain certain historic governance rights over controlled schools, and have in recent years expressed serious concerns about the dilution or outright removal of Protestant and Christian ethos from the sector (Transferors Representatives' Council 2007). While these 'are not in any sense official Protestant church schools' (Richardson 2008), they retain historical, confessional and community links (Nelson 2004) which bear similarities to Scotland's non-denominational schools prior to the Millar Report. Voluntary schools are publicly funded (although full government funding on a parity with the controlled sector was only achieved in 1993) but are not in the ownership of the state - the vast majority of these schools are owned and operated by the Roman Catholic Church, making voluntary schools synonymous with Catholic Schools. While the Church remains the trustee of voluntary schools, with ultimate ownership of the estate, schools also have a board of governors responsible for the educational operation of the school, on which the Church is

represented but does not hold overall control. Since the 1980s, a movement for ‘integrated’ schools has grown up, often envisioned as a response to sectarian tensions and divisions – these are required by law to achieve a reasonable balance of Catholic and Protestant pupils in their student intake. Despite being the subject of intense media, academic and policy discussion (see McGlynn 2003; Montgomery et al 2003) the integrated sector remains a minority provider, with just over 6% of pupils attending integrated schools. The role of the churches in integrated schooling is a complex one, ranging from initial hostility from the Catholic Church in particular (Macaulay 2009) to active engagement in the pastoral dimensions, liturgical and social life of the school community – the stereotype of integrated education as a secular enterprise is far from accurate in many cases.

In addition to the complexities of this tripartite system, Northern Ireland remains the only part of the UK to retain academic selection, and while the Minister for Education’s 2008 decision abolished the state-sponsored ‘11-plus’ examination for grammar school entry, academic selection, now accomplished by means of privately administered entrance examinations, remains a reality for many schools in the Province. While the Catholic Church in Northern Ireland has formally endorsed the decision to end academic selection (NICCE 2010), many of its Voluntary grammar schools’ boards of governors have elected to retain selection. Combined with proposed legislation to set up a single Education and Skills Authority and the recent introduction of Citizenship and a skills-focused Northern Ireland Core Curriculum, this places the education system in Northern Ireland in a period of unprecedented change, in many ways mirroring changes which have taken place on the British mainland over a much longer period since the 1970s. The effect this will have on religious education and religious schooling remains to be seen. Religious education in Northern Ireland is arguably characterised by greater diversity of state-funded provision combined with a greater degree of state control than seen elsewhere in the UK.

As with the Scottish situation, religious education understandably evolved differently in controlled and voluntary schools, reflecting the different constituencies they serve and the different aims and emphases of the two sectors. In the controlled sector in particular the influence of developments in British religious education, mediated through teacher training institutions, came to justify itself on strictly educational grounds and these schools began to pursue aims less concerned with Christian nurture, although confessionalism remains a more evident theme in Northern Ireland’s controlled sector than in its Scottish, English and Welsh

counterparts. Given the scope within the legislation for supplementing the *Core Syllabus* with additional material, most Controlled and integrated schools study religions other than Christianity with greater depth and variety than required by statute.

Unlike in Scotland, where Protestant confessional education was permitted to wither in many areas, Northern Ireland's controlled schools established in 1966 the RE Council, Northern Ireland, recognising the need for development, specialism and relevance to a rapidly changing society. In 1977, the RE Council's report *Design for Religious Education* recommended the study of Christianity in an 'open exploratory spirit, as the most appropriate way of promoting understanding of and insight into the religion that is nearest to most children and also of providing a basis for the wider study of religion' (23). The report called for discussion on the aims and objectives of the subject, recommending, as a middle path between confessional and multi-faith approaches, a 'strict objectivity' in the study of the Bible, differentiated from evangelical or catechetical uses. Richardson (2008b) considers this attempt to have had sporadic, 'unsystematic – some might say *chaotic*' impact across the controlled sector.

Catholic schools, in which the subject is often still designated 'religion' have retained a confessional model concerned with Christian nurture, though this should not be interpreted as incompatible with academic aims or the aims of encouraging understanding of religious diversity. Often relying on materials developed in and for the Republic of Ireland, Catholic schools regard themselves as faith communities charged by parents and the Church with the responsibility of fostering discipleship and religious commitment.

The exclusion of religions other than Christianity from the original *Core Syllabus* aroused controversy and demands for recognition from adherents of other faith traditions in the Province. This contrast with the rest of the UK continues to attract controversy – while Richardson (2007) continues to object to the churches' control over the syllabus, Barnes argues that the demography of the Province makes English model multi-faith religious education 'inappropriate to the Northern Irish educational and cultural context' (2002, 19).

In February 2002, following a request from Minister of Education Martin McGuinness, the four churches again established a Steering Group and Working Party to undertake a review of the *Core Syllabus*. As part of the review the Northern Ireland Department of Education asked the group to consider the inclusion of other world religions as an integral part of the syllabus, giving consideration to recent equality and human rights legislation. In response a sub-group



on world religions was established. Proposals by the working party, which included the requirement of a short study on Judaism and Islam, went to public consultation in September 2003, and the Department of Education submitted the proposal for a full Equality Impact Assessment (as required by Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998). The results were published in November 2006, confirming the legality of the new revised syllabus, to the annoyance of some representatives of other world faiths. The revised *Core Syllabus* came into effect in September 2007.

In secondary education, a number of schools choose English based examination boards for GCSE religious education. Arguably, these boards' syllabi are incompatible with the statutory requirement in the *Core Syllabus* that Christianity should be studied from 'the Roman Catholic tradition and at least one Protestant tradition', further confirming the legacy of sectarianism and the priority given to religious education as a vehicle for anti-sectarian aims and objectives.

Religious education in Northern Ireland remains distinct from that on the British mainland, although similar influences can be detected. The movement towards an academic model of religious education is clearly discernible, although this is still supplemented by confessional dimensions in Catholic and sporadically in controlled schools. While Northern Ireland is home to conflicting communities and a diversity of educational provision, convergence in religious education aims and practices can be observed in recent years, supported by more prescriptive statutory guidance than in the rest of the UK, and by the continued influence of the Christian churches in schooling and society.

#### e) Summary

Religious education policy across the UK is characterised by similar tropes and themes, most notably a move away from Christian-centred confessional approaches towards a more 'academic' focus, though refracted through the unique legislative, educational and cultural contexts of the four constituent nations. In all contexts, Christian churches and religious minorities have exerted influence, both through membership of syllabus drafting bodies and state-sponsored religious schools, although the question of the 'ownership' of religious education is resolved differently at different times and in different legislative locations.

Dating back to the origins of state-mandated education in the four nations, controversy has followed public and professional debates around the aims, practices and models of

effectiveness in religious education in the UK. While discussion of these changes in policy and cultural dimensions has focussed on the move from ‘confessional’ to ‘academic’ models, this has, as we shall go on to see, often left open the question of what an ‘academic’, ‘objective’ or ‘educational’ study of religions ought to look like. As the discussions above have demonstrated, such debates are rarely resolved by policymakers, owing more to professionals and interest groups. In response to this, the next stage of inquiry will be to map the narrative status of professional debate and opinion, first in the philosophical and pedagogical literature, then by mapping the dialogue of policymakers and key practitioners in conversation.

### Chapter 3: Pedagogical and Philosophical Critiques

#### a) Paradigm of enquiry

As the preceding policy analysis illustrates, religious education in the UK has not been immune to educational change, or to pressure from shifting political and curricular priorities. Social trends of secularisation and multiculturalism have opened up an increasing diversity of worldviews, religious and non-religious. The increasing drive toward cross-curricular initiatives in all legislative areas of the UK (LTS 2010; DENI 2007, QCA 2004b) and the introduction of new subjects in the area of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, such as citizenship and personal, social and health education, have led to debate around the suitability and sustainability of religious education in the curriculum. In the critical literature, as well as in the popular media, a number of critiques exist of the role and practice of religious education in UK schools. These critiques can be divided into two broad categories, those which conceive of religious education as failing to present religions fairly on their own terms – a failure to be genuinely *religious*, and those which conceive of religious education as failing to be truly *educational*. As a prerequisite to this enquiry into religious education practice, it is necessary to delineate a meaningful domain of models of effectiveness which can be described as adequate and appropriate to both the *religious* and *educational* dimensions of the subject matter.

In considering the aims, practices and models of effectiveness in religious education, it is necessary to discern the validity of the myriad educational approaches advanced in the literature, relative to these fundamental critiques of their religiosity or educativity. With reference to the divergent aims and practices common in observed practice, and in particular in the aims and practices observed in the case studies which form the second part of this thesis, do they invalidate themselves by definition, either with regard to one or other (or, more disturbingly, both) of these fundamental criteria. Most ruinously of all, are these two criteria fundamentally antithetical to one another, that is to say, does the religious dimension of human experience aim at something which is conceptually antithetical to the broad liberal educational intentions of Anglo-European models of public schooling, or vice-versa?

In defining a domain of dual validity for religious education, there is insufficient space to furnish an exhaustive definition of either religion or education in the abstract. As in the

preceding chapter, an ostensive approach is pursued, dismissing certain models which have taken the name ‘religious education’ but which have in practice been judged invalid on religious and/or educational grounds. Having arrived at a working definition by these means, we may then enquire whether any models of effectiveness are left within the domain of dual validity, proceeding in subsequent chapters to examine whether any of these remain present in professional practice, before examining the possibility and effectiveness of their enactment in key cases.

In recent years, increasing emphasis has been placed on the role of religious education in fostering the skills for living in a pluralistic multicultural society. More broadly, the role of religion in distilling the deeply held cultural values and attachments of citizens in Britain, with all its creative and destructive potential, has received increasing recognition of late, reflected particularly in the primacy given to religious organisations in the Preventing Violent Extremism agenda (DCLG 2007). Numerous accounts of pluralism have been advanced by social theorists, and some multicultural social models have been subject to criticism in recent times (e.g. the comments of Sir Trevor Philips and Lord Ousley on segregation in Britain Guardian 19<sup>th</sup> September 2005) and community cohesion has come to the fore as a stated aim in social and educational policy, particularly in inner city schools in England following the Robinson report (2005, 1413) which detailed ‘community fragmentation’ as a significant causal factor in the 2001 disturbances in Oldham and Burnley.

The task of furnishing a coherent account of pluralism in the face of such contestation is a challenging one. A good starting point is provided by Karim-Aly Kassam (2010b, 1):

Pluralism asserts diversity... in human culture, and recognizes that change is a normal part of ecological and socio-cultural processes. Pluralism not only accepts difference but values it... pluralism enables diverse groups to work successfully together in order to realize their common good... While socio-cultural and ecological diversity are empirical facts, pluralism is normative because it values this diversity and seeks to safeguard it.

Drawing on examples from his work with interacting nomadic and settled cultures in Central Asia, Kassam details practices of pluralism exercised through hospitality, trade (in conditions of pre-modern economy regulated by trust) in illustration of ‘niche complementarity’ which

Increases with diversity because no monoculture is as productive as some combination of two species, and no combination of  $N$  species is as productive as some combinations of  $N + 1$  species (Tilman et al 2001, 843 cited Kassam, 2010b, 11).

This account of pluralism is problematic for consideration of religion on its own terms, as we shall see, due to its reliance on a normatively pre-defined notion of ‘common good’ or ‘productivity’ which is proper to pluralism itself as a value metanarrative. This risks the commoditisation of effectiveness, a concern which is pivotal to those critiques of the accuracy of approaches to religious truth claims in religious education advanced by Felderhof (2007) and others. Can a more limited account of pluralism be advanced, recognising the contingent value of cultures to one another, qualifying the absolute value presumed by Tilman’s definition of pluralism with regard to diverse normative claims, religions and world views.

In addressing these and other questions, discussions held at Shackleton Point, New York on *Resituating Pluralism* in 2009 pointed toward a reformulation in terms of common interest, pointing to a methodological pluralism, a toolset for communities with diverse aims to assist one another in areas of commonality. Noting that in practice pluralism is often used as both a descriptor and a process, the latter, process-pluralism, may be described as a response to crisis, a refusal to throw out troublesome parts of a problem when conceiving of a response, a choice to avoid binary solutions. Descriptive pluralism, on the other hand, distinct from the empirical fact of diversity, remained an ongoing dissensus, and was taken up again in discussions held at the Strathclyde University Institute of Advanced Study in 2010. In these discussions, the view was advanced that academic disciplines, cultures and religions can advance justifications for pluralism from within their internal value systems. Descriptive pluralism was thus distinguished from prescriptive pluralism, in that it seeks to actively preserve minority cultures and identities through coherent dialogue, as opposed to imposing a metanarrative with planned limits and singular justifications for pluralistic practice. It is from such an account of descriptive pluralism that I will seek to draw in this work.

Adopting the concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom from Aristotelian philosophy, Kassam (2010a) is able to posit a dichotomy between adapting learning to a context, ‘knowing how’, epitomised by a student who explained ‘I feel more about this concept now than I did at the beginning. Now I feel that I have a lot more responsibility to myself and to others when I step out into the “real world”’ (215), and ‘knowing that’ – this dichotomy permits diverse

communities of social practice to arrive at similar conclusions as to the subject matter, without either subjectivising knowledge content or abstracting from lived experience. Bridging the interpretive and lexical gulf that can sometimes exist between cultures of social practice within the school and outside is a problem for descriptive pluralism, one which demands discursive openness. Drawing on the work of Moll (1992) on Latino families' household knowledge, Kassam is able to excavate the discursive gap which exists between children's' life-worlds of social practice and their learning in school (Avery and Kassam 2011). This *practical* dimension to the philosophical, drawing on the concept of action philosophy developed in Chapter 1, will be an essential consideration in excavating the spiritual and social consequences of religious learning. While such dichotomies are common to education (such as Avery and Kassam's concern with science and engineering knowledge), in the case of religious education, they take on a dual dimension – where grasping something beyond the abstract academic dimension may well be an aim of science or history educators, it is possible to have an authentic science education which does not access a level beyond the theoretical, whereas it is a fundamental misrepresentation of the religious if a religious education fails to grasp something beyond the literal.

#### b) The first critique: religious education as indoctrinatory

The most persistent and prevalent critique inherent in much criticism of religious education is that it is indoctrinatory. As Yob (2007) notes, fear of this criticism has all but put an end to any learning about religions in American schools, with 94 per cent of K-12 school teachers admitting they would not teach about religion (153). The American experience is not far removed from changes in British religious education - reference to the US Supreme Court judgment outlawing religious observance in public schools frames the introduction to Schools Council Working Paper 36 (1971), highlighting a perceived need which precipitated dramatic changes in English religious education. Secular critiques of religious education (e.g. National Secular Society 2010; Narisetti 2009) tend in particular to focus on the accusation of indoctrination, particularly with regard to the linking of religious teachings to moral education. This critique is of particular significance with regard to the affective dimension and social claims of religious education.

At its most simplified, religion can be transformed into a pedagogic and rhetorical device for securing certain kinds of behavioural and attitudinal goods on behalf of society – this kind of

‘civic religion’ then shifts purpose and identity from the truth claims and world views of religions as an object of study to a resource for the cultivation and/or modification of given dispositions and behaviours. It is precisely such uses and abuses of religion that are the subject of some of the most vitriolic critics of religion’s place in public life (Dawkins 2006; Hitchens 2008). Two possible answers present themselves to the charge of indoctrination: universally, to deny that there is anything educationally invalid about indoctrination, thus rendering the critique vacuous; or, conditionally, demonstrating that while certain indoctrinatory models of religious instruction are invalid, valid practices and models remain which are not indoctrinatory.

The concept of indoctrination comes to us ready-evaluated and ready-condemned, it is a term in which the imputation of violence is clearly implied. When examining this philosophical critique in particular, the rhetorical dimension of language must not be disregarded.

‘Indoctrination’ creates and enforces a role deeply embedded in cultural memory (Bruggeman and Fredal 1999, 135) – the spectre of the Jesuit hiding in the shadows, the Cromwellian Major-Generals, the religious ‘fanatic’, Nazi propaganda, Korean War era ‘brainwashing’ tactics and terrorist-controlled Afghan madrassas are never far from the rhetorical allusions in its use. The significance of this ‘unthought’, of loaded language, is an increasing concern to postmodern approaches to language (Foucault 2005; Pickstock 1998), particularly in education. Discussions about the bias of language and valued knowledges cannot be separated entirely from the balance of power. While this insight is often attributed to Foucault, its origins are evident in the realism of Thomas Hobbes, who noted that ‘Riches, Knowledge and Honour are but severall sorts of Power’ (1985, 139). Professional knowledge in particular, and the successful use of professional language, is of interest throughout the subsequent study, potential bias and pre-evaluation within the cultural domain of practice has the ability to skew meanings, as the ethnographic data demonstrates. For educational purposes, we may summarise that ‘A person indoctrinates P... if he teaches with the intention that the pupil... believe P regardless of the evidence’ (Copley 2005, 4), that ‘indoctrination attempts to bypass the reason’ (Rose, 1996, 175).

Is all educational activity, then, to be considered indoctrinatory because of the power exercised by professional knowledge? Is the intimation ‘religious education is indoctrinatory’ a cipher for the wrong kind of indoctrination, of the influence of the wrong kinds of knowledge/power by the wrong kinds of interest groups (churches and other religious

organisations)? If the critique that all teaching of beliefs and opinions is indoctrinatory is to be upheld, the consequences for education as a whole are either broad and sweeping or tautologous and inconsequential. As Lloyd (2007) notes, the same process of selection and ‘objective’ presentation of propositions on the ground of authority rather than empirical proof is common to the rest of the school curriculum, and is rarely questioned. In many ways, value nurture is inevitable in the school curriculum (Thompson 2007) - Rose (1996) for example, notes that ‘no questions are raised about the indoctrinatory role of the teacher with regard to health and safety issues, or equal opportunities’ (176). While Narisetti (2009, 12) considers ‘involuntary involvement of children in [their parents’] religious practices from the time they are born’ to be a form of abuse, this approach cannot be sustained with regard to other aspects of children’s socialisation, such as exposure to language or visits to the doctor. In response to this, Narisetti has no cogent argument to advance beyond the reiteration of a well-known catalogue of the misuses of religion in recent history.

In responding to the universal formulation of the charge of indoctrination, fundamental questions need to be posed as to the fundamental aims and values which underpin education, these questions cannot be ultimately resolved with regard to any criterion of effectiveness, but require careful scrutiny of the cultural and social values which underpin them and from which they derive (Scruton 2007; Apple 1993). These questions continue to re-emerge with alarming regularity in regard to religious education throughout the course of the study, surfacing deep anxieties among the professional community of religious educators at all levels. Some teachers are clear that they do not wish to impose, uphold or even disclose any particular values or ethical or religious claim in the classroom, often representing this as a form of neutrality. A commitment to a pluralistic pedagogy of religious education requires as much explicit moral commitment to pluralist values as does a confessional pedagogy, yet many teachers retreat from this level of commitment. While of pivotal importance to the philosophy of education more generally, the frequent return to these foundational questions in the realm of religious education is abnormal in comparison to debates in the wider school curriculum in the UK. Rather than address the universal critique of educational power and practice, I intend to turn to a philosophical analysis of the particularised critique as it is applied to religious education as enacted in UK schools within the policy constraints enumerated in Chapter 2.

Andrew Wright advances a subtle argument with regard to the potential indoctrinatory nature of religious education’s aims. In *Spirituality and Education* (2000) Wright argued that



Effective spiritual education... must be equally committed to education as nurture and education as critique [and] that indoctrination is both a necessary and inevitable component of effective spiritual education (113)

although in a subsequent account (2007a) Wright rejects attempts to re-establish a Christian nurture approach to religious education, arguing instead that religious education

concerned simply to maintain a closed liberal worldview needs to be replaced with a critical RE designed to enable children to engage with the truth claims of the various world faiths (171).

Controversially, Wright's thesis advocates an openness in the presentation of religious truth claims that is tolerant of intolerance by accepting critical approaches to all value judgments, including criticism of the applicability of critical method itself. Such an approach is consistent with the critical dimensions of a descriptive pluralism, while rejecting an overarching indoctrinatory pedagogy with regard to normative or metaphysical pluralism. The exposure of critical method to critique is a radical response to the seemingly 'inevitable' role played by indoctrination in some phases of education. A consequence of such an approach is to claim for religious education an unique place in the curriculum, offering a critical perspective on the inevitable indoctrinatory commitments embedded in the whole curriculum. This inevitable role includes the laying of groundwork, what Ziebertz calls *lebensweltlich* 'the pre-conditioning of pupils before a learning process starts' (Copley 2005, 3), the nature of which is itself a ground of contention. While the Plowden Report of 1967 recognised that 'young children... should not be confused by being taught to doubt before faith is established' (Gates 2007, 129), many contemporary accounts of religious education begin from a very different foundation. A religious education which begins in the sociology of religions, for example (see Keenan, 2009) would take as its foundation the assumption that religions are a human phenomenon founded upon social processes, a view explicitly rejected as the foundation for Christian religious education in Scottish Catholic Schools (SCES 2007). There is a presumption among many critics of religious education (National Secular Society 2010) that indoctrination works only in favour of religious groups. Terence Copley, in a thoroughgoing analysis of this question, has been one of the few to address the possibility that indoctrination may also operate in secular education:

What if the majority are being indoctrinated in such a way that they never see the question, let alone start assessing the truth claims that provide possible answers (Copley 2005, xv)

Copley observes that one of the few things not assessed in the British education system is its underpinning values (2005, 18) – the presentation of secular models of religious education as though value neutral cannot be sustained (Mott-Thompson 1996; Watson 2007; Wright 2007a). Neither an attempt to lay a groundwork in faith nor a groundwork in social theory, as a perquisite to critical enquiry, necessarily entail objectivity nor indoctrination understood as an attempt to ‘bypass the reason’, nor may either be conceived *in esse* as objective. Echoing the nesting of social processes addressed in chapter 1, this critical concern with regard to the grounding of curriculum values may be seen as analogous to the prophetic domain often claimed by religion in public life, of ‘speaking truth to power’.

Rose (1996) summarises three conceptions of indoctrination: indoctrinatory methods; indoctrinatory aims and indoctrinatory content (175) although whether content *per se* can be indoctrinatory is moot (Watson 2007). In this thesis, attention will be given to aims and methods. The personal-transformative capacity of education in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural realms, a stated aim of the whole curriculum but particularly prominent in religious education, renders concerns about indoctrination particularly pertinent. Neither purely the realm of the rational and critical faculties, nor therefore of necessity indoctrinatory, this dimension of education poses value questions which are problematic for philosophical ethics, as classical moral philosophy has concerned itself with deliberation of means, not of ends (Aristotle 1971, 1113a10).

The bio-ethicist David Gems addresses the identity-transforming character of these educational ends insightfully. Gems poses the question:

Life is simple enough when one has desires, and possible means to achieve them. But in their absence, as we sit on the bed and stare at the floor, the question of what to desire and what to aspire to can be hard (2005, 1)

In response, Gems posits a kind of intervention, ‘ontological enhancement’ which differs from other interventions in three distinct ways: ‘superfluity, directionality and identity transformation’ (2005, 1) – ontological enhancement appears unnecessary before it is

undergone but becomes an integral and directive part of the subject's conative and affective framework having been thus 'enhanced'. In some sense, all educational activity conforms to such a definition, and religious commitments may also be of such a character. If religious education has such a capability, the risk is that it will either present only what students, parents or the professional community select, and thus reinforce existing cultural prejudices, or present alternatives that will inevitably change students' outlook on the world in directions with hidden cultural origins. Faced with such profound risks, the attraction of saying nothing at all is understandable yet nonetheless misguided.

Undeniably, therefore, the aims and intentions of the religious education curriculum cannot be overlooked in the following analysis. In particular, remembering our definition of indoctrination as bypassing reason, one must take seriously Kay's critique of the 'skills' agenda in curriculum development, observing that 'adding the word "skills" to any activity is such as to remove thought and analysis from it (2007, 105). Much of this critique is borne out by evidence of oversimplified constructions, repetition and rote learning in response to examination pressures in religious education (Davis and Wenell *forthcoming*). Kay exposes the socio-pedagogical roots of the skills agenda in physical competences in the workplace (103) and illustrates that the acquisition and assessment of a skills framework in a literate subject such as religious education may prove equally complex, if not more complex, than that of a knowledge framework, with origins which may be more obfuscatory and less open to critique. Many other authors (Jackson 2004; Watson 2007; Yob 2007) have been more positive about the potential of skills in religious education, though these are by no means mere physical competences. While there may indeed be forms of religious education which, conforming to Kay's critique, are merely competence-based, bypassing the reason (such as reciting the Penny Catechism or learning the correct positions for *Salah*, for example) these are not present in mainstream British schooling, and so to repudiate religious education on these grounds is a straw man argument.

Two pertinent concerns arise out of this analysis, the importance of reason and student autonomy and the aims and intentions of curriculum selection and design. For religious education to successfully respond to the charge of indoctrination, it must demonstrate that the content presents students, not with an unbiased selection (such is an impossibility) but at least with a selection the origins of which are subject to critique and scrutiny, and which students will not be pre-disposed to accept or reject by the very nature of the learning exercise

(Felderhof 2007). A curriculum which keeps students in ignorance with regard to valid choices does not offer a sound educational basis for choice (Watson 2007, 6), and thus the removal of religion from the realm of public schooling cannot be supported. Likewise, a curriculum which deliberately overlooks ‘the controversial issue of assessing religious claims to truth’ (Barnes 2007, 78) for reasons of instilling uncritical commitment to a religious world-view or to ‘civic’ values of an uncritical kind of tolerance, which fails to equip young people with the necessary cognitive skills to examine religious claims for themselves, must be seen to be failing in regard to its educational aims, although this need not preclude a conative, affective and indeed spiritual dimension.

c) The second critique: religious education as a-rational/irrational

Besides the argument that religious education cannot develop in a value vacuum, there is also the critique, not unrelated, of a content vacuum of sorts. There is a perception that much of the curriculum misrepresents religion. This critique stems from anxieties about the rationality of the spiritual content of religions, underpinning which is a philosophical concern about the realism of religious referents. According to this critique, religions provide us with a set of claims which cannot be assessed from ‘outside’ of the cognitive framework of the religious believer. They have, at best, an internal coherence and rationality. This is not unrelated to the concerns of the indoctrination critique – if there is no ‘outside’ from which to rationally adjudicate between religious truth claims, how can religious education avoid the criticism of bypassing the reason?

The work of DZ Phillips (1993) on Wittgenstein’s philosophy of religious language provides an entry to this critique. Phillips makes use of Wittgenstein’s concept of language games to understand the notion of religion as a private language shared by believers. Phillips raises two concerns about language games: firstly that religious language games appear disconnected from the rest of our language, at least as regards the verifiability of their truth conditions; and that what religion can tell us about human experience can be equally well explained with reference to other, more integrated, areas of language (1993, 69), although what these other areas might be is not specified. Phillips places religious language firmly on the horns of a dilemma: bearing in mind that ‘the criteria of meaningfulness cannot be found *outside* religion, since they are given by religious discourse itself’, religious truths cannot be spoken of

outside of religion unless they are willing to be misrepresented, thus seemingly juxtaposing religious *meaning* and religious *truth* (1993, 8).

This critique draws on ideas put forward in Wittgenstein's *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (1966). In understanding the truth claims of religious beliefs, Wittgenstein observes, the kinds of rationality we would apply to a scientific experiment simply do not obtain. Firstly, scientific rigour and even 'indubitability is not enough... Because the indubitability wouldn't be enough to make me change my whole life' (57), once again, the idea of *phronesis* is essential in bridging the divide between the means-ends realisation performative goals and purposive, transformative encounters (Lundie 2009, Kassam 2010a). Secondly, the kinds of evidence that present themselves as religious proofs, far from being *more* rigorous than scientific proofs, rest upon 'an entirely different kind of reasoning', hardly treated as 'a matter of reasonability' in the scientific sense at all (58). This concern pertains not only to religious narratives, but to metaphysical and metanarrative claims in general. 'Language cannot say how it mirrors reality because we cannot get outside of language to see this mirroring' (Sheehan 2001, 27). Based upon such an understanding of religious language, it must be asked whether it is ever entirely possible to effect the 'bracketing out' of these images required by the phenomenological displacement. If there is no Archimedean point with regard to religion, the presumed neutrality of many teachers remarked upon above must give way either to a distorted view of religion or to an explicit commitment to a pluralistic or faith-specific world view.

Philips applies this concern particularly to religion and to conceptions of God. Part of the difficulty in saying anything meaningful about God is the problem of metaphysics in general, for contrary claims to be adjudicated 'two people must share a similar understanding, they must be playing the same game, speaking the same language' (Phillips 1993, 61), and the concept of being as derived from a supreme Being has no parallel in the language of the non-believer. Wittgenstein's contention, thus understood, is not that religious statements are without meaning, but that their meaning is outside reason, either irrational or a-rational. For the project of education as conceived within the liberal state '[t]hat something could be necessarily beyond human understanding seems to be an intolerable thought' (Phillips 1993, 153).

If religious meanings are not learned by rational enquiry, in what way do religious concepts become part of a learner's world view? Wittgenstein poses the foundational questions for such an inquiry: '[h]ow did we *learn the meaning of this word...*? *From what sort of examples? in what language games?*' (Stickney 2008, 680). Religious 'evidence' unlike scientific evidence 'will show, not by reasoning or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for all in [the believer's] life' (Wittgenstein 1966, 55). The need to consider such personalistic evidence is echoed by Brenda Watson, who argues that faith positions

start from assumptions which people arrive at through reflection on life as a whole – using imagination, empathy, intuition, and many other aspects of cognitive and emotional activity (Watson 2007, 9).

In his analysis of how such meanings are arrived at, Phillips goes on to illustrate that this reflection cannot be a detached, rational process:

The child does not listen to the stories [about God], observe religious practices, reflect on all this, and then form an idea of God out of the experience. The idea of God is being formed in the actual story-telling and religious services (Phillips 1993, 4)

This affective-experiential dimension is a point on which Lloyd (2007) also remarks:

to expose a child to a variety of lifestyles adequately could mean that the child is progressively changed by those experiences. He or she will not be the same as he was before. It is not like choosing a holiday by inspecting a number of brochures (27).

The particulars of religious education, it would seem, require an affective and ontologically directional personal experience of holistic religious ways of thinking and living. Can such an experience be regarded as rational, or is it of necessity indoctrinatory? The consequences of our answer to this question prove pivotal to the entire enterprise of religious education – if such an approach is of necessity indoctrinatory then no conception of religious education may be advanced which is both educationally valid and represents religion on its own terms in a way which allows students to engage with the affective and conative dimensions of religious experience. Religious education would thus be restricted to either an external sociology of religious ideas or an indoctrinatory religious instruction model. How can we study that in which 'we live and move and are' (Acts 17:28)?

Attempts have been made to rescue meaningful and rational engagements with religious truth claims from such an account. Whereas Wittgenstein is insistent that we do not choose the language game (Strawson 2000, 39) Carnap's understanding of language frameworks suggests that by using a particular framework of religious language, we are choosing to accept as true the concepts which that framework represents. While Byrne (2003) rejects Carnap's frameworks on the grounds that they are implicitly verificationist (90), what is more pertinent to our enquiry is that Carnap also fails to take adequate account of the circularity of his pragmatist epistemology. The question of effectiveness or usefulness can only be answered from 'inside' a teleological framework, and it is precisely such a framework that religious belief systems propose. Once again, the difficulty of conceiving of the aims of religious education without a shared teleology makes the concept of 'effective' religious education highly contestable. Religions are their own meta-narratives. There is no 'outside' to the religious believer's understanding of their religion. Teece's understanding of Grimmitt's definition of *learning from religion*, that

Such an evaluation may include the ability to make distinctions between expressions of religion that promote human flourishing and those expressions that are antithetical to human flourishing (Teece, 2008, 193),

which is not the way in which Grimmitt presents such judgments (Grimmitt 1987, 225), fails to note the core of this argument, that religions are teleologically self-contained and different religions are teleologically separate, neither subject to, nor having access to any prior concept of 'human flourishing'.

Is there another answer to this critique? One response is to reconsider the meaning of 'education' within the context of schooling in the liberal state. If only 'reasoning' and dispassionate 'reflection' are to be considered valid forms of education, then such an account does indeed prove fatal to the project of a religious education which represents religion on its own terms. As noted above, however, British schooling explicitly includes a spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimension. The analogy of language provided by Wittgenstein is again an appropriate one – children are not expected to evaluate their need for language learning prior to exposure to language, nor is such an evaluation even possible. Consequently, as Stickney (2008) attempts to demonstrate, Wittgenstein's own philosophy of education included a significant role for conditioning, training and acculturation before learning as reasoning can

even begin to take place. Contrastively, in attempting to map a philosophy of education based solely on the power of reason, Michael Luntley returns to the dilemma of how to construct an account of the development of rational capacities, not only in religion but in education more generally, a dilemma which he is only able to resolve by dissolving the borderline between education and training (Luntley 2008).

How can the gap between a-rational cognitive development and rationality be bridged? The pedagogical and psychological work of Jean Piaget provides one possible starting point to construct an alternative understanding of rationality that will suffice both for religion and the general undertaking of education in its socio-cultural and personal-spiritual dimensions. Piaget was deeply concerned with the reconciliation of religious and scientific understandings of the world (Kohler, 2008) – for Piaget, ‘reason is neither a system of ideas or categories, nor a system of laws, but it is constructive activity’ (Kohler, 2008, 99). It would be difficult to conceive of schooling which did not make use of constructive methods of learning, and it is easy to see how such methods could concur with the techniques of ‘imagination, empathy, intuition, and many other aspects of cognitive and emotional activity’ which Watson (2007, 9) enumerates as the skills of religious education. The construction of meaning from students’ experience will emerge as a core element in the empirical work.

This approach differs subtly from Lealman, who is critical of the over-emphasis on socialisation theory and developmental psychology in moral education, and instead advocates the use of inspiring images, and the exploration of myths, which ‘are not the opposite of truth but a recognition of mystery’ (1996, 21). In empirical work carried out with younger children, Hyde (2008) posits that even in a faith school context, childhood spiritual development is an imaginative process of piecing together a broad multiplicity of sources in response to wonder and spiritual experience. Grimmitt (1987) suggests that spiritual learning is best engaged with, not at the extremes of human experience, but beginning in the context of everyday life. The piagetian constructive and mystagogical approaches suggest themselves as satisfying both the educational and religious validity requirements in answer to the two critiques advanced thus far.

Nonetheless, foundational concerns as to the realism of religious referents remain a cause of anxiety. Returning to Wittgenstein’s analysis of religious language, Phillips posits a further problem: if evidential criteria cannot be used to examine religion, how can religious ideas



escape the criticism of being ‘forms of disguised nonsense’ (Phillips 1993, 66)? Unlike Derrida, Wittgenstein did not deny the existence of a metaphysics beyond language (Sheehan 2001), Wittgenstein’s language games have a purpose with regard to reality, though like the planets in Aristotelian cosmology, language continually circles in imitation of, but never reaching, its First Cause.

There are indeed things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical (Wittgenstein, Tractatus 6.522).

While Wittgenstein’s anti-realist successors such as Phillips have interpreted his stance towards metaphysics by emphasising the irrationality of religious talk, this denial of metaphysics is not inherent to a Wittgensteinian epistemology. It

places limits around what is real and the limits make what is real dependent on us, specifically on the practical or theoretical limits to human observation (Byrne 2003, 82)

In response to this limitation, Byrne (2003) proposes a return to what he terms ‘innocent realism’ with regard to the relationship between mind and world. Byrne’s innocent realism amounts to a form of deistic positivism, predicated on the possibility of a metaphysically omniscient being, and a correspondence between our way of knowing and His. A similar naive realism can be seen in the work of Wilfred Cantwell-Smith (1962, 17) although this leads the two theorists to very different conclusions about the human capacity to know God’s transcendent reality. As Byrne accepts, there is a need for a measure of anti-realism about religious language if we are to progress or even to acknowledge that human language is incapable of fully grasping transcendent realities. This supports the mystagogic pedagogy of religious education advanced above. It is for precisely this reason that a language-independent metaphysics is central to Byrne’s thesis.

There is a further position position, between Byrne’s innocent realism and the kind of ‘weak realism’ which he attributes to constructivist accounts of knowledge such as the piagetian, consisting in the denial of any kind of ‘scholastic realism’ about the pre-existing differentiation of all knowledge while acknowledging the pre-existing mental differentiation of their knowability as a physical fact about the human mind. That is to say, differentiation of facts is not dependent on the facts really being there ‘outside’ of persons, nor are facts

dependent on all human brains sharing physiological similarities predisposing them to think in certain ways about the outside world. According to such a model, facts about the world are neither defined by reference to self nor defined by faith in a pre-existent Knower. It would thus still be possible to say that metaphysical statements have meaning, without requiring definitive external verification of the metaphysics of the transcendent reality.

Following Wittgenstein, lines of argument relying on symbolic or metaphysical positions remain beyond objective resolution, at least within the philosophical apparatus available to public scrutiny or positivistic evidence, as tends to characterise processes of public educational policy and curriculum development in the liberal state. To justify an authentic religious education in the liberal state, justifications resting on mystical theology or the supra-rational silence of the transcendent unknowable are unlikely to prove successful in public debate. One attempt to rescue the rationality of religion from the bottomless pit of metaphysical angst is found in the focus in much recent pedagogical literature on ‘spirituality’ in education. For this understanding, a transcendent Being is not required. Mott-Thompson (1996) defines such spirituality as ‘anything which might be regarded as a source of inspiration to a person’s life... ideals, goals, sense of purpose and identity’ (77) and is thus forced to admit that, for the non-religious subject, ‘spiritual’ inspiration can come from the arts, politics, sport or a range of other sources. ‘Spirituality’ in the abstract

rules out no conception of what might, for any given individual, constitute a good life... even those which are expressed through immoral or amoral lifestyles... But it would be wrong to assume that because we might call this a ‘spiritual’ framework at some level, we are thereby compelled to accommodate it as an *ideal* in the [educational] policy for spiritual development (Mott-Thompson 1996, 81).

According to this view, spirituality is not necessarily relational, either with regard to other persons or to a transcendent Other, but is characterised by an appreciation which is real at the level of the whole of human life. While this may not satisfy Byrne’s transcendent realism, it is one way of answering the educational, if not the metaphysical, critique of religious education’s rationality.

Robert Jackson (2004) advocates a more permeable interpretive approach to religious education, a ‘positive pluralism’ which, while still originating in social anthropology, differs from the relativism of Smart and Teece in that it begins from a position of epistemic humility,

making no metaphysical claim to the relative truth of any faith position. One must be careful to distinguish making such an epistemic claim about the public discourse of the Religious Education classroom, and teaching such a claim as worthy of acceptance by individual pupils, which amounts to an indoctrinatory agnosticism. In attempting to reconcile these critiques, an anthropocentric spirituality could be rehabilitated as the outworking of a Hegelian tradition of viewing religion as the highest expression of humanity (Honneth 1995) a view echoed in early attempts at developing a post-confessional religious education for England (Rose 1996, 178). It need not lead to the rejection of metaphysical questions in religious education, and indeed relies on the ability to pose just such questions, while understanding that a complete answer in rationalistic terms will not be forthcoming. Such an analysis accords with Peter Berger's understanding of the supernatural, which could be described as the human supernatural, not necessarily the realm of the objectively transcendent, but of the super-normal. "What is the purpose of my life?" "Why must I die?" "Where do I come from and where will I go?" "Who am I?" (Berger 1970, 75) - all such questions, Berger argues, are relegated to meaninglessness without metaphysics. There is a further sense in which the language of the spiritual can be classified as *supernatural*: Kim (2000) defines a naturalised epistemology as one in which

The criteria of justified belief must be formulated on the basis of descriptive or naturalistic terms alone, without the use of any evaluative or normative ones, whether epistemic or of another kind (301).

Not only religious but also 'spiritual' understandings of the world are, on this definition, *supernatural*, as they include normative and evaluative terms superimposed upon descriptive ones, irrespective of whether this imposition is of human or transcendent agency.

Applying this view to the particulars of the classroom, Lealman (1996) identifies five categories of childhood consciousness: the personal, related to routine living; the pre-personal, consisting of unconscious desires and fears; the sub-personal, related to family bonding and 'body-knowing'; the suprapersonal, which she associates with creativity, aspiration and spirituality; and the transpersonal, related to mystical experience, wonder and the experience of transcendence (23). Lealman's theory rests on the very edge of the divide between transcendent and anthropological views of religion and spirituality. A difficulty may be observed in mistaking the unconscious fears of the pre-personal level with the transpersonal,

making it far easier to construct a lazy, psychologistic and spiritually disengaged pedagogy than to encourage genuine engagement with mystery and transcendence. Such confusions are constitutive of many of the examples of failures to explicate a sense of progress in religious education (Ofsted 2010). For similar reason, Copley (2005) is wary of the concept of spirituality in religious education, seeing in it an agenda to separate religious practice from religious belief, a dismemberment of subjective worlds of faith as social practice from serious consideration of the possibility of metaphysical realities.

To summarise, it may be said that rationality in religious language does not rest upon the correspondence realism of any metaphysical statement about religion, nor does the inevitable inability of finite language to grasp an infinite transcendent fatally undermine the attempt to teach meaningfully about the spiritual. Nonetheless these spiritual complexities make religious education hard to teach well and easy to misrepresent. The truth of religion is not an empirical question but a holistic and personalistic one. The same skills of reflection on the wider human experience which are present in religious education are common to the whole activity of schooling without in any way invalidating the critical and rational claims of education. In practice, faithfully representing the unique justifications operative within the realm of religions may prove a still greater hurdle for philosophical coherence and pedagogical effectiveness.

Bringing this critique together with the earlier discussion of indoctrination, we must be wary of introducing a form of teaching which so misrepresents or under-represents the hermeneutic totality and teleological self-sufficiency of religious systems that it becomes a *de facto* education for agnosticism, or that it risks subsuming religions into a new, artificially

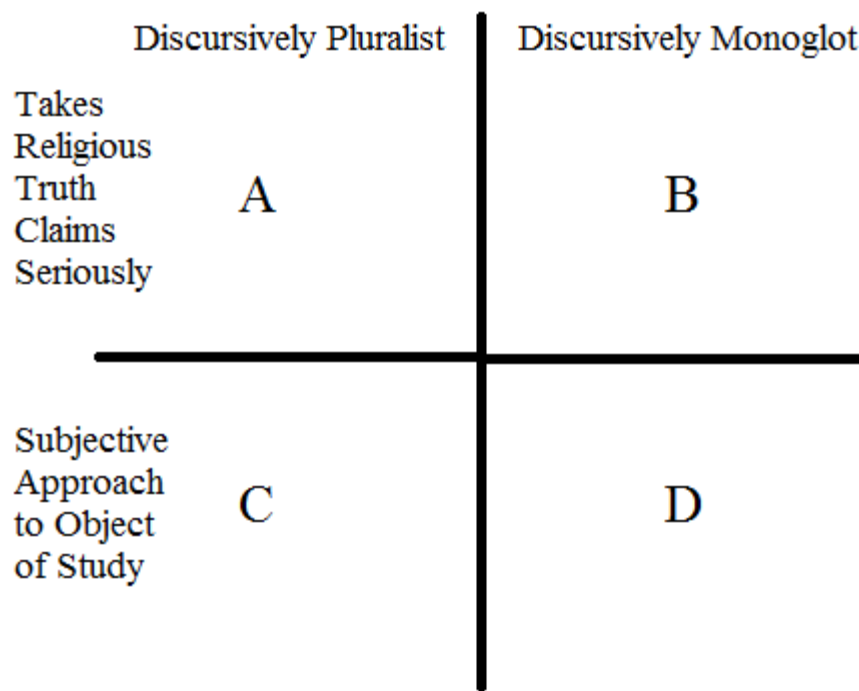


Fig. 2 – models of effectiveness

constructed meta-narrative intended to serve other, ‘higher’, often civically utilitarian ends (a concept which itself misrepresents religion). Drawing these critiques together, it is possible to construct two dichotomies in the models of effectiveness in religious education. Firstly, with regard to the Wittgensteinian account of religious language as image, around the language of social practices, whether culturally monoglot (including a monoglot concern with a pretended objective or sociological neutrality as much as a confessional model) or taking seriously a plurality of images and local knowledges about religion. Secondly, the lens or focus upon the object of study of religion, that is to say, whether it takes seriously the truth claims of religions or subjectivises the object of study. It is consequently possible to enumerate four possible models of effectiveness, as represented in Fig. 2. In the course of the ethnographic work, schools may be identified which fit into each of these models, as Chapter 6 shall demonstrate. Summarily, this theoretical overview has demonstrated the need for religious education to proceed in such a way that students are able to come to a practical understanding of the meaning of religious language, in a way which does not excessively abstract or oversimplify the objects of religious study, making of them remote particulars or mere ciphers for psychological language.

## Chapter 4: Gathering Expert Perspectives

As alluded to in chapter 2, an initial approach to policy analysis, focused on textual analysis, tracing the influence of statutory and non-statutory guidance directly upon practice, leaves a significant lacuna. It is not possible to trace a unidirectional or linear influence of policy upon practice with reference to discursive similarities between texts alone. While extensive documentary evidence (Acts of Parliament, Hansard, national media reporting, etc.) can be summoned in evidence of the process of national policy formation, there is scant documentary evidence for the key influences and processes in the informal brokerage processes by which professional and local interests interpret and support the enactment of policy. Furthermore, as has been demonstrated, recent developments have frequently defined themselves apophatically, in contradistinction to older, confessional or catechetical approaches – positive definitions of good religious education practice in national policy literature are at times lacking, at times overburdened with a multiplicity of ends. As we shall go on to see in the ethnographic data, the influence of the language of a number of para-legislative and professional contexts is much more evident in the language of classroom practice than much of the language of statutory documents. As textual analysis in this regard proves inadequate, the project team decided on a dialogic approach to gathering opinion among these key professionals who function as brokers, interpreters and gate-keepers to policy, theory and practice.

### a) The Delphi process

The reflection of religious education professionals has often been enriched by the questions raised as they have wrestled with both the philosophical and political challenges posed by attempts to integrate the subject into an ever evolving school curriculum. Nonetheless, as the preceding chapters have demonstrated, religious education's unique legal status at times creates a sense of professional displacement from the mainstream currents of educational development.

Religious education in faith schools has not been exempt from challenge and has been required to respond to realignments within confessional education, in some instances openly strengthening its catechetical dimension (O'Donoghue 2008; SCES 2010) and in others having to defend catechetical and faith formation aims against demands for integration.

While sometimes sharply contrasting views of the aims of religious education exist, classroom practitioners and their representative bodies enjoy generally productive relationships with churches, other religious bodies and faith community organisations, university teachers and researchers in religious studies and theology. Somewhat dispersed and even occasionally isolated, specialist teachers in secondary schools also find themselves, in virtue of the local and informal policy structures enumerated above, frequently integrated into local and national bodies which function as fora for the exchange of ideas and perspectives in the shaping of policy, and the forging of professional identity, whether formal bodies such as NATRE or informal networks such as REonline. Key professionals have drawn upon this well established series of networks of professional collaboration in formulating responses to curricular change.

The project team wished, firstly, to draw upon this accumulated insight and professional understanding in order to better understand and refine the terms of our enquiry, developing an understanding of the plethora of contested, frequently contradictory aims and models of effectiveness shaping the landscape of religious education in secondary schools. Secondly, the project further aimed to understand how, or indeed if, senior professionals provided anything like a coherent conduit whereby normative and policy claims were interpreted into classroom practices. The team decided to employ the Delphi method, a systematic, interactive forecasting technique, pioneered by the Rand Corporation for the US Department of Defense. Delphi is designed to elicit expert opinion on a research question or area of enquiry by harnessing the personal professional knowledge of a panel of independent experts (Brown 1968; Uhl 1971; Adler and Ziglio 1996). The experts respond individually to questions posed in a series of two or more rounds. After each round, a reporter feeds back to the experts an anonymised summary of all responses from the previous round with a sampling of reasons given for any judgments made by the participants. The Delphi method thus relies on an iterative cycle of questioning, feedback and refinements to maintain focus and so maximise the application of expertise to the primary concerns of the researchers. The experts are then encouraged to respond to this summary through a further series of questions. It is central to the goal of the Delphi method that during this process the range of responses from the group converges toward optimal clarification. Finally, at a predetermined point, the cycle is stopped and results are fed back to the commissioning body. The final outcome of the Delphi method when implemented in this way is thought to achieve a higher degree of reliability than other means

of collating disparate professional opinions. A key attraction to the use of Delphi was that it was developed with the specific intention of engaging expert opinion on controversial issues.

When used in the humanities, the emphasis of the Delphi method usually lies less in forecasting and more on the gathering of expert perspectives on areas of complexity and points of professional disagreement, recognising that heterogeneity can be a constitutive feature of professional expertise. Where the objective is to map such complexities, the facilitators can use the reflection at each stage in the process to promote an interest in seeking mutual understanding. While this method has been regarded with suspicion by some social scientists (Sackman 1974) the Delphi method has been used extensively in American education studies to engage local communities in education policymaking. The role of facilitators in such uses has been subject to criticism, in particular in situations where local communities may be open to manipulation by government ‘change agents’ pushing their own agendas (Scheele 1975).

Making use of the Delphi method with an expert panel from the religious education community where the subject matter is heavily contested is particularly apposite to the project’s intention of surfacing and mapping difference while also highlighting successful resolutions to professional contradictories. In particular, the team was interested in the extent to which the professional participants would, or indeed could, distil these occasions for consensus and dissensus. The expert panel convened for the project was drawn from the three legislative contexts of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, including both known advocates and critics of pluralist and confessional religious education. Of the 13 participants, 11 had direct experience of teaching religious education in schools, eight had prior involvement in initial teacher education, six had significant research experience, five had held policy development roles, five had held leadership roles in major religious education professional associations and three mentioned involvement in publishing teaching resources for schools, one participant identified himself as a philosopher of education.

In preparation for the review, questions were sent to the panel ahead of the two-day residential discussion. These questions, drawn from a review of literature on issues and debates concerning the aims and intentions of religious education, were intended to focus discussions around points of contestation in the literature. Individual responses were anonymised and consolidated into a synopsis which provided the basis for the opening discussion on the first day – this synopsis with its attendant questions is worth reproducing here in full:



**1. Who in your view decides RE policy for schools in the UK today?**

- Complex interplay of interest groups
- Tension between church/faith groups and professionals in RE
- Tension between national policy and local interpretation
- Tensions need not be negative

**2. What do you consider ought to be the main aims and purposes of RE in UK secondary schools?**

- Conceptual understanding of religious traditions and world views (including non-religious stances)
- Developing learners' perceptions of who they are and how they relate to the world
- Self-understanding

**3. Should all of these aims obtain in every school (if not, which should not be in every school and why not)?**

- Yes
- Yes but with some qualifications: need for sensitivity to context; same end point but different starting points; need to negotiate partnership between school aims and overarching aims for RE.

**4. There are a number of different paradigms operative in the study of RE today, which do you consider to be of most relevance to effective RE teaching in UK society?**

- Bifurcation between responses that favoured a paradigm and those who wanted to avoid paradigms
- Where a paradigm was favoured it was for a learner-centred, constructivist approach
- Opposition to paradigms was based on their tendency to misrepresent or be misconstrued

**5. What do you consider to be the most important learning goals for pupils undertaking RE in UK secondary schools?**

- Exploration rather than fixed goals
- Personal shaping
- 'education in conscience'
- developing understanding of the relationship between historical tradition and contextual, living interpretation

**6. Indicate what you consider to be the dispositions and attitudes towards religion with which young people should emerge from their secondary education.**

- Positive attitude towards difference/diversity
- Open-ness
- Willingness to engage with others

**7. What are the most important personal and professional qualities in an effective RE teacher in modern UK secondary schools?**

- Commitment
- Integrity
- ‘passionate impartiality’
- model the attitudes and values they are promoting
- conceptual understanding and clarity regarding purpose of learning

**8. What in your view are the most serious barriers to effective RE today?**

- Lack of senior management support
- Perceptions of the status of the subject – negative models of superficial secularism and uneducated attitudes to faith
- Lack of confidence/competence of RE teachers
- Tension between values of RE and the rest of the curriculum

**9. Indicate some of the means that in your view might be employed to monitor the effectiveness of RE**

- Existing mechanisms for monitoring provision to be used more effectively
- Recognition of pupil views/ pupil voice
- Focus on the quality of the people not surveillance

**10. In your view, how does RE contribute to the creation of a flourishing multi-cultural society?**

- Intercultural understanding is not the main aim of RE
- Better understanding will translate into positive attitude towards others
- Secure sense of self
- Not through the content of RE but possibly through the skills developed

**11. Is RE inevitably a source of conflict and division in an ever more secular British society?**

- Not inevitable

- Challenge premise that society is more secular as opposed to more diverse
- Dependent on quality of RE

The seminar was constructed around three discussion periods, two involving only the 13 invited participants, and the third plenary session in which the participants fed back key conclusions in the presence of the research team. A summary presentation of the key points and questions raised by the first day's session was produced and presented to the panel for discussion on the second day. In a departure from the conventions of the Delphi method, all sessions were digitally recorded and later transcribed.

#### b) Evaluating the Process

The Delphi method offered an interesting and innovative approach to eliciting and distilling expert opinion on the aims and models of effectiveness of religious education in the curriculum, but its adaptation to the needs of the project presented some challenges. The decision to record the sessions was a radical departure from the conventions of the Delphi method and the advantages this offered the team, in enabling analysis of the narrative patterns of interaction among participants were offset by the possibility of undermining the anonymity which enables Delphi participants to deviate from previous publicly-espoused positions. Nonetheless, as all public reporting of this data is anonymous, it is unlikely this had a particularly profound effect on patterns of communication. In the following chapter, it is not possible to identify individual speakers, in order to preserve anonymity – references to turn-taking in each extract (speaker A, B, C, etc.) are not intended to present a continuous narrative of any one speaker's position, but to distil key themes, linguistic and rhetorical patterns in the overall professional conversation.

Analysis of the transcripts of the seminar sessions suggests that the patterns of interaction between the panellists broadly conformed to what Scheele (1975) categorised as an episodic Delphi encounter. This encounter is characterised by participants continuing a discussion in which they have had prior involvement, either with the other participants or similar professional colleagues. The fact of the relatively small size of the religious education professional community and the familiarity of some participants with one another tended to reinforce this tendency. Professional reflections were strongly embedded in pre-determined discursive patterns and tended to create an impression of uniqueness around individual spheres

of practice. Contrary to Scheele's (1975) characterisation of such encounters, however, the group did not resist redefinitions but positively embraced the shifting of interpretations and flux of professional opinions within religious education. This preference for ambiguity over clarification may reflect the collective anxieties which engulf a subject so regularly subject to public critique of its fundamental bases.

Two self-designating leaders emerged, one of whom played an important role in discussions around conceptions of religious education as a discipline, and the other playing a similar role when the focus was on current policy and practice in religious education. In the second discussion round, which lasted 3½ hours, only two of the thirteen participants were responsible for introducing new topics for discussion. In standard Delphi processes, discussion is governed by the successive rounds of questions set by the commissioning agency. However, in all three sessions discussion tended to revert to the first set of questions posed at the beginning of the encounter, and to a subset within these. This would suggest that professional reflections on such matters are strongly embedded in pre-determined discursive patterns at the heart of which lies the fundamental rationale or legitimacy of religious education as a subject. During such discussions, attempts by individuals to steer the focus back to the questions tabled by the research team tended to be ignored and the impetus for refinement lost:

A<sup>2</sup>: Can anybody tell me what non-theistic belief systems means?

B: Going back to question four...

C: [Interrupting B] That's an interesting question, A, how about sharing with us your thoughts?

A: Well, it could mean all sorts of things...

During the interaction, participants began by assuming shared understanding of terms considered to be professional commonplaces. The presentation of personal accounts of participants' first hand or anecdotal experience of the evolution of religious education policy and practice was an important rhetorical device throughout the first and into the second discussion periods. In many important respects, such devices parallel the discursive patterns observed in teacher feedback and staffroom conversation in the ethnographic data. The

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<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, the letters represent turns in the discussion, beginning with a new 'A' in each reported quotation, they are not used consistently as identifiers for particular participants.

lengthy narratives do, however, afford some insight into the plurality of professional views on the strengths and weaknesses of particular policy and pedagogical positions. These personal accounts were used as a vehicle for participants to advance their theoretical conceptions. A certain professional courtesy was evident throughout the discussion, precluding sustained or systematic criticism of these personalistic accounts. Equally importantly, participants tended to focus more on examples of pedagogical aims and practices of which they disapproved than on examples of good practice, reflecting the critical focus already observed in many theoretical attempts to shift the pedagogical paradigm. During a discussion on the attributes of religious education teachers, for example, four examples of good practice, one contested example and seven examples of how not to teach religious education were enumerated and discussed.

At times in the discussion, it was clear that some contributors approached questions from an abstract, theoretical perspective, while for others interest lay in exploring pedagogical issues concerning the practice of religious education – the overlap of these narratives, far from enriching a pluralistic ecology of meaning, at times led to confusion and frustration:

A: I'm troubled by this, still religious education by and large does entail some moral commitment... This of course gets us on to some very tricky territory because religions enshrine different conceptions of justice and fairness...

B: Going back to the non-statutory national framework, the description of religious education at Key Stage 3 was in another context a 'beliefs and issues' agenda...

...

C: You're talking about ideas, but I'm talking about people...

On first impression, little reference seems to be made in the discussion to sources representing research and scholarship in religious education and, as we have seen, participants tended to rely on anecdotal and experiential arguments. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals explicit reference to an extensive set of policy and theoretical literature. The policy documents referred to include the 1944 Education Act and the 1988 Education Reform Act for England and Wales, Circulars 6/91 (Scottish Office 1991) and 1/94 (Department for Education 1994), the Non-Statutory National Framework for England (QCA 2004a), the Ofsted report *Making Sense of Religion* (Ofsted 2007), the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government 2009) and the Birmingham 1975 agreed syllabus *Living Together* (Birmingham SACRE

1975). References to research tended to focus on work from the 1970's such as that of Rummery on religious education and catechesis (Rummery 1975 & 2001), Goldman on conceptual understanding (1969), the importance of dialogic approaches to teaching (Hull 1982) and Smart (1984) on the 'scientific' study of religion. Reference was also made to more recent research on the inclusion of non-religious perspectives in religious education, criticism of citizenship education in schools (Watson 2004) and questioning the impact of religious education on overcoming stereotypes of religious groups (Nesbitt 2004). Implicit reference was also made to research about the relative importance of the aims of learning about and learning from religions, drawing on the work of Grimmer (1987), the contribution of ethnographic approaches (Jackson 2004) and the notion of 'committed openness' (Thiessen 2007). The absence of any sustained engagement with research and evidence, in particular more recent research, nevertheless illustrates a significant gulf between the theoretical and practical domains in the subject.

On a number of occasions, participants' attention turned to the rationale and workability of the research project itself, in particular whether religious education could be considered a single coherent subject matter across the various jurisdictions and models of schooling embraced within the project, with particular regard to the confessional/non-confessional dichotomy. Additionally, the possibility of measuring and attributing efficacy to religious education in its affective dimensions was called into question, the very nature of holistic personalistic aims in education was represented as resistant or even antithetical to the possibility of compartmentalising in the ways educators commonly do in order to assess efficacy:

Given what we've heard so far, does it make sense as a project? That's the question I begin to ask myself as I look at the questions. How do you isolate your hour a week of religious education from the rest of life, you can't do it, it's not feasible in research.

Much of the plenary discussion was consequently spent with participants interrogating the research team on the methodology of the project. Central to this interrogation was an expressed scepticism as to the possibility of achieving measurable outcomes in and for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of religious education. This scepticism tended to reinforce the unique construal of the task and identity of religious education in the school, and tended to frustrate attempts at distilling a consensus as to aims and models of effectiveness.

Perhaps one of the most dangerous critiques for empirical research in religious education, one echoed by some teachers in the course of the ethnography, was the tendency to suggest that the spiritual, moral, social and cultural effects of religious education could only be measured longitudinally:

A: I personally think that the only way of getting to the bottom of effectiveness of course is to engage in longitudinal studies, a lot more than 3 years...

B: So theoretically we could take any 30-year-old and look at what religious education has done for them.

C:... Looking at this programme that they received at the age of 12 when they're 15 or 16 tells you peanuts. It's the effect 25 years down the line.

Feeding off the multiplicity of social and personal development goals enumerated in Chapter 1, a critique of empirical classroom research which I call the '40-year old fallacy' emerges in this and much of the ethnographic data, as well as being repeated by key stakeholders and policymakers at subsequent conferences – the publicly espoused view that the effectiveness of religious education may only be measured with reference to the values held by 40-year-olds, not 16-18 year olds. I contend that such an approach is penurious for religious education as it seeks to justify its effective educational entailments in a fast changing curriculum.

It was the team's intention to use the expert seminar to inform the first stages of ethnographic research, elucidating expert opinions regarding the aims for religious education. It had been anticipated that this stage would reveal a 'snow storm' of influences from multiple sources and in this we were not disappointed. Despite some evident challenges in using and adapting the method, the Delphi conversations surfaced some of the tensions within professional narratives on religious education. In a theme which will continue to be of significance throughout the following thesis, the Delphi transcripts exposed the obfuscatory role that language can play, and it is by exposing such discursive limitations that key areas for further enquiry are exposed.

### c) Key findings

While a range of findings are elucidated in the research paper (Baumfield et al. 2011) which emerged from this dimension of the work, with specific reference to the topic of this thesis, several of these themes deserve to be explored in more depth.

i) Rationale for contemporary RE: competing and overlapping views

The need for religious education to be responsive to the needs of young people in contemporary society evinced broad agreement. Religious education ought to contribute to the development of pupils' social and personal understanding, enabling them to live a 'good life' however defined, evincing an ethical dimension in the broadest sense. Participants did not reject the possibility of developing a religious education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century with common criteria for success across confessional and non-confessional contexts. To do so, however, would require more than an acceptance of diversity and controversy within individual religious traditions, between traditions and with non-religious life stances – such controversy would need to be a focus of classroom practices in religious education. This would have significant implications for the way in which texts are studied, giving recognition to the subversive and counter-cultural element in religious narratives. Such an account of critical approaches tended to view a too shallow instrumental approach to community cohesion and tolerance as a threat. There was a rejection, in summary of an approach to tolerance as a kind of

embarrassment [which] does not want to deal head-on with difficult topics,, does not want to challenge falsehoods, does not want to seem too definite about morality. The characteristic principle of the embarrassed is a particular kind of tolerance, a tolerance that is tolerant of all 'nice' things, that treats all world religions, for example, as being about the golden rule (do unto others...), and there are no real differences except for the names of the buildings and the dates of the holidays. The politics of embarrassment pushes all questions of truth into the personal and private worlds of individuals, leaving public spaces free of truth but implacably tolerant (Stern 2007, 24).

... it's interesting that they teach the parable of the Good Samaritan. I've never seen much teaching of the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, because that's much more problematic, much more difficult to square with a liberal democratic notion of morality, much more difficult to square with ideas about the nature of justice as equal distribution, and so on.

Confirming the earlier affirmed focus on realism in regard to the religious, claims to truth in religious traditions, it was widely agreed, need to be laid bare in classroom discussion:



If we're interested in some kind of religious education that does attempt to honestly explore the truth about religion... truths that some religions affirm, other religions deny, and that I think is one of the problems and... people are too frightened to discuss these things. You can't discuss these things in religious education, you can't discuss them publicly, because people are afraid of opening the can of worms.

Religious education would need to become more controversial rather than an anodyne subject eliding fundamental differences and difficult issues. There was a claim that both the critical approach to truth claims and the ethnographic approach to lived religious experiences, properly deployed, raised pluralist challenges to such anodyne simplifications:

but it does also raise questions about what sort of religion do we teach. Do we go for the nice clean sanitised version of what it ought to be about? Do we go for the warts-and-all ethnographic approach? Or the homogenised approach, which is the other way, or lots of other ways. When we talk about the religions we teach, which version are we presenting?

Delphi participants suggested that structuring religious education around the constructs of learning about and learning from religious traditions, the two attainment targets proposed by the Non-Statutory National Framework for England, can be helpful if the former acknowledges the complexity of ideas and practices and the latter incorporates the capacity for rigorous evaluation of opinions. Religious educators face a more acute form of the challenge inherent in all attempts at schooling in which the next generation need to be encouraged to become independent while also being inducted into traditional forms of knowledge.

ii) Division on aims obscured by shared practices

Throughout the seminars, the question of whether religious education in confessional and secular school contexts has enough in common to be considered a single subject was a recurring locus of contention:

It's what the crux of it is. I mean we can't move on until we resolve that. We can't carry on because every single question is going to bring us back to this issue. I still think you're left with that problem that if you're going to go into research practice and look at two or three different types of... three different ways in which religious education is used, unless you're going in with your eyes wide open that you're looking

at three different animals... they're not the same thing, and you're going to find them behaving in different ways

Challenges to the view that religious education in the context of faith schools is a different activity to that of religious education in other contexts, due to the presence of a faith formation aim, stressed the common element of commitment to normative social values, albeit pluralist ones, present in liberal, secular schooling. Common ground was also found in the notion that even in overtly religious settings, endorsing positions of absolute certainty in religious matters would be regarded as damaging to the wider educational aims of the subject and discouraged in contemporary practice. Dissensuses at a teleological level were often masked by agreement around pedagogical practices common to both confessional and secular contexts:

One of the things that's very interesting is that A just said that faith formation is central to his conception of religious education, but listening to your accounts of what you do with the kids in your classroom it is fantastic stuff, and all of us would say that that is really good religious education. It's not that we have two different systems, there's this blurring when it comes to what happens in the classroom, because you're challenging kids, you're doing all sorts of wonderful things.

Agreement about the 'stuff', 'what happens in the classroom' also included broad agreement over the implications for teachers. Opening up debate in the religious education classroom involves being prepared to form opinions about a particular set of beliefs, and this is challenging for teachers who are wary of being perceived to advocate for a faith position or encourage pupils to be disrespectful toward any religious group or its beliefs. To carry out such a debate respectfully requires teachers to possess a depth of knowledge sufficient to the object of study if they are to avoid superficial or stereotyped accounts of religious beliefs. While promoting, or at least permitting, dialogue around the significance of beliefs and ideas was viewed as more important than imparting mastery of factual content, teachers need to have a sophisticated understanding of the theological concepts underpinning religious beliefs in order to engage confidently. While the dissensus around aims is not of itself surprising, the way in which a common practical and pedagogical vocabulary and discursive pattern threw a blanket of apparent agreement over deep teleological and ontological fissures is of particular interest.

One theme which emerged from the participants in the Delphi encounter was the tendency for government guidelines to promote instrumental approaches to the study of subjects across the curriculum. Reflecting anxieties expressed around the direction of policy, the focus on generic skills and measurable performance has resulted in an impoverished view of the intrinsic benefits of studying a particular subject so that its contribution to wider educational goals becomes understated. Rather than relying on the benefits of a liberal education to promote democracy and social cohesion, Delphi participants expressed a view that subject disciplines are being shaped by government policy into means of meeting political objectives such as community cohesion. While religious education is not unique in this regard, the participants saw it as particularly vulnerable to such outside influence. Moreover, the consequences of this instrumentalism make themselves evident in the ethnographic data, as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters.

Participants working in a faith school context embraced the view that education to promote religious faith should accommodate outcomes that include adherence to divergent faith positions and inculcate respect for others, as illustrated by the educator who stated:

.... we see inclusiveness as the outworking of that faith formation.

Whilst a foundation in a particular faith may include the recognition of plurality internal to that faith and a plurality of faiths, this does not necessarily result in a full acknowledgement of the claims of other faiths, which may be usurped in a weak conception of tolerance from within the narrative of a faith position as much as from within a secular liberal narrative:

I think there is a major challenge in handling the issue of alternative claims to religious truth, whether one is in a common school or a faith school. I think it's clear that both types of school are acknowledging religious plurality, what isn't clear is whether they are both acknowledging the relative autonomy of other religious conceptions.

In the notion of 'personal search' or learning from religions in the non-confessional sector led to a recognition that the division between a broad based curriculum and religious nurture implied by the concept of additionality may not be as clear-cut in practice:

We've gone from confessionalism, there were the early steps in the 70's, 80's and 90's there's something else which has to move onto a much more serious probing into what

it is about religion which makes it work, what can we get from this in terms of insights and personal search for meaning.

Furthermore, religious education can have an impact on how young people think about religious ideas and influence their beliefs whilst explicit religious nurture can have no effect. This was expressed in terms of anecdotes and commonplaces:

I know loads of children who go to faith schools and walk out as agnostic as the next child.

Such failures of intent in confessional education also functioned as a bridging device, at once a critique of the models of effectiveness in faith school religious education and a proof of the acceptability of such models for a secular liberal model which values personal search and individual choice. Attempting to establish divisions between curriculum areas or types of activity is at odds with aspirations to encourage schools, including faith schools, to promote an interdisciplinary approach and cohesive culture of learning.

### iii) Teacher agency

The participants were agreed that despite the constraints imposed by diffuse authority structures, the teacher has a considerable degree of autonomy in interpreting the religious education syllabus and deciding on pedagogical approaches:

I imagine there are a lot of schools, particularly secondary schools, who look at what the local syllabus says and say ‘we don’t want that thank you very much, we’ll go and do something else’.

This prediction is borne out by the ethnographic findings, and finds corroboration in other recent empirical studies (Ofsted 2010; Jackson et al 2010). One participant raised the question of whether this autonomy is greater than among teachers of other subject specialisms, but this was not pursued. A view was expressed that politicians were afraid to make changes to the legislative framework, leaving changes in the interpretation of policy to the workings of arms-length organisations such as the QCDA and teacher professional associations. Corroborating the aforementioned disjunction between policy guidance and practice, one participant noted:

That there are policymakers out there but that curriculum development is going on at another level, and what is happening is law is catching up with practice, so thinking

about this business of what is effective, we are thinking about different levels – not the policymakers at the top but people creating religious education in the classroom.

Whilst there is a tendency across all three jurisdictions towards central government agencies providing advice for schools, the main inhibitor which participating experts identified was the lack of confidence on the part of teachers, rather than strong external constraints:

The other point is that the business of deciding on policy in schools, in practice the person who does the teaching when they are with the kids is almost in the position of enacting policy because they are the ones who make it, whatever it is, happen. The circumscribing of their freedom is increasing as there is more and more advice on what teachers should be doing. Not only in Northern Ireland but in Scotland and especially in England there isn't the requisite knowledge, confidence and competence on the part of many of those who are called upon to teach religious education and so the policy that is enacted is often done from ignorance or insecurity.

There is quite a lot of research evidence that shows that teachers are the ones who create the curriculum. You have various inputs but in the end it is the teacher who puts it all together, in the end you have teachers who create, and we need to go to that, and look at that process, if you want to know what's really going on.

On the whole, teacher autonomy was viewed as a positive, although some participants saw the impact of teachers' own beliefs on the teaching of religious education as a possible threat:

because within what we would call religious education in maintained schools there is still the approach of individual teachers and individual departments, and the faith commitments of those teachers can very much skew the teaching of religious education in those schools.

In contrast, other participants considered teachers' personal religious convictions to be imperative to lending integrity to the presentation of particular religious perspectives:

If you're not truthful about teaching religion, the damage you can do to young people's view on religious education is colossal.

I think all of these moral dimensions rest on an ontology of the person, which is why we're doing a disservice to a teacher who does not belong, who is a non-specialist and

does not feel a sense of belonging in the sacred sphere. I think we do a disservice to the teacher if we ask them to talk about something they feel no connection with, that we're asking them to tell lies.

Divergent definitions of what it means to be a specialist, and in particular to the notion of truthfulness, integrity and the disclosure of personal faith commitments were offered, with significant discussion around the concepts of 'passionate impartiality' or 'committed openness'. There was a widespread sense that a high level of 'connection', 'belonging' was required in order to teach religious education, a level of comfort with a passionate paradigm beyond familiarity with the syllabus content, which may not apply to specialist status in other subjects in the curriculum. For some participants from confessional backgrounds the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to teach effectively included personal religious conviction. The public attachment of teachers to particular beliefs was a contentious point, reflected in professional anxieties of teachers in the ethnographic study. There was general agreement that the religious education teacher should enthuse and engage learners in debate in such a way that shows religious ideas to be important and that engages students' views about the key issues. This must however be done in an even-handed way, with the advocates of 'passionate impartiality' particularly at pains to stress:

That's what people in classrooms try to do all the time, they look at different religious traditions and though they personally may not accept it they put their beliefs to one side and look at it with as open a mind and as warm a heart as they can and find what it is that makes this faith credible, and get my pupils to grasp that and understand it. That's what religious education does. It's not so peculiar to be dispassionate about belief but do it with as much passion as you can muster, knowing that you might be making mistakes in areas, but nevertheless trying to do it with as much honesty and integrity as you can.

Significantly, the phenomenological concept of 'putting their beliefs to one side' survives in many conceptions of the good religious education teacher, though this is less prevalent in what is expected of the student. The question of modelling good practice became a contested issue, both in the faith school and the plural school – is the teacher who models 'passionate impartiality' exercising an openness to the reality of the object of study, or are they seeking to foster both passion and impartiality in their students? The question of 'making mistakes' also

drew out important divisions among the expert participants. Concerns around the religious literacy of religious education teachers and teacher education students centred around two issues; on the one hand, some participants lamented general levels of religious illiteracy; on the other, it was recognised that no theology or religious studies graduate could reasonably be expected to be expert on all world religions. A certain ‘obsession with content knowledge’ was criticised wherein:

that non specialist who’s got to teach this tomorrow, what are they going to do? Run into the staffroom, photocopy the book, and then they can all label the different parts of the Mosque or whatever, because they’ve got to get it right, and then they’ve got to learn how to pronounce that word right, so they go and look that up, but those teachers never get the opportunity to ask those questions in relation to their own lives as part of their training.

Teachers who lack the commitment, connection and confidence alluded to above tend, it was suggested, to adopt a ‘multi-fact’ approach that avoids challenging particular religious ideas and if they do invite pupils to express opinions, they do so without providing any criteria for evaluation. While there is a need for teachers to have command of the subject content, this was not viewed as the most important attribute of the successful religious education teacher. This assessment corroborates the findings of a recent Ofsted report (2010) into the practices of religious education:

When young people are trying to work out for themselves what takes on meaning for them, where their own agendas are, we simply throw an open door and say that all opinions count and all opinions are of equal worth, and it’s just sort-of a sharing of ideas, but increasingly that exploring of what has meaning for you has to have some sort of rigour to it, and we need to help children to explore what makes the difference between something which is good thinking and something which is flawed.

An understanding of progression, flowing from the ability to engage in critical evaluation of religious and moral claims was seen by all to be essential to effective religious education.

#### d) Using expert ideas to inform the research design

Two tropes are present in the Delphi narrative on models of effectiveness – one conveys the idea of religious education as a subversive activity consciously directed towards ‘messing with

their heads', where preconceptions are challenged and existing social structures subjected to radical critique, the other is that of inclusion in which all perspectives can be accommodated within the classroom, yet without immunity from critical engagement. These tropes correlate to the dual imperatives of accommodating critical pluralism and taking seriously the object of religious truth claims discussed in the preceding chapter. At points throughout the discussion the apparent consensus breaks down when discussions around practices give way to or require engagement with the proximate purposes and aims of religious education, suggesting no definitive professional consensus has yet been reached as to the validity of a range of approaches to pluralist or monoglot discursive practices. The masking of these deep disagreements may well offer one reason for the professional anxieties, the sense of fragility which subsisted just below the surface throughout the discussion.

The research team was acutely aware of the complexity of the questions posed and the Delphi method appeared an innovative way of eliciting and tracing narrative patterns in expert opinion. Delphi findings corroborate the sense of complexity developed in the above policy and theoretical analyses. In particular, Delphi distilled four key sets of discursive goals for religious education, these goals sit on a continuum which cuts across the more obvious catechetical/multi-faith divide, exposing at once a disciplinary commonality and a richer diversity. The first, a model which seeks to nurture a systematic knowledge and commitment to a religion and its teachings, with a focus on religious literacy, is supported by comments such as:

If someone came to my school for an interview for a religious education teacher... If they hadn't mentioned something about catechetics, faith formation and social justice, that wouldn't be what we were looking for.

This view seeks to convey something to students:

saying things that constituted a systematic coherent body of beliefs... they provided something that pupils could grow into rather than grow out of (Houston 2007, 23)

Connected to this, were conceptions of religious education which aim to nurture a pre-defined set of moral dispositions through religious teachings, which are not themselves drawn from nurture in a given religious tradition, but rather from exposure to the teachings of world religions more generally, asking:



do people come out of it more tolerant, more liberal, more inclusive, more inspired?

whether... they can connect what they've learned with life. Certainly it can be seen, have they become people of integrity, connected with social justice, confident of themselves, able to identify with the other?

encouraging boys and girls to develop a faith to live by... it would have within it a plurality of different outputs.

Such a view resonates with Brian Gates' (2007) account of the role of religious education in child development, in which he enumerates – besides the pre-defined values which individual religions seek to inculcate in believers through their teachings – values of open-minded altruism, an extended sense of belonging, understanding of symbolism, critical thinking and wonder, and a sense of the finite and transcendent (138-146). Michael Grimmitt's understanding of implicit core values (1987, 121-128) also demonstrates similarities with such an approach.

Views which seek to encourage intellectual engagement, religious literacy and curiosity about the religious as a domain of knowledge sit within a third model, elucidated by comments such as:

The key criteria surely by which we can gauge whether children are likely to be successful is whether pupils are engaged. Whether they are interested.

what I've got in mind is a sort-of beta-model... something that happened in the 1970s when religious instruction was dropped and what replaced it was something that wasn't about the formation of faith, it was about helping young people to mature and grow in their own personal understanding, and understand the place around them.

Subtly different from the previous model, such an approach does not pre-determine the values which students ought to take from religious learning, but is instead focused on teaching 'how to think like... a religionist' (Yob 2007, 153).

Finally, and again cutting across both confessional and non-confessional models, participants identified a religious education concerned with encouraging students to challenge personal and social moralities, pointing to the radical challenge posed by religious teaching, a theme to which we shall return in some detail:

religious education was the area [of the school curriculum] where the expressive and exploratory come out way more than any other subject... grasping something beyond the literal.

I started teaching them St Basil the Great's meditation that the rich man is a thief, and I found that the business studies teacher came to my door and told me to stop teaching them that the things she was teaching was [sic.] immoral

In many ways, such a view corresponds to the work of Andrew Wright, Elmer Thiessen's (2007) work on committed openness or Conroy's (2009) work on *enstrangement* as an encounter with the intrinsic limitations of human nature. The complexities of including such a diversity of views, often addressed in the theoretical and practical literature under common headings, as though the subject had a shared trajectory of key aims, requires further unpacking through ethnographic analyses of the pedagogical terms as defined through their use in the cultural domain of the classroom.

#### e) Summary

Drawing together the diverse strands presented thus far, meaningful religious education must include a cognitive and affective dimension, teaching about religions from a critical intellectual engagement and an authentic engagement with spiritual values, recognising the unique directive role which religions play in the lives of believers. Concern to develop such a model may be seen in the twofold approach to religious education policy development in recent years, with its combined focus on both learning about religions from an academic perspective and learning from religions, implying a more personal engagement. These models have often suffered a lack of coherence, in part due to the complex patterns of influence, in particular the influence of powerful religious community interests in British public education, and in part due to anxieties among policymakers about addressing fundamental foundational questions as to the metaphysical and epistemic claims made by religions and secular/pluralist philosophies. This political and philosophical analysis could be taken much further, as it raises fundamental questions as to the role of religion in public life and the limits of possibility for the liberal state in responding to religious truth claims. While such questions as these are matters of intense interest, this is not a work of political philosophy but an empirical enquiry into religious education as enacted in the classroom.

Turning therefore to the opinions and experience of key stakeholders with responsibility for mediating and enacting policy in the classroom, concerns were raised about competing foundational conceptions of religious education, at times leading to the eliding out of difficult questions, both in the practice of professional reflection about the subject and in the practice of engaging in the classroom with the complex and controversial truth claims of religions. Such divisions included but were not limited to the perceived division between confessional faith-nurture approaches in schools of a religious character and multi-faith approaches in secular contexts. A broader spectrum of approaches were adumbrated, some of which engaged with the profound counter-cultural truth claims made by religions, although lack of teacher resource and confidence was cited as in many cases restricting aims and practices to more modest, at times timid ends. The ways in which these complex philosophical and political considerations are played out in classroom practice in the schools in this study remain to be excavated.

Significantly, while echoes of the theoretical analysis of previous chapters were clearly articulated at points in the discussion, with regard to pedagogical models, the four models discussed above do not correlate to those epistemic dimensions. Although all four models of effectiveness draw to some extent upon an epistemic position, and some may be more compatible with some positions with regard to pluralism and realism than others, it is impossible to effect an exact mapping to the four models in chapter 2 without misrepresenting one layer or the other. It is significant that even at this level of professional and academic engagement, such models do not proceed from epistemic commitment, but, as with the broad nature of the discussion, are expressions of eclectic professional pragmatism, reflecting the complex range of practical as well as theoretical influences on religious education.

Before analysing the evidence gathered in the classroom, it will first be necessary to delineate the ethnographic methodology pursued in this study.

## Chapter 5: Ethnographic Approaches

Although highly theorised as a subject, religious education suffers from significant lacunae in empirical work. In the seven volumes of the *Journal of Moral Education* from 2001 to 2008, for example, 77 articles out of 217 reported empirical findings, some 35.5%. For the journal *Religious Education* over the same timescale the figure was 54 articles out of 175, just 30.9%. The ‘Does RE Work’ project represents a considered attempt to redress this balance, drawing on an extensive qualitative dataset. Breaking from a tradition of quantitative surveys of attitudes among students and teachers concerning religious values, the project seeks to excavate deeper insights into what the poet Hopkins might have called the ‘inscape’ or ‘whorled interior’ of the personal and interpersonal impact of religious education in the complexities of contemporary British society.

### a) Ethnographic and phenomenological paradigms

In order to gather data on this ‘inscape’ of religious education practice, an ethnographic approach was adopted, conforming to the five key characteristics of ethnographic encounter enumerated by Walford (2008):

- 1) The study of culture, learned ‘from those who inhabit that culture’ (7);
- 2) Diverse forms of data and multiple methods used to gain a broad insight;
- 3) Long-term in-situ engagement between researcher and subject;
- 4) The researcher as the most important research instrument;
- 5) Recognition that ‘participants hold knowledge about themselves which nobody else has’ (11).

In making meaning from the data, a critical ethnographic paradigm was followed, which recognises that ‘understanding is intersubjective, not subjective or objective’ (Carspecken 1996, 189) building on the understanding of religious language drawn from Wittgenstein addressed in Chapter 2 and also prevalent as a philosophical model in the Delphi conversations. There is no private language, and so the private data of inner experiences of religious phenomena are not directly available to the religious education teacher, nor to the researcher in the classroom. In deciding on an ethnographic approach, an explicit departure was taken from a long-standing reliance in religious education research on the insights offered by phenomenology.

While the phenomenological perspective holds out great hope in its claim to present the first person perspectives of observed subjects, this perspective approaches religion as a purely human phenomenon, epistemologically presupposing an approach to treating seriously the transcendent truth claims of religious belief systems. It is of critical importance that the methodology for empirical investigation does not presuppose or exclude fundamental layers and types of evidence. A complete account of the study of religious knowledge requires both a stripping away of cultural constructions, an engagement with the personal, the promise of which is held out by phenomenology, and the critical engagement with shared systems of meaning, entered into in their transpersonal and transcendent dimensions – the (inter)personal other and the transcendent Other alluded to in the title. ‘Truth, by enabling men and women to let go of their subjective opinions and impressions, allows them to move beyond cultural and historical limitations and to come together in the assessment of the value and substance of things’ (Caritas in Veritate 2009, 4). Nonetheless, for the classroom observer, only a small part of that truth ‘in which we live and move and are’ may be glimpsed.

In the face of this promise of phenomenology, the relevance of ethnographic approaches to the study of religions has been called into question in recent years. Robert Jackson, an advocate of ethnographic interpretive approaches to religious education (1997, 2003, 2004) has moved away from the language of ethnography, couching his more recent iterations of the interpretive model almost exclusively in hermeneutical terms. While ethnography of religions has been subject to criticism, can this critique be applied with equal strength to ethnography in the religious education classroom? A brief comparison of foundational approaches to the ethnography and phenomenology of religions ought to illustrate many of the key strengths and weaknesses of both approaches as they have subsequently evolved.

Merold Westphal’s phenomenology (1984) distinguishes itself from descriptive approaches by asserting his approach is one of ‘doing’ the philosophy of religion by first-hand reflection (9), an approach wherein ‘the philosopher adopts provisionally the motivations and intentions of the believing soul’ (11). This phenomenological approach, which Westphal calls ‘sympathetic imagination’ (15) is carried out through personal reflection on observed practices, and finds precedent in Smart’s works in religious education (1960). Phenomenology’s reliance on the imagination of the observer presumes the data of observation fall within ‘the tightly knit system formed by phenomena and my body together’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 350), at once requiring and denying a transferability of experience from observed to observer. While

beneficial in acknowledging the supra-rational and a-rational experiential dimensions of the religious domain, as well as, in some contemporary theological phenomenologists, recognising the transcendent nature of the experiencing self (Janicaud et al 2000), phenomenology places undue emphasis on the ability of the researcher to empathise with the subject. Fundamental to the success of the 'Does RE Work' project is allowing empirical data to speak for itself, and while phenomenological approaches claim to receive 'phenomena purely as they give themselves' (Marion cited Janicaud et al 2000, 10), the required emphasis on observer sympathetic consciousness has the potential to obscure rather than expose the student experience. Indeed, Westphal rejects purely explanatory descriptive approaches. Education as embodied and experienced is a fundamentally social and interpersonal cultural practice, and phenomenology seeks an interpretive clarity precisely through the laying aside of the effects of culture and the social construction of meaning (Crotty 1998, 79-80).

In contrast to phenomenology, ethnographic approaches seek to understand the individual in terms of the social constructions and identities he or she makes use of. Ethnography attempts to explain and understand its subjects

as *necessarily where they are*... not to effect the phenomenologists' – 'projection of oneself into the other' ... [but rather] to give oneself a generic and genetic comprehension of who these individuals are... the social conditions... the circumstances of life... conditions inseparably psychological and social, associated with a given position and trajectory ins [sic.] social space. (Bourdieu cited Trondman 2008, 129)

Beginning from Durkheim in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, who, with echoes of the Wittgensteinian account of religious reasoning, acknowledged the importance of the experience by which 'the individual observes the regular succession of phenomena and thus acquires a certain *feeling*' (Durkheim 1916, 368), while stressing, centrally and distinctively, the incommunicability of this individual experience. For Durkheim and subsequent ethnographers of religion, understanding is a social process, allowing the ethnographer an understanding of the observed subject through shared experience. Collective representations are essential to the educational experience as well as the religious experience, and 'to make them, a multitude of minds have associated, united and combined their ideas and sentiments' (Durkheim 1916, 16).

Durkheimian sociology, however, remains prone to many of the flaws of the phenomenological perspective, including the issue of observer bias, particularly in adopting a

methodological agnosticism like Smart's which denies the possibility of the external reality of the phenomena held by the believer (Pickering 1984, 95). While Durkheim treats religion as a purely social, and therefore purely human phenomenon (Durkheim 1916, 206-11) his approach nonetheless stressed the need to experience religious sentiment 'as the believer feels it; what it is to the believer is really what it is' (Durkheim cited Pickering 1984, 96). This social observation differs however from phenomenology in that it acknowledges the sympathetic observer's externality as a separate part of a shared social process, one who sees and shares in the experience of the religious among the believing group, as opposed to one who attempts to re-envision and re-imagine the subjective experience of any given believer. This descriptive approach sets ethnography of religion apart from phenomenology, and this distinctive interpersonal dimension remains an ongoing strength in the subsequent developments of the ethnographic tradition.

The work of Clifford Geertz on the ethnographic study of religions is worthy of note for its paradigm shifting methodological as much as its empirical conclusions. Geertz's epistemic self-realizations and ethnographic observations are inter-twined – epitomised by his reflections on aesthetics and the perception of quality mediated through observations on a Balinese cockfight (Geertz 1993, 443-448). Throughout Geertz's observations, however, is an awareness, and he makes his readers aware, of himself as academic observer, a participant, but one capable of translating and interpreting in the language of the critical social sciences. Contrasted with Westphal, there is no pretence of imaginatively adopting the first person perspective of a Balinese cockfighting aficionado. As Geertz cautions about all ethnographic observation 'What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' (Geertz 1973 cited Jackson 1997). Without denying the significant reflective insight that can emerge from phenomenological 'sympathetic imagination', and without denying the role such imagining can play in pedagogical practice in the religious education classroom, the empirical aim of this study is best served by interpersonal ethnographic rather than introspective phenomenological approaches.

The application of ethnographic methods to education in recent years owes much to the work of Phil Francis Carspecken. Carspecken defines his work within the tradition of critical ethnography as concerned with

social sites, social processes, and cultural commodities like text books, films, and video games in order to reveal social inequalities. All such researchers basically begin their research with the assumption that contemporary societies have systematic inequalities complexly maintained and reproduced by culture. (Carspecken 2001, 4)

This approach is in keeping with the aims and outcomes of educational ethnography outlined by Pole and Morrison:

- A rich and comprehensive description of the social action within the observed context;
- ‘The portrayal of an insider’s perspective, in which the meaning of the social action for the actors themselves is paramount and takes precedence over, but does not ignore, that of the researcher’;
- ‘The construction of an account of the discrete location... which is grounded in the collected data and which incorporates a conceptual framework that facilitates understanding’ (2003, 4).

While Pole and Morrison’s reference to the construction of meaning exposes an avowed anti-positivism in their approach to ethnographic methodology, such an account need not accompany all ethnographic practices. In contrast, Carspecken addresses the constructivist critique of ethnography with reference to the work of Habermas, and advances a pragmatist account of representation and truthfulness in ethnographic accounts (2001, 7). For Carspecken ‘holistic preconceptual and communicatively structured experience may replace the perception metaphor in epistemology’ (1996, 188) – the interaction between communication and experience, interactive and subjective allows Carspecken to adopt an intersubjective approach, investing normative-evaluative claims with a truth value, while avoiding either naive objectivism or baseless constructivism (1996, 76-84). While positing an interpersonal account of meaning which precludes access to the ‘inscape’ of subjects’ first person perspectives, critical ethnography nonetheless offers the advantages of a more grounded account of the experience of the observed subject in context. The intersubjective approach to meaning and truth proposed by Carspecken and the Houston school of critical educational ethnography allows us to take seriously the normative-evaluative dimensions of conative and affective experience, a methodological advantage over phenomenological approaches.

#### b) Linguistic ethnography



The American linguistic anthropologist Franz Boas' contribution to ethnographic methodology can be distinguished from earlier colonial traditions by a categorical abstinence from value judgments. In practice, as Boas and subsequent followers of his tradition discovered, this suspension of judgment could only be achieved by explicitly distinguishing the anthropologist's point of view from the 'native' point of view (Blomaert 2005, 7). Linguistic ethnographic traditions have a particular relevance to the educational dimensions of the experience of religious education practice. Geertz suggests the search for meanings in ethnographic data is a 'problem, not in social mechanics but social semantics... an extension of the notion of a text beyond written material, and even beyond verbal' (Geertz 1993, 448-449) suggesting that the linguistic thread of meaning in this context cannot be separated from broader observations, an observation to which the multimodal strand in the ethnography will return. Linguistic ethnography as a framework seeks to provide an account of communication which goes beyond verbal content, recognising that human subjects

use speech to transmit, simultaneously, two types of message. One of these might be called the purely 'linguistic' message, the sum of the information contained in the morphemes, the raw material, from which the utterance is built up. The other, more personal, type of message is conveyed by the ways this raw material is selected, combined, and delivered (Hickerson 2000, 201)

As well as taking account of the complexities of language in the observed encounter, the task of tracing religious education's personal, social and spiritual effects in the lives of students requires transcontextual analysis, an appreciation of the 'absent presence' (Lefstein and Snell 2009, 22) of texts and discourses outside the classroom, those factors which influence the roles and culture of curriculum, teacher and student from outside the observed period in the classroom. While it is true of all educational ethnography that it limits itself to classroom experience, in the case of religious education, this is particularly significant because of the diversity of experience of pupils outside the classroom environment, and the insufficiency of crude measures such as religious affiliation or church attendance (Jackson 1997, Nesbitt 2004) to gauge levels of religious and moral literacy, experience and maturity. To that end the complexity of sources and contexts cannot be overestimated, and the analyst must be wary of presuming a complete dataset, or of reading personal assumptions into the intersubjectively experienced discourse. For this reason a focus on language necessarily requires that the observer hold to the domain and limitations of the communicative and intersubjective realm.

Dell Hymes suggests eight aspects to the analysis of linguistic ethnographic data:

- Setting – the context of the event
- Participants
- Ends – the purpose and expected outcome of the speech encounter
- Act sequence – how is the speech delivered
- Key – the mood of the participants
- Instrumentality – covering factors such as dialect and its purpose
- Norms – how the encounter compares to patterns of expectation
- Genre (Hickerson 2000, 201).

Hymes draws attention to ‘repertoires’ of speaking and communicating, similar to Bernstein’s idea of ‘codes’ (Blommaert 2005, 13), it is precisely these subsets, micro-cultures and variations in language and its use which are significant to the classroom context – ‘the focus should be on *what language means to its users*. We can, and must, start from the observation that language matters to people, that people make investments in language’ (Blommaert 2005, 14). Building on the Wittgensteinian notion of the language game, Duranti (1997) emphasises the significance of context to the social construction of meaning. Duranti’s account of conversation analysis suggests that linguistic events ought to be examined ‘without entering the issue of the individual motivations for such behaviours... the notion of preference is not individually but collectively defined’ (Duranti 1997, 263). Building on the intersubjective paradigm described above, and the Wittgensteinian exclusion of a phenomenological private language as meaningless, the notion of accessing the observed subject’s first person perspective is dismissed both epistemically and methodologically. The observation of interactional constructions of meaning is the deepest level of data to which this study can hope to gain access. This is significant in defining and delimiting notions of otherness in interpersonal and transpersonal understanding.

Linguistic ethnography thus acknowledges the possibility of meaning, following Boas, no longer imposed by the observer, but rather to be apperceived in a situated and embodied sense, with regard to the contextual factors which lend social meaning to language. Unlike discourse analysis, linguistic ethnography concerns itself with enacted language, language as explicatory within the freedom and constraints of interacting subjects, as opposed to discourse as a ‘found object’ (Foucault, 2002) necessarily determined by power relations. The ethnographer as

observer is no less a participant in the encounter, a participant in the language game, and in the reflective self-analysis of recording the encounter.

Understanding the linguistic culture of an ethnographic encounter, as well as understanding the categories employed by the participants in meaning-making affords us an elementary understanding of the site of encounter as *place*. Place in this context denotes more than physical location. The linguistic and multimodal streams of ethnographic analysis mutually illuminate and convalidate one another, in particularly in the interconnectedness of *place* and *voice*. Place ‘means the... position... from which one may speak to important issues... without being challenged about identity or the right to engage in dialogue’ (Gegeo 2001 cited Gerhart 2003). Actors, voices, artefacts, texts and images in the site all speak to the domains of educational and religious culture from within a particular place. In sites of religious and cultural meaning-making, language may reveal an imagined place as much as a concrete location (MacDonald 2003,2)

### c) Multimodal ethnography

In addition to the linguistic modes of analysis explored above, a further dimension to understanding the ethnographic data is afforded by multimodal and visual modes of analysis. Multimodal ethnography expands the understanding of a ‘text’ beyond the oral/literary sources, recognising the multisensory nature of human participant observation. A sense of image, place and culture helps to situate the embodied nature of the interacting subjects within the intersubjective domain, and adds colour and light to linguistic accounts in the ethnographic data.

Recognising the range of registers and cultures represented within each ethnographic site, a significant role fulfilled by the multimodal dimension of the methodology is differentiating elements of the wider culture represented and excluded from the school environment – which elements are excluded and in what manner does this gatekeeping structure function. An understanding of the cultural domain, the way in which facts about the world and their meanings are intersubjectively constructed from the inside of a culture (Borgatti 1999, 117) will prove invaluable to an understanding of the relations between the domains of religion, culture and education in the school-based ethnographic encounters.

A range of methods exist for the analysis of cultural domains, including both structured and unstructured freelists, where a range of participants are asked to list the members of a particular cultural domain (structured) or where such a list emerges organically and repeatedly in conversation (unstructured) – it is possible to gauge the salience of certain key items in the cultural domain by analysing how often an item in the domain is mentioned and how quickly (Borgatti 1999, 123). On other occasions, a ‘dialectic of presence and absence’ (Battaglia 1997, 213) operates, which evades certain delineations and power relations. In an important study of the ritual purposes of axe blades among Trobriand islanders, Debbora Battaglia demonstrates that the displacement of these hidden objects subordinates the visible sites in a significant way. Dominant narratives may be destabilised by an absence of key actors from the domain, or significance lent to an object by its absence. It must be noted which aspects of religious and educational culture, which aspects of student and community culture, are not present in the classroom, who effects this absence, and why. In displacing or eliding aspects of the cultural domain material is disjointed from the realm of its ordinary meaning-making, ‘something is *made* invisible’ (Battaglia 1997, 203).

Perhaps the most prominent of the objects made invisible in the visual ethnography is the absence of students from the photographic record, a decision taken at the research ethics phase, a displacement which imposes a distinctive visual culture, which must be borne in mind in subsequent analysis. This decision itself illuminates reflexively a particular visual culture in educational research, consideration of which is needed in any process of allowing meaning to emerge intersubjectively from photographic sources, particularly photographic records of empty classrooms. Visual sources are not limited to photographic images, however, as the entire activity of ethnography is a visual/tactile as well as a linguistic/auditory field. Certain textual approaches to articulating the visual dimension exhibit an excessive concern to verbalise meanings, these can seem awkward and contrived, as well as risking misrepresenting the encounter. In keeping with the suprarational and experiential dimensions to the religious domain, where appropriate these visual and multimodal sources are presented directly.

While visual sources and artefacts provide ‘sources of concrete visual information about the abstract concepts and processes which are central to understanding everyday social life’ (Emmison and Smith 2000, 58) it must be borne in mind that the use of such sources without clear understanding of the domain and representational conventions operating within the ethnographic site can obfuscate as much as elucidate the meaning of the data. Most notably, in

presenting visual data in photographic formats a displacement occurs, which transforms the context by ‘freezing an image for contemplation’, separating an object from the experiential conditions in which meaning is intersubjectively constructed (Morphy and Banks 1997, 16). A photograph of a classroom wall display in a thesis is not the same as the display, reduced as it is from an aspect of the learning environment to an artefact for analysis. In the case of the religious education classroom, a double displacement may occur, such as in Fig. 3 below, in which an artefact has first been displaced from sacred use within the cultural domain of religious worship and transformed into an ambient or pedagogical use in the classroom, then further displaced from the classroom environment to serve as an illustration of the attitude to religious practices in a particular school for the purposes of ethnographic analyses.

In addressing the threat to validity of displacing visual and multimodal findings from the cultural domain, several correctives present themselves. Triangulation of visual data with linguistic and other ethnographic data is essential to demonstrate the validity of assertions made with reference to the meaning of visual sources, situating these within the broader context. The making of meanings from images must be informed by the personal and professional intentions of the photographer (Pink 2007, 69) and these intentions require reflection and excavation. Learning and appreciating the local visual culture is stressed by many anthropological approaches - besides the complication of research cultures in education addressed above, this is further complicated in schools by the contrasts easily observable between a student culture saturated with images and media, comfortable with the use of instant communication and multimedia information technology and an institutional culture in many ways centred on interpersonal and verbal structures, suspicious of visual and media developments.

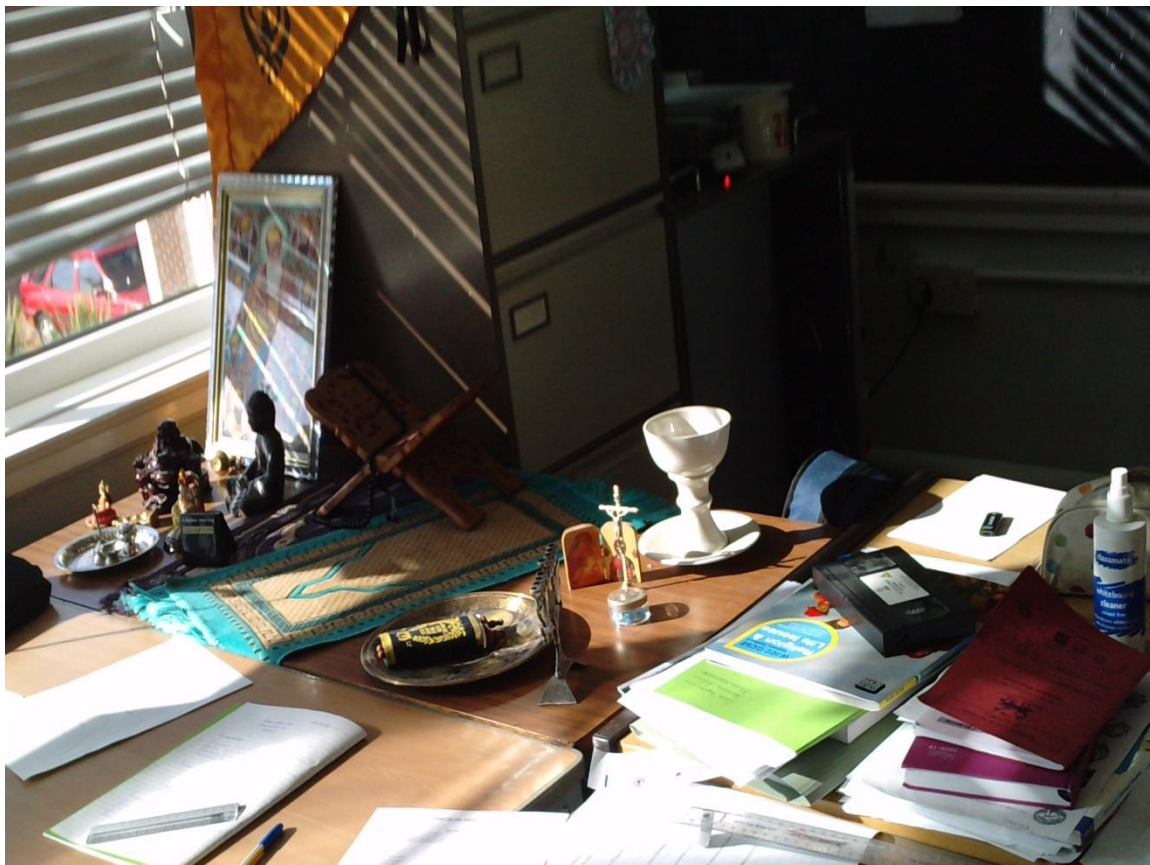


Fig. 3 [G\*Brockton\*1.3] a detail from Ms Raphael's desk – religious artefacts on display.

Beyond the use of the visual as mere illustration, what Gerhart describes as 'local color' (2003,118) – data in the ethnographic encounter formerly ignored or overlooked, which illuminates the relationship between reader and text in the intersubjective making of meaning – may emerge through the inclusion and analysis of the multimodal domain.

Having elucidated an ethnographic model based on a critical and intersubjective paradigm, examining language in the context of the multimodal encounter, and open to the non-verbal and experiential dimensions of student experience, without making any phenomenological claims of privileged access to private sensory experience, it is possible to construct a practical model for the gathering and selecting of appropriate data to the project's aims.

## Chapter 6: Ethnographic Data

### a) Rationale

In all, five ethnographers worked in 24 schools across the British Isles over a two-year period, amassing in excess of 3 million words of description, as well as pictorial records, tape recordings of classroom interactions and focus groups, and a range of school documents. A condition for the invitation to participate was that such schools self-selected as centres of good practice in religious education, resulting in a critical incident sample. This stipulation represented an attempt to avoid pathologising religious education, as well as acknowledging the participant/non-participant bias inherent in resource- and time-intensive studies of this type in schools, utilising this as a strength.

Carspecken identifies three possible questions critical ethnography is capable of answering:

- ‘Why do these particular cultural themes exist?’
- How is this cultural formation related to other cultural formations on different social sites?
- What functions do the action consequences encouraged by this cultural formation serve within a larger social network?’ (2001, 22)

These three questions bear similarities with what Hymes (1996) categorises as ‘comprehensive’, ‘topic oriented’ and ‘hypothesis oriented’ ethnographic encounters. In a comprehensive encounter, the ethnographer approaches a new fieldwork situation with the aim of mapping any significant features of the field, while a topic oriented encounter focuses on a particular aspect of the field, and a hypothesis oriented encounter looks for evidence which proves or disproves a particular relationship hypothesised from previous data.

The ethnographic data, constituting the most extensive set of data collected in the course of the project, focuses at the narrowest part of the hourglass model discussed in the opening chapter, exploring the relations between input and outcome in classroom practice and the realities of school experience. It was agreed, because of the consistent focus on multicultural identity and religious education in much of the literature (e.g. Nesbitt 2004; Hulmes 1992; Swann 1985) to focus investigations on schools in the three largest multicultural urban areas of the three

nations being studied: Belfast, Glasgow and London<sup>3</sup>, and to invite participants who were confident of their religious education provision. In so doing, it was hoped to be able to map diverse models of effectiveness and to be open about the elective sampling which is inevitable to any long-term ethnographic engagement requiring this intensity of commitment from schools. Difficulties in securing the participation of schools in urban settings led to the widening of the invitation across the whole of Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as the opening of a fourth field of study in the North East of England.

In constructing our methodology, attention was paid to the research literature in the field. Perhaps the most extensive use of ethnography in the study of religious education in the UK to date has been that undertaken by the Warwick RE Project (Jackson 2004; Nesbitt 2004; Nesbitt 1998a & b; Everington 1996; etc.). Both the Warwick and Glasgow projects fall within the broad paradigm of critical ethnography, as discussed above, utilising ethnographic methods not only for observation but active improvement of professional practice. The two projects diverge significantly, however, both in focus and in analysis. While the Warwick project began with an hypothesis –

If society is to progress smartly from stereotyping to alert receptivity, both religious education and citizenship education require of us not only a theoretical, distanced, broad brush understanding of religions and cultures but also a fine-grained, close-up awareness (Nesbitt 2004, 3)

- the Glasgow project begins with a more grounded understanding that several aims and models of effectiveness may be operative within UK religious education and in some cases several aims and models may be operative, either by deliberate choice or methodological confusion, within a single context. The Warwick project has brought to light a particular awareness of the danger of reducing every aspect of a subject's behaviour to a presumed product of their religious identity (Nesbitt 2004 & 1998b). In constructing his account of effective religious education in the construction of identity Jackson (2004) advocates the use of students' interests as a starting point for any inquiry. Taking account of this, ethnographic interviews and focus groups with students formed a key source of data for our enquiry, and a

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<sup>3</sup> The project was conceived in 2007, prior to the publication of the Welsh National Exemplar Framework, at which time English and Welsh contexts were considered sufficiently similar to justify consideration as a single entity. Subsequent to the publication of a separate framework for RE in Wales, there is a clear need for further research into the effectiveness of religious education in the Welsh context.



survey questionnaire provided a further triangulation for ensuring that the ethnographer's relationship to recorded findings, as far as possible, reflected the perspectives and perceptions of students. While the Warwick project has made use of an heuristic negotiation of ethnographic findings with families and faith groups (Nesbitt 1998a) in the construction of materials, aiming at consensus in their account of religious practice, the focus of the Glasgow project has been to map areas of both consensus and dissensus in educational practice, presenting evidence as gathered in order to stimulate debate among professionals and policymakers. It may thus be said that the Warwick and Glasgow projects employ a similar paradigm to widely divergent ends, with Glasgow arguably playing Diogenes to Warwick's more Platonic idealism.

#### b) Constructing an analytical framework

The ethnography was divided into two distinct phases. In the early phase, corresponding to a comprehensive encounter model, significant freedom was afforded the ethnographers to gather as broad a contextualised account as possible, although a considered observation schedule was agreed, intended to facilitate comprehensive note-taking, subsequent categorisation and future observations. Precedent to the school visits, the lead ethnographers agreed on a schedule intended to facilitate categorisation of fieldnotes. This initial schedule focused on the following ten core areas for observation:

- Spatial/temporal information;
- Documentation to collect;
- Non-teaching activities in the classroom;
- Cross-curricular comparisons with religious education teaching;
- Involvement of outside partners in the delivery and planning of religious education;
- Teacher-student interaction;
- Student-student interaction;
- Relationship between ethnographer, teachers and students;
- Whole-school ethos and influence on relationships;
- Teachers' and students' interactions with curriculum, resources and values.

Notwithstanding the benefits the above schedule provided to ethnographers in the field, and in writing up and first-stage analysis of 'amplified' field reports (Delamont 2008, 50) there remained a need for deeper analysis of classroom interactions. In particular, there was a need

to connect data collected under the above categories to the key questions posed by the research project. As it was not the ethnographers' intention to impose any particular model from the literature upon definitions of effective religious education encountered in the field, it would be necessary to record evidence of a more nuanced kind without methodologically precluding any particular findings in the area of normative judgments on religious education. Subsequent to the first few ethnographic visits to Scottish schools, the following analytical model was proposed, building on key questions gathered from the literature and the Delphi conference. The model poses eight questions, probing directly the epistemic underpinning of classroom interactions. Due to their theoretical complexity, they are worth reproducing in full:

- Is the conversation open or closed? – In other words, does it offer possibilities for students' disagreement? Are they able to articulate such disagreements effectively? Are such disagreements rooted in an understanding of argument and evidence? Does the teacher try to supply or point to sources which do or might provide such evidence?
- Does the language presuppose consent?
- To what extent are the students enabled to engage in forms of self-narration? Is the conversation conducive to cultivating and probing a sense of self?
- Do the resources (iconographic, auditory, etc.) deployed carry pre-ordained conceptions of the religious or moral good? Or, are they used/deployed in such a way as to ensure that the conversation is morally monoglot?
- Is the undergirding epistemic framework consistent and coherent? – in other words, does the teachers consistently articulate a particular understanding of what would count as good or right? This is quite important though establishing consistency or inconsistency does not of itself constitute grounds for any judgment as to moral propriety or priority or indeed educational efficacy.
- Does the teacher explore not only the content of faiths other than her or his own but also explore and engage with ideas beyond their own at a metaphysical or epistemic rather than at a descriptive level?
- Do they engage with the boundaries and borders between religious ideas where there is enhanced porosity? Do they step back from or go through these boundaries?
- If religious education is concerned with more than a set of descriptions of other beliefs and practices then it might be concerned with the symbolic order – that is how the world is represented through ideas, images and practices. To what extent does the

classroom discourse engage with the symbolic order? Indeed, does the conversation engage the claim that religion evokes and attends to mystery? Of course, some traditions (particularly in the Christian corpus) may not draw on the discourse of mystery but on holiness. It is important also to attend to this distinction in our observations.

While this approach lends an important theoretical richness to the data, it is often difficult to probe in practice, at times entering into the matter of interior motivations specifically precluded by an intersubjective paradigm. Empirical observation demonstrated that teachers rarely describe their models of effectiveness in sufficient theoretical and epistemic depth to be able to comment on intentions in this way, leaving the ethnographer in the position of judging from only surface exposure to methods in practice. Where concepts cannot be read from the data, the ethnographer must beware reading intentions into the data in a way which distorts the observed evidence.

Drawing together the theoretical frameworks above, the following analytical framework was agreed upon for the final coding and presentation of ethnographers' fieldnotes:

1. Context of School:
  - 1.1 Community layout
  - 1.2 Wider school layout
  - 1.3 Layout of class room
  - 1.4 Whole school ethos and influence on relationships
  - 1.5 Teacher-teacher interaction (outwith classroom):
  - 1.6 Relationship between ethnographer/teachers/students
2. Context of Religious Education:
  - 2.1 Religious education teachers' expressed values
  - 2.2 Content of lesson and methods used to deliver
  - 2.3 How does religious education teaching compare with that of other subjects?
  - 2.4 Resources and funds available to religious education
  - 2.5 Time of day when religious education takes place
  - 2.6 Teacher biographical information
  - 2.7 Department documentation and teaching resources
3. Methodology and Teacher Engagement:

- 3.1 Planning
- 3.2 Power relations and teacher engagement
- 3.3 Classroom talk
- 3.4 Teaching methods
- 3.5 Non-teaching activities in the classroom
- 3.6 Outside/guest speakers and partners involved in delivery and planning of RE field trips etc
- 4. Students:
  - 4.1 Student-student interaction
  - 4.2 Student feedback on their religious education learning experiences
  - 4.3 Examples of students' written work
  - 4.4 Student relationship with curriculum/ resources
  - 4.5 Background information on students

In June 2009 a day of seminars was held to allow the ethnographic research team to present their initial observations from this open-ended first phase, enabling the project team to distil key themes emerging from the data. A set of 10 themes emerged, of which three relate to contextual factors and seven address discourse and language:

#### Contextual themes

A: The role of examinations in setting the aims and content of RE;

B: The fit between teacher, pupil and school values in the RE curriculum, and the relationship of RE to the school ethos;

C: The level of resource and support given to RE;

#### Language-centred themes

D: The use of ICT in the RE classroom;

E: The language and treatment of immanence and transcendence, touching on pupils' levels of religious experience and religious literacy;

F: The level of intellectual challenge offered by RE, relative to other subjects in the curriculum, with particular reference to differentiation;

G: The frequency and practices of engagement with texts in the RE classroom;

H: The impact of teachers' pedagogical style;

I: The role and approach to multi-cultural awareness in the RE classroom;

J: The epistemic claims made about truth and plurality in the RE classroom.

The subsequent ethnography, conducted using this framework to investigate hypotheses generated in the first phase, may be categorised as a hypothesis oriented encounter. Although often presented otherwise, in reality the phases of data collection, recording and data analysis are not clinically delineated and often overlap (Delamont 2008). At times, significant analytical work is conducted in the process of observation and the writing up of shorthand notes, at times a further layer of analysis needs to be added when data is presented in this thesis, while at times it will suffice to allow the data, or rather the ethnographer account of at-source analysis thereof, to speak for itself.

A template was constructed from the above themes and categories for the input of ethnographic data into an NVivo 8 database. Data from multiple sources was entered into the database, including ethnographers' fieldnotes, policy documents, pupils' work, teaching materials and lesson plans, pupils' work, photographic sources, recordings and transcripts of interviews and focus groups and recordings of classroom dialogue. Coding nodes were created corresponding to the themes emerging from the comprehensive ethnography, and these were applied both retrospectively to the first phase schools and subsequent observations in the hypothesis oriented phase. Autocode nodes were further created corresponding to the 24 data categories, under which the fieldnotes were entered. The 24 schools were entered as cases in the database, categorised by ethnographer, region of the UK (four geographical locations were covered, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the North East of England and the Greater London area), school type and religious character (if any). These three initial levels of coding enabled the construction of a three-dimensional matrix, with the 24 schools and their attributes running along the X axis, the 24 data categories running down the Y axis and the 10 themes emerging from the comprehensive phase forming the Z axis. Such a matrix gives a total of 5760 possible intersections, each of which is a question query of the type:

‘What does Y tell us about Z at X?’

i.e. ‘What does student-student interaction tell us about the level of intellectual challenge offered by religious education at Dundon Grammar?’

#### c) Schools

The locations of the 24 schools involved in the project are provided in Fig. 4 below:

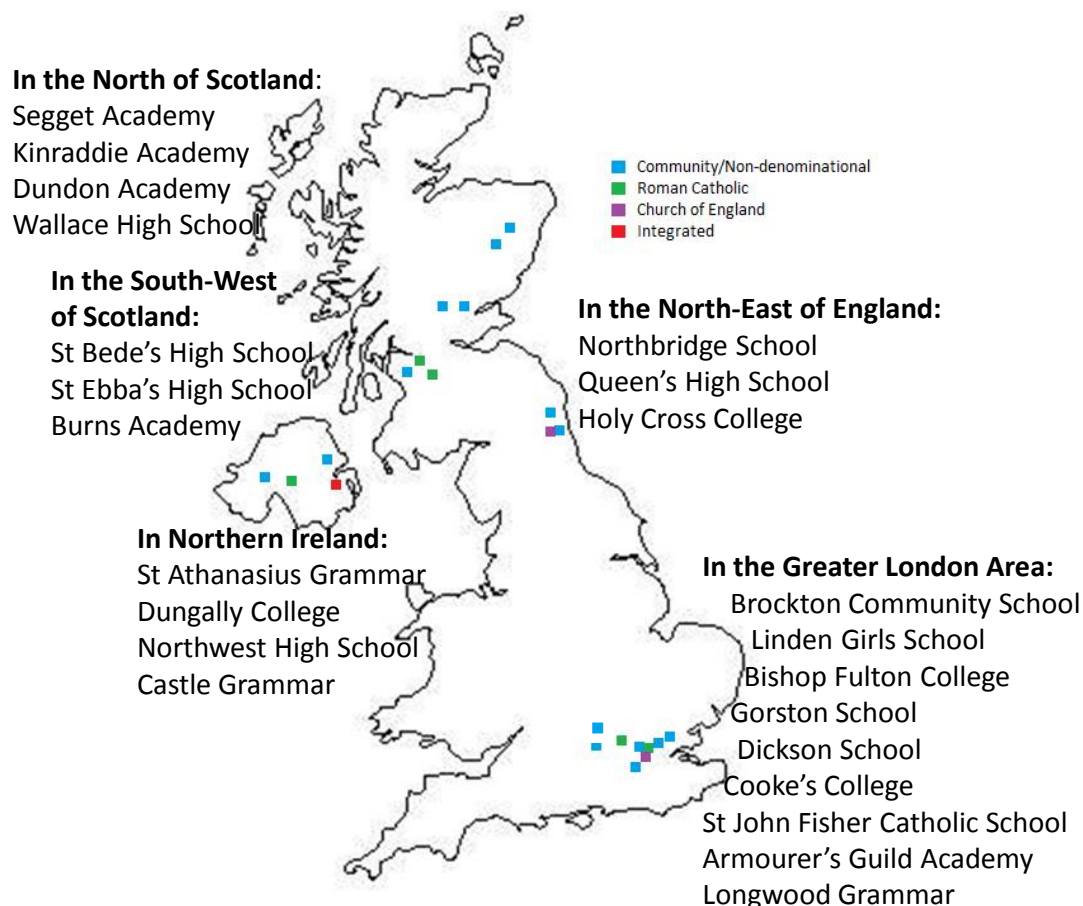


Fig. 4 – Participating schools

Further details on each of the schools are provided below:

| School                             | Type   | Ethnographer   |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| Armourer's Guild Academy           | Suburban Voluntary Aided with a broad Christian foundation           | David Lundie   |
| Bishop Fulton College <sup>4</sup> | Inner-city Voluntary Aided Catholic, separate boys and girls schools | David Lundie   |
| Brockton Community School          | Inner-city Comprehensive   | David Lundie   |
| Burns Academy                      | Suburban Non-denominational  | Nicole Bourque |
| Castle Grammar                     | Rural Controlled Grammar   | Gavin Duffy    |
| Cooke's College                    | Inner-city Church of   | Nicole Bourque |

<sup>4</sup> Bishop Fulton Collegiate School counted as two of our schools in England, being a separate Boys' School and Girls' School on a single site

|                                |  |                    |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------------|
|                                | England Academy                              |                    |
| Dickson School                 | Suburban Comprehensive                       | Nicole Bourque     |
| Dundon Academy                 | Inner-city Non-denominational                | David Lundie       |
| Dungally College               | Suburban Integrated                          | David Lundie       |
| Gorston School                 | Inner-city Comprehensive                     | Nicole Bourque     |
| Holy Cross School              | Inner-city Voluntary Aided Church of England | Vivienne Baumfield |
| Kinraddie Academy              | Rural Non-denominational                     | David Lundie       |
| Linden Girls School            | Inner-city Single-sex Comprehensive          | David Lundie       |
| Longwood Grammar               | Suburban Comprehensive                       | Kevin Lowden       |
| Northbridge School             | Inner-city Comprehensive                     | Vivienne Baumfield |
| Northwest High School          | Rural Controlled Secondary Modern            | Gavin Duffy        |
| Queen's High School            | Rural Comprehensive                          | Vivienne Baumfield |
| Segget Academy                 | Rural Non-denominational                     | David Lundie       |
| St Athanasius Grammar          | Rural Catholic Grammar                       | David Lundie       |
| St Bede's High School          | Suburban Catholic                            | Kevin Lowden       |
| St Ebba's High School          | Suburban Catholic                            | Nicole Bourque     |
| St John Fisher Catholic School | Suburban Voluntary-Aided Catholic            | David Lundie       |
| Wallace High School            | Rural Non-denominational                     | Kevin Lowden       |

Each of the schools is significant in itself, and each geographical region has unique features worthy of comment. In the research sample in Scotland and Northern Ireland, for example, issues of multiculturalism

| School Name               | Chapter 3 models of effectiveness <sup>5</sup> | Chapter 4 models of effectiveness <sup>6</sup> |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Armourers' Guild Academy  | C  | 3  |
| Bishop Fulton College     | A  | 1  |
| Brockton Community School | A  | 4  |
| Dundon Academy            | D  | 3  |
| Dungally College          | A  | 1  |
| Kinraddie Academy         | B  | 2  |
| Linden Girls' School      | B  | 4  |
| Segget Academy            | D  | 2  |
| St Athanasius Grammar     | B  | 1  |
| St John Fisher School     | B  | 1  |

played a different role to those in the Warwick project and much of the other literature. The demographic of students in the sample schools in which we were based were all largely composed of white British or Irish pupils from secular, Protestant or Catholic Christian backgrounds. Teaching about other world religions, and the promotion of multicultural tolerance played a significant role in all of these schools, although significant differences may be observed between discourses of multiculturalism in schools where diverse groups met within the school, such as Gorston and Brockton Schools, and those schools which might be said to be preparing pupils for a multicultural world 'outside' the lived experience of the school or local community, such as Kinraddie and Dundon Academies.

Applying the theoretical models developed in Chapters 3 and 4 to those schools in which I was personally involved as the lead ethnographer (Fig. 5 below), it is possible to see that, while on a surface level the models of effectiveness enumerated in these two chapters appeared to have an affinity, there is no clear correlation between them in practice, suggesting that there is a free exchange of aims and practices between the faith and non-faith sectors, and a complexity, perhaps even confusion, between the teleological models (chapter 3) and descriptive models

<sup>5</sup> A – Discursively pluralist, takes religious truth claims seriously

B – Discursively monoglot, takes religious truth claims seriously

C – Discursively pluralist, subjectivises object of study

D – Discursively monoglot, subjectivises object of study

<sup>6</sup> 1 – Nurture systematic knowledge and commitment

2 – Nurture pre-defined moral dispositions through world religions

3 – Encourage religious literacy and curiosity about the religious domain

4 – Encouraging challenge to personal and social moralities



(chapter 4) which predominated, although in most cases schools exhibited pedagogical elements drawn from more than one model of effectiveness.

The key ethnographers on the project ran a coding comparison where they blind double-coded 8 nodes of the data, two sections of data from two schools under two themes. There was agreement between the three on an average of 85.88% of the coding, producing a median Kappa Coefficient of 0.7, demonstrating significant reliability and comparability between ethnographers' coding approaches.

### c) Selection of data for analysis

Four schools were identified as of particular interest to the central theme of this thesis, all of which I visited to carry out ethnographic fieldwork in 2009, at each of which a particular context and ethos played a significant role in setting the agenda for religious education. In all of these schools, religious education played a leading role in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural agenda of the school, reinforcing ethical priorities with regard to religious and cultural values. In all of these schools, religious truth claims were taken seriously, and not subjectivised (i.e. all fall into categories A and B in the Chapter 3 enumeration). Two schools are in Northern Ireland, the other two in East London. In two cases, schools exist in a context of inter-community tensions, providing a mediating space, a threshold for dialogue between two broadly Christian communities in tension. In the other two schools, a single largely contiguous ethnic and religious community predominates.

Brockton Community School is a comprehensive school in an area of multiple deprivations in East London. The area has seen much recent migration and has experienced racial tensions, including a brief surge in support for the far-right British National Party. Brockton's headteacher spoke to me at length about the measures he had personally taken to avoid racial tensions (literally) at the school gates spilling over into the school community, as well as his work with all sections of the local community to avoid the widespread phenomenon of 'white flight' precipitating a de facto racially segregated school (Burgess and Wilson 2003). The headteacher reported to me that he sees the humanities in general, and religious education in particular as key to the school's success in managing diversity, conceptualising this success in terms of the centrality of skills of dialogue and enquiry which religious education fosters rather than in terms of learning from the content of any particular religious teachings.

At Brockton, students from two main identity groups come into contact in the course of their learning – white working class students from East London and largely second- and third-generation black British students, recent arrivals in the area from South and Inner London. Significantly, patterns of classroom talk at Brockton expose a dialectical and phonical fault line, partly but not entirely commensurate with ethnic divisions, between a traditional East London/ Essex accent and dialect and speakers of a ‘multiracial vernacular English’ (Kerswell et al. 2007). In discussions with the headteacher in particular, meaningful encounters with students, parents and staff, where individuals are challenged through a holistic dialogue and encounter with members of the ‘other’ community, form the backbone of the school’s significant efforts to turn the tide of racism and intolerance in the local area. More broadly, the school takes very seriously its role as an agent of social change, providing students with access to social mobility through education, having been transformed from a school on the brink of special measures in 1997 into an oversubscribed school with examination results significantly above the local average.

Dungally College, an integrated school in Belfast, was established in the 1980s as an ecumenical Christian response to the Troubles. The school’s admission policies are carefully managed to ensure representative proportions from the Protestant and Catholic communities, and of varying academic abilities. Unlike Brockton, whose religious and ethnic demographic reflects changes in the local community, Dungally’s diversity is a proactive decision, drawing from the widest catchment in Northern Ireland, with students from some 60 feeder primary schools across Belfast.

Integrated education in Northern Ireland demonstrates an in-built commitment to social reconstruction (McGlynn 2003, 12) but remains a minority concern in Northern Ireland, educating just over 4% of the population in 2003 (Montgomery et al 2003, 2) rising to around 6% presently (McGlynn, personal correspondence). Religious education and identity occupy a prominent place in the life of the school, and have done so since its foundation, with two full-time lay chaplains, one Catholic, one Presbyterian, serving the school’s staff and students. With regard to nomenclature, the subject, officially designated religious education, is at times referred to as ‘religion’ reflecting differences of terminology between Catholic and controlled schools. Staff and students are involved in a number of projects in peace education involving inter-community dialogue both in Northern Ireland (such as the Corymeela Community) and an exchange programme with students in Israel and Palestine (although due to safety concerns,

students from Dungally do not make a return visit). Although the explicit aim of integration and conflict resolution is a draw for a minority of parents, for the majority, Dungally's strong academic record is the main attraction for school choice. As well as being integrated between the Protestant and Catholic communities, Dungally also recruits from both the Grammar and Secondary-Modern streams in Northern Ireland's (until recently) selective education system, its head of religious education describes it to me as a 'second chance school' for many students, reflecting an explicit Christian commitment in its social and educative aims beyond ecumenism or faith formation.

A single-sex community school of around 1,400 girls in East London, located in the highly diverse Borough of Tower Hamlets near the ward of Spitalfields and Banglatown, Linden Girls School does not have any explicit faith basis. Nonetheless, the students at Linden are drawn overwhelmingly from families which define as Muslim (97%) and of Bangladeshi origin (94%). The school and its religious education department embrace its status as a school for the Bangladeshi Muslim community, although this is nowhere reflected in the school's official policies. Religious education has a high profile within the school, and the current Director of Community Cohesion (a senior leadership post), headteacher and head of humanities posts are all held by religious education teachers. Community cohesion has been at the heart of the school's work for some years, and the school has been in receipt of government funding initiatives connected to the community cohesion agenda (DCLG 2007).

While Linden's status as a school of choice for the Bangladeshi Muslim community is presented by its management as an accident of historical geography, St Athanasius Grammar School, a small Catholic grammar school of 600 students in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland has a much more deliberate status within its faith community. Established by a religious order in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the nuns remained a presence on the school site until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, eventually relocating due to old age. The school has a long established status as the elite school among the region's Catholic community. Although the area has seen recent immigration of Polish and Timorese young people, who are visible in St Athanasius' feeder Catholic primary schools, these students are not yet a presence within the grammar school, a point which several teachers attribute to the effects of academic selection.

Both schools can therefore be said to be monocultural, comprising almost exclusively a student body of a singular and largely contiguous ethnic and religious identity, which is not

reflective of the wider geographical community. In both cases, the ethnic and religious identity described above is presented by external critics and represented by school staff at all levels as being an identity in flux. While religious values are in both cases held up as providing an enduring and transcendent framework, rapid changes are observed in the traditional ways in which the ethnic community has acculturated these religious values. These changes are accompanied by manifold and occasionally paradoxical critiques. More experienced teachers at Linden Girls School note as positive changes in social attitudes towards the post-16 education of girls in the Bangladeshi community in recent decades, but the danger of radicalisation of young people has emerged as a priority for school and government in the years since 9/11. The scars of the Troubles are beginning to heal in Northern Ireland, and with them a lessening of sectarianism in public life, but its consequences are still notable in the area around St Athanasius Grammar, one of its students having endured a near fatal attack for intervening to assist the victim of a paramilitary beating in the past year. Teachers at St Athanasius also remark upon the decrease in traditional piety, with the damage caused by the clerical abuse scandals in Ireland providing an unavoidable backdrop. In both cases the negative dimensions are largely excised from public language, in particular in the classroom, although the need to preserve what is of value in religious identity is clearly articulated. In the case of St Athanasius, there is also a clear desire among teachers and managers to preserve a set of values and attachments which are distinctively Irish, a correlative desire is not evident at Linden.

Too exclusive a focus on the schools' approaches to religious and cultural identities and values would however misrepresent the realities of school life. The value system observed in all four schools emphasises, above all, the role of the school as an academic institution, and in particular an institution achieving success within the broader national paradigm of an examination-driven framework for academic success. Religious education is not exempt from this framework. Religious education has to function within the norms of these academic values in order to retain coherence within the wider culture of the school, and value in the eyes of students and school management. Numerous other case studies in the project may be cited where religious education has marginalised itself through a lack of willingness to engage in this broader examination culture. In all four schools, A-Level religious studies is one of the most popular option subjects, and both GCSE and A-Level religious education boast examination success rates significantly above the school average.

The data presented in this thesis is drawn from two studies intended for publication, one on religious education as a liminal site for inter-community dialogue, the other on the relationship between religious and cultural commitment in religious education. While the former study focused on Brockton and Dungally and the latter on St Athanasius and Linden Schools, all four schools shed important light on both subjects, and the two themes are herein presented as aspects of a wider thesis about the holistic impact of religious education. Consequently, the means for selecting the data presented in the subsequent section are applied more broadly to all four schools, delivering broader insights on the relevant themes.

In investigating the practices of religious education teachers in mediating inter-community conflict in the contested sites, it was initially conceived to focus analysis around theme J: The epistemic claims made about truth and plurality in the religious education classroom. Initial coding analysis, however, found that a significant portion of the source material at Brockton and Dungally had been coded for its significance to this theme. While this further corroborates the importance of these schools to gaining an understanding of the complexities of this theme, it also draws too broad a picture for focused and systematic linguistic analysis of the schools' pedagogy with specific reference to questions of community cohesion and students' conative and affective development. It was subsequently decided to focus analysis on a thematic threshold, narrowing down the data search to those areas coded under the intersections between two or more key themes. The findings presented in this chapter are drawn from a three dimensional cross-section drawn from the NVivo matrix – 20 questions generated on the coding framework described above, examining two thematic thresholds. Each of the questions focuses on one thematic threshold, at one data category node, at one school, for example:

What does data on lesson planning reveal about the data coded under both the epistemic claims made about truth and plurality in the religious education classroom and the fit between teacher, student and school values and ethos in the religious education classroom at Dungally College?

Each question query is then allocated a code, hereafter represented in square brackets after each extract from the ethnographic data, recording the theme(s), school and data category which formed the database query from which the source was drawn. The question above, thus coded, is represented [J&B\*Dungally\*3.1].

Two thematic thresholds were identified as having a direct bearing on the intersection between students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and community cohesion:

J&B – data coded under both the epistemic claims made about truth and plurality and the fit between teacher, student and school values in the religious education classroom.

J&I – data coded under both the epistemic claims made about truth and plurality and the role and approach to multicultural awareness in the religious education classroom.

These secondary themes draw together the two pedagogical conceptions of values education and multicultural education which formed the basis of debates in the Delphi process and which can be observed in the theoretical literature, between a conception of values education as the nurture of particular values associated with pluralism as an overarching world view, and a conception which seeks a critical and challenging engagement with the truth claims of religions as forms of lived experience.

Initially, data in the second paper on students' religious and cultural attachments was approached with the same threshold approach developed above, identifying a series of thematic thresholds where data had been coded concurrently at more than one node, suggesting a richness of meaning and relevance to the theme. In this case, once again J&B appeared to be a fruitful threshold of data, data was also considered germane which appeared under the thresholds:

B&E – data coded under both the fit between teacher, student and school values in the religious education curriculum and the language and treatment of immanence and transcendence, touching on students' levels of religious experience and religious literacy.

E&J – data coded under both the epistemic claims made about truth and plurality in the religious education classroom and the language and treatment of immanence and transcendence, touching on students' levels of religious experience and religious literacy.

These thresholds were found to be points of entry into some, but by no means all of the data relevant to this second analysis. The contextual and multimodal nature of much of the data, as we shall go on to see, lent itself to a thorough exploration of data around the borders of these

themes, and a widening of the search to include not only data double-coded under these thresholds but data coded under any of the three nodes, B, E or J, as well as a re-exploration of the database to uncover data previously discarded or left uncoded as of marginal significance. This yielded a much larger, less focused sample, yet proved indispensable to enriching the subsequent analysis. While data in the previous enquiry elicited coding depth – points of multiple intersection rich in meaning – much of the data in the second enquiry was drawn from marginal sources, data which went largely unremarked or unnoticed in the first stages of coding, focused as they had been on linguistic meanings. This second, broad multimodal approach, combined with the first, allows us to develop an ethnographic analysis that is both deep and broad.

Between the first and second studies, data was drawn from eight categories in the coding framework:

- 1.3 Layout of classroom
- 1.4 Whole school ethos and influence on relationships
- 2.1 Religious education teachers' expressed values
- 3.1 Lesson planning
- 3.3 Classroom talk
- 3.4 Teaching methods
- 4.2 Student feedback on their religious education learning experiences
- 4.3 Examples of students' written work

Altogether, this presents a matrix of 128 questions out of which data was gathered for interrogation in the concluding section of the thesis. Four themes are explored at four schools, making use of eight categories of data. This is a significant increase on the 20 question queries which formed the first of the two studies mentioned above (2 thematic thresholds at 2 schools using data from just 5 categories), demonstrating the exponential capacity of the NVivo database to expand available data for analysis. In presenting the breadth of this wider study, attention must be paid to the fact that much focused analysis has already taken place under these narrower search criteria. Such an approach provides both a depth of focus and a breadth of available data to elucidate the role of religious education in the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in these sites of value commitment and contestation.

## Chapter 7: Analytical Models

Having established a physical and methodological site of enquiry from which to analyse the impact the philosophical, pedagogical and policy dimensions distilled in Part I have upon students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in critical case studies, it is necessary to enumerate a series of perspectives, drawn from a broad range of theoretical literature, which provide an heuristic device to understand the themes which emerge from the data. Conforming to the model developed in Chapter 3, these models include both a pedagogical dimension proper to education as a discipline and a theological dimension proper to religion, as well as drawing on broader anthropological understandings of the holistic dimensions of human spiritual and social development. Far from obscuring the data, superimposing these analytical perspectives is essential to developing a meaningful account from the data.

[N]arratives abound after the event, they explain that event... such narratives become scripts or arguments to be used by the instigators of new sequences, and equally by those who aim to rebut them. One 'social drama'... may provide materials for many stories, depending upon the social-structural, political, psychological, philosophical, and, sometimes, theological perspectives of the narrators. (Turner 1988, 33)

### a) Social development – liminality and enstrangement

Much of the research presented here focuses on thresholds and points of intersection, both in methodology and context. Thresholds between the religious and educative, personal, interpersonal, transpersonal and transcendent, and thresholds between the school culture and culture(s) of students play an essential role in setting the parameters for possible models of effectiveness. The work of James Conroy on liminality and enstrangement in education is thus of significance in positing an approach to educational practice which looks beyond the structured practices of the school. Among many theoretical models which have been proposed for the interaction between the individual and culture in moral education, Conroy's model as presented here offers the unique strength of accommodating the complexities not only of culture but of individuality.



While retaining the strength of discourse-centred approaches in recognising the complexities of culture, Conroy's model proposes that there is also more internal complexity to the subjective personal realm, rendering it genuinely distinct from the realm of intersubjective cultural/social discourse. Beyond 'collective representations of the [public] person there is a *unique* particularised singularity... the particular *isness* of the self' (Conroy 2004, 6). This *isness*, the embodied and enculturated subject, nonetheless retains an irreducible complexity of its own. Not only is the individual realm distinct from the social, but the individual is also 'made strange from within' (Conroy 2009, 147) – it is this concept which Conroy labels *enstrangement*, distinguishing it from the dialectical or dialogic 'estrangement' found in Marxist and Foucauldian accounts in that it is not the subjective/intersubjective dichotomy, the other *qua* other which determines the enstrangement of the self, but the recognition of the incompleteness of the inner subjective realm as a function of the individual's being (Conroy 2009, 150). One's distinctiveness from the other is not problematised, but accepted as an aspect of the human condition. Conroy's proposed pedagogical solution, the de-centring of the self through encounter with the other, is to be distinguished from the phenomenological 'bracketing out' of the self (Smart 1968), acknowledging that, even in the unfamiliar place of encountering the other, one remains entirely oneself, consciously aware of personally held normative commitments but also aware of an inner incompleteness. Complexity, thus interpreted, may be viewed as an inherent feature of existence, not a 'problem' to be resolved through some final synthesis.

The account of liminality advanced here draws more on the conception advanced by Conroy than by Victor Turner, whose work on this area is more prevalent in the anthropological literature. Turner's

*liminal phenomena...* are performed in privileged spaces and times... they are the scenes of play and experimentation, as much as of solemnity and rules... both the performances and their settings may be likened to loops in a linear progression, when the social flow bends back on itself, in a way does violence to its own development, meanders, inverts, perhaps lies to itself, and puts everything so to speak into the subjunctive mood as well as the reflexive voice. Just as the subjunctive mood of a verb is used to express supposition, desire, hypothesis, or possibility, rather than stating actual facts, so do liminality and the phenomena of liminality dissolve all factual and

commonsense systems into their components and ‘play’ with them in ways never found in nature or in custom, at least at the level of direct perception. (1988, 25)

Turner labels *liminoid* processes which share some of the threshold/transitional features of the liminal, but which are associated with ‘an independent and critical source’ (1982, 33). To an extent, what concerns this study is of its very nature *liminoid* in Turner’s terms, because Turner associates the liminal with rites of passage, frequently accompanied by a denial of the rights which social reality confers upon persons in the pre- and post-liminal states of life (Turner 1967, 96) , a denial which is impossible within the context of universal rights as understood in Western cultures. ‘Optation pervades the liminoid phenomenon, obligation the liminal’ (Turner 1982, 43).

In distinguishing the liminal from the liminoid, Turner posits five key features:

| Features       | Liminal   | Liminoid  |
|----------------|---|---|
| Societal types | ‘mechanical solidarity’, agrarian or simple societies | ‘contractual solidarity’, industrial or complex societies |
| Participation  | Collective, cyclical                                  | Individual, continuously generated                        |
| Salience       | Integrated into social processes                      | Marginal to priorities of polity                          |
| Meaning        | Agreed collective symbols and signifiers              | Idiosyncratic interpretations                             |
| Purpose        | Diffuse social tensions                               | Distil tensions and generate change                       |

Fig. 6 (Turner 1982, 53-54)

| School        | Societal | Participation | Salience | Meaning  | Purpose  | General Comments  |
|---------------|----------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|---|
| Brockton      | Liminoid | Liminoid      | Liminoid | Liminoid | Liminal  | Generally liminoid  |
| Dungally      | Liminoid | Liminal       | Liminal  | Liminal  | Liminoid | Unclear   |
| Linden        | Liminoid | Liminal       | Liminal  | Liminoid | Liminoid | Attempts to be liminal, but reduced to liminoid by teacher/student culture divide |
| St Athanasius | Liminal  | Liminal       | Liminal  | Liminal  | Liminal  | A liminal institution, becoming increasingly                                      |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |          |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|----------|
|  |  |  |  |  |  | liminoid |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|----------|

Fig. 7: application of Turner's distinction to the schools.

In comparing art in complex industrial societies (which Turner in his later work will label as liminoid) with ritual in traditional societies, Turner asserts that the liminal and liminoid function reflexively: 'Getting to know oneself is to put oneself on the way to healing oneself. The kind of self-knowledge that produces despair is inadequate self-knowledge' (1988, 106). It is at this point that the key dissensus with Conroy's view establishes itself. For Conroy, self-knowledge is always *in esse* inadequate, *enstranged*. While Turner's liminal implies a like demand to confront the familiar through the unfamiliar, to startle the subject 'into thinking about objects, persons, relationships... they have hitherto taken for granted... divested of their previous habits of thought, feeling and action' (Turner 1967, 105), Turner's account posits a dialectic between *communitas* and structure (1974, 235). It is because he rejects both the dialectic of personal and social posited by Marxist dialectics and the more subtle Turnerean dialectic of *communitas* and structure that Conroy's account of enstrangement is capable of reaching beyond commentary on the social processes of a culture, to a normative and indeed a spiritual dimension. While Turner extols the doffing of 'the masks, cloaks, apparel, and insignia of status from time to time even if only to don the liberating masks of liminal masquerade' (1974, 243), Conroy sees both the negotiation of the social world and the self-representation of private passions and motivations as subject to masking – the mask faces inwards as well as outwards (Conroy and Leitch 2010). It is this lack of final resolution to Conroy's *enstrangement* which allows the indoctrinatory/emancipatory divide explored in chapter 2 to be explored normatively. While for Turner, the liminal ends in resolution between the personal and social, the liminoid in change and challenge, no normative judgment can be made of either outcome, provided self-awareness has had its healing effect. No such purely descriptive account will suffice in the context of the contested territory of religious education in schools.

Even in his later work, where Turner adds a concern for psychological as well as social processes in the liminal (1982, 21) and a concomitant concern with liminal reflexivity as providing 'metacommentary on the life of their times... assigning meaning to its decisive public and cumulative private events' (1985, xii), bringing this closer to the spiritual and normative, Turner's account of the liminal is significant for shifting the focus of anthropological analysis away from a Durkheimian concern for representation toward a

concern for process (Kapferer 2004, 37), although this alone remains incapable of entirely resolving normative questions around the reinforcement of an old structure or its replacement by a new one which follow from liminal crises (Turner 1974, 250) especially '[w]here consensus over key values no longer exists [and] the redressive machinery premised on such a consensus loses its legitimacy' (1988, 35). This is a point to which we shall return in considering the spiritual dimension and the work of Rene Girard.

At its root, Turner's liminality draws upon an ideal 'of human society as a homogenous, unstructured *communitas*, whose boundaries are ideally coterminous with those of the human species' (1982, 47), an account which draws much closer to the bracketing out or laying aside of personal commitment relied upon by phenomenologists, or to the depersonalised universalism of John Rawls' 'original position' (Rawls 1993). In contrast, it is precisely in encountering the other in his otherness, Conroy asserts, which is of primary concern in liminal education. The radical philosopher Slavoj Žižek echoes this concern in his critique of tolerance:

the way we use this term in the West also mystifies things, it means, yes, let's tolerate each other, but it also means 'don't harass me', which means remain at appropriate distance from me, it means that if you scratch the surface you will also discover that the other that more liberal multiculturalists are ready to tolerate is what I ironically refer to as 'decaffeinated other'... products deprived of their poisonous substance... this mythic, holistic, good other (Žižek on Al Jazeera 2010).

This notion of the strangeness of the individual, recognising that the individual is not represented to the self in the same way as to the other, that there is no 'private language' which can finally make public (the functional domain of language) the *isness* of the self (the true domain of the private) is further developed by Barr (2008) who points out that any act of judgment, moral or educational, is inherently liminal, taking the subject to the borders of intersubjectivity 'to meet the object halfway... everyone is caught up in an *imaginary* network (fantasy or myth) of self-representation, authorizations or inhibitions' (155). Subsequent anthropologists such as Piroska Nagy, in a historical anthropology of religious weeping in medieval Christianity, have reinterpreted Turner's concern for the liminal, shifting focus away from liminal events in time and space, drawing parallels with the account of place and the social imaginary developed in chapter 5, admitting the possibility of intimate and interior

ritual exercising a liminal transformative effect (Nagy 2004, 128-130). This role of the imaginary as intermediary in liminal encounters is significant in the case of several of the schools, in which the sense of place includes not only the physical location but a significant role for imaginary networks to construct community identity.

One way in which liminal encounter between the interpersonal domain of culture and personal identity construction expresses itself at the two monocultural sites, Linden Girls School and St Athanasius Grammar is in the imagined places of exile which exert a salience in both contexts. In many ways St Athanasius Grammar's physical location near the border, the ideological geography of its surrounding towns (See Fig. 8) the prominence of Irish language in the school, and its use of materials and schemes of work designed in and for cross-border Catholic schools, the effects of a macroculture still influenced by the aftermath of armed struggle, among other factors, set it in an imagined Catholic Ireland which is neither the reality of Northern Ireland nor the Republic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Student talk suggests a self-representation of Bangladeshi identity at Linden Girls School giving similar salience to an imagined place of exile – at times displaying attachments to a geographically, historically and intergenerationally remote 'back home', language which conflicts with distaste for the realities of contemporary Bangladesh, culturally alienating first generation migrants 'fresh from the 'Desh' at the same time as constructing an imagined cultural place of origins, within and against which to negotiate identity and meaning. Concerns expressed by Linden's staff around containing the perceived threat of addressing contemporary international issues (Palestine, Iraq) in the school point to the significance of concealed cultural dimensions alluded to in the previous chapter – an imagined place made conspicuous by its elision, which speaks of the threat posed by a perceived globalised Islamic identity. Besides these particular imagined places, other imagined places appear in the cultural domain of all schools – university, the world of work, and the home/faith lives of students – at times the imaginative



Fig. 8 [I\*St Athanasius\*1.2] sign I passed every day on my way to the school – the sign reads ‘Failte gu [name of town]’ (Irish for ‘welcome to’) and ‘Remember 1981’ – a reference to the IRA hunger strike.

gap between teachers’ and students’ views of these places opens up as a clear indicator of a gap in shared conceptions of faith and culture, creating problems of coherence, an absence of meaning in the intersubjective level which manifest themselves in pedagogical encounters. It is in this regard that Turner suggests the subjunctive remodels and reflexively examines the actual world by means of metalanguages, magical, festive or sacred imputations (1988, 26-27).

Both Brockton and Dungally also form points of liminal encounter, thresholds at which students encounter otherness in various intersubjective theatres of meaning. In this encounter, Conroy argues, we uncover more about ourselves, stepping beyond the obviousness of our own culture. In both cases, a deliberate displacement occurs, where teachers and students choose to place themselves at or beyond the threshold of the culturally familiar, constructing a new imagined place, an intermediary between a more familiar cultural identity and the complexity of the wider macroculture of conflict. As the empirical work will go on to demonstrate, this choice is a necessary prerequisite of a transformative encounter. This choice involves a deliberate displacement of preconceived, contained socio-psychological constructions, enabling fresh perspectives to emerge from an appreciation of the otherness

within. Turner distinguishes two types of liminal events, those concerned with individual transition within a cultural domain, and those marking transitions of a whole community, such as from war to peace (1988, 101) – within this context, St Athanasius and Linden Girls School can be associated primarily with the former, Brockton and Dungally with the latter.

Two forms of ‘otherness’ can thus be posited – the otherness of the encounter in the religious education classroom, displacing common understandings in order to provide metacommentary, classified as either liminal or liminoid depending on certain key features, and the otherness of the self when displaced from its familiar points of reference, classified as estranged. These function as both anthropological observation and pedagogical blueprint in various ways in the observed data.

#### b) Cultural development – two conceptions of culture

Having elucidated and demonstrated a methodological approach which mediates between researcher interpretation and local understanding, excavating the materiality notably not only of what is seen but also unseen in the intersubjective encounter of ethnographer and ethnographic site, the question of the multifarious meanings of “culture” in anthropology emerges. Significant attention needs to be paid to interpretations of culture if the anthropologist is to avoid misrepresentation. Invoking ‘culture’ as a catch-all term to explain human activity can prove vacuous, the term is ‘so burdened with meaning that... [it] end[s] up conveying none at all’ (Girard 1978, 84). At least three possible conceptions of culture present themselves as germane to the data: an holistic anthropological sense of culture as the totality of systems of thought, meaning-making and representation which surround our ethnographic subjects, including the ethnographer, the specific ethnic and national customs and traditions of the communities whose children attend the schools, and an idealist conception of ‘high culture’ associated with a pursuit of the ‘best that has been thought and said in world history’ (Gallagher 2003, 13).

In addressing this issue, traditional understanding of ‘high culture’ as advanced by theorists in aesthetics such as Roger Scruton (2007) are largely discounted as ill-suited to the ends and methods of the ethnographic study. Certain aspects of the idealism of high culture approaches will however return in analysis of communities’ self-understanding of their respective cultures. In considering the responses of Christian churches to culture, Michael Gallagher enumerates six categories of cultural theory – descriptive accounts of a cultural domain;

accounts which focus on a social heritage; normative accounts of cultural values and standards of behaviour; systems of law and social order; structures of common living; and accounts which seek to excavate the origins of a culture. Gallagher points to a fault-line among the more anthropological views of culture:

Even though culture offers us tools and rituals to cope with the world's strangeness, it also provides us with sources of antagonism, power games and mutual prejudice. Instead of being a source of social cohesion and coherence, contemporary views of culture insist that it has 'shattered into diverse domains' (2003, 16).

Such an account of the internal complexities of culture challenges the idealist dialectic of Turner's account of liminality – just as Conroy's account of enstrangement denies the possibility of absolute *communitas*, so Gallagher's account of cultures and their internal complexity denies the possibility of absolute structure. In order to see this at work in the complexities of the empirical data, a disambiguation is needed between a descriptive account, social heritage account and normative account of culture.

A purely descriptive account of culture offers no criteria from which to evaluate cultural praxis with regard to religious values. In addressing the departure of the religious order from St Athanasius Grammar, for example, the account provided by teachers, school leaders and students transcends merely noting that certain practices used to form a commonplace of the cultural domain of Irish Catholicism and no longer do, nor will it suffice to note that these practices were insufficiently robust to sustain themselves in a small nation heavily influenced by European liberalism and American consumerism. The legacy of vocation, commitment and political struggle for educational equality which accompanied the establishment of Catholic schooling, and the legacy of violence and abuse which caused such damage to the same community (BBC 1998; Belfast Telegraph 2009) cannot be appropriately addressed in merely descriptive terms. Such a descriptive account fails the intersubjectivity test established in previous chapters, failing to reflect the normative discourse of the community as it represents itself in dialogue with the ethnographer. Descriptive accounts of culture take insufficient account of human agency within the cultural domain, the ability not only to move within a cultural domain, but to make meanings and exert influence on or within it.

Processes of construction of a social order are themselves inimical to their own manipulation and circumvention, being part of dynamic human processes of volition (Bornstein 2006; 9).



The possibility of anything within a cultural domain having a meaning within that culture to the inhabitants of that domain beyond a merely descriptive or mechanistic meaning, requires the possibility for failure of meaning making. The ability to describe a cultural context's effect on human persons, including the ethnographer, requires a normative as well as a descriptive dimension. In an insightful collection, Tomlinson and Engelke (2006, 2) argue that failures of meaning-making allow approaches to meaning as a contested and uncertain process, rather than an entity waiting to be uncovered. This contested conception of meaning allows for the consideration of cultural artefacts, images and events that follow, not as the bars of a rigid cultural cage within which students and teachers are caught, but as the strands from which students and teachers weave a tapestry or tapestries of meaning. An aspect of the meaningfulness of such a tapestry is that it can have holes, areas in which the negotiation of meaning falls flat; it can unravel, when core values and beliefs fail to withstand the testing of life in the world; the possibility of the failure to make meaning in itself renders meaning possible on a normative level beyond the purely descriptive. Meaning allows for the imagined and the normative to have a place within culture, for the intersubjective paradigm to retain its ethnographic closeness to the language and identity of the subjects. As Bornstein (2006; 91) illustrates, these moments of meaninglessness for participants may themselves be both pedagogically and ethnographically meaningful. On occasion, as in the cases of two Scottish schools in the study operating in areas of overwhelming secularism, indifference and hostility to religion, the tapestry can be almost blank, offering no points of reference from which to begin an exploration of processes of meaning making within a given religious culture. This is far from the case in the data presented in this thesis, however, in which religion, cultural heritage and intercultural encounter are intricately interwoven.

Having addressed the descriptive and normative dimensions of culture as used here, it must be inquired whether religion is, in these circumstances, separable from culture, or merely an element within or type of culture. Returning to our initial chapter and to the reflections of Grimmer, Jackson and Wright, which sets a theoretical pedagogical context for the work, it is clear that all three theorists aim at something beyond a descriptive anthropological understanding of religion as an element of culture. Of the three, Jackson's account veers most closely in the direction of descriptive accounts of religious culture, although this is clearly with an intention of introducing young people to processes of normative meaning-making operative within a culture. Indeed, bearing in mind the critiques of Felderhof (2007) about

religious education and the possibility of religious commitment, if an account of religious education is to be considered successful either in its aims or practices, something beyond the culturally descriptive must be included. Wright's accounts, which focus on the normative and philosophical, are nonetheless situated within a culture of critical sensitivity to religious language, presuming an existing appreciation of the norms and possibilities within such a culture.

The work of Rene Girard provides a unique perspective on the relationship between sacrificial value and the wider acculturated dimensions of meaning developed above. For Girard, religion is foundational to human culture in all its forms – relationships of discipleship create a double-bind, a normative injunction to imitate which engenders a counter-injunction not to appropriate the object of one's imitation (1988 147). This mimesis creates emotionally intense clusters of shared desires and competition over the object of shared desire, which creates scandals and crises that can only be resolved through ritual violence (Girard 2004, 94). This double bind requires a double concealment, firstly concealing the object of desire, and thus concealing the sameness between disciple and model – in so doing, a culture conceals the violence inherent in itself, then conceals the fact of its concealing (Girard 1987a, 165-166). In so concealing, cultures lend a supernatural dimension to power, reliant on a 'false transcendence [that] commands obedience' (Girard 2004, 96). In illustration, Girard draws attention to the prophet Job, whose realisation of the falsehoods uttered by his companions breaks the cycle of a presumed 'infallible and... divine' pattern of popular justice categorised by recurring victimisation and violence (1987b, 15). Within merely human cultural structures, Girard argues, there is a recurring cycle of mimetic desire, leading to rivalry, crises, and being both resolved and perpetuated by scapegoating resolutions (2007, 56) which continually renew the concealment of the pattern itself. The similarity between this posing of the problem and Turner's positing of a pattern of 'breach, crisis, attempted redress... and restoration of peace' (1988, 104) illustrates the difficulties and limitations in an account of culture limited to the human and descriptive dimensions.

Religious belief, at least in the six major religious traditions which form the core of the Non-Statutory Programmes of Study for England, is open to a transcendent reality, it contains within itself the potential for continuous normative enhancement of the material conditions of a culture. A culture may be infused by religious belief, and religious belief may require a culture to mediate encounter with its truth claims, yet even where a culture is deeply infused

with religious values, there remains the possibility of a critique of the culture from within the values of the religion. An account is needed of religion which bridges the divide between an abstractly normative philosophical analysis and a mechanistic descriptivism. Such an account should be dynamic and accommodate the requirements of policymakers and practitioners in making a selection from the total available content of the domain of religious culture(s), which will facilitate the cultural, social and spiritual aims of the curriculum.

With specific reference to the data presented herein, in suggesting that two of the schools in this study serve a community of largely singular ethnic and religious identity, while the other two serve ethno-religiously divided communities, it is not implied that these identities are the sole determinants of student identity, or that there is homogeneity within any given religious or ethnic cultural identity. Two significant factors already mentioned – the almost universal academic macroculture of examination success, and the role of schools as liminal or liminoid institutions, have already been mentioned, besides the commonalities and differences arising from geographical and policy dimensions in the two geographical areas. In all of these regards, and many others, among them economic and social class divisions and the influence of media and popular culture, the macrocultural environment encroaches on the values and practices of the school. Nonetheless, it may be said that two of the schools in this study share an intention of educating students for the complexities of contemporary British society from within the meaning-making apparatus of their own cultural and religious value systems, while two seek an encounter between meaning-making systems, through which an active practice of multiculturalism exists within the school, while recognising and valuing the separate cultural domains of the communities represented within. Distinctions further emerge between the incidental nature of monoculturalism at Linden and of multiculturalism at Brockton as opposed to the intentional monoculturalism of St Athanasius and multiculturalism of Dungally. In the former cases, it can be argued that approaches to culture and multicultural understanding are subject to an overarching pragmatism, while in the latter cases approaches to culture are conceived as ends in themselves. Complexity categorises students' identity construction in a wider world, of which school is but one element, and this can be heard in the confluence of a variety of registers and repertoires in student talk.

In the interests of clarity, in what follows, 'culture' will be used to denote the broad totality of contextual factors which operate within the school environment, 'social heritage' to denote the ethnic and national traditions of the communities whose children attend the schools studied,

and ‘meaning’ to denote processes of normative value judgment made by actors within the context of the culture and social heritage.

|                              | Demographic<br>Community      | Reasons for<br>Demographic | Liminality           | Geography        |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Brockton Community<br>School | Two communities<br>in tension | Incidental                 | Liminoid             | East London      |
| Dungally College             | Two communities<br>in tension | Intended                   | Liminal/<br>Liminoid | Northern Ireland |
| Linden Girls’ School         | Monocultural                  | Incidental                 | Liminoid             | East London      |
| St Athanasius<br>Grammar     | Monocultural                  | Intended                   | Liminal              | Northern Ireland |

Fig. 9 – Comparative commonalities of schools in sample

#### c) Emotional development – meaning and sacrifice

Having dismissed psychologistic accounts of spirituality earlier as excessively bound up with a phenomenal realm both beyond empirical reach and inadequate to the normative claims of religions, it is nonetheless necessary to consider the emotional and affective dimensions of religious language. Firstly, emotional development is listed alongside the other personal dimensions of the National Curriculum aims which form the policy rationale for the focus of this study. More essentially, emotional engagement is essential to deep personal encounter with the social, spiritual and cultural values and norms explored herein. Resolving the cultural-emotional crises in a way which averts the cyclical patterns of Girard’s ‘false transcendence’ requires recourse to a realism about the possibility of a transcendent spiritual dimension, to which we will now turn. Social heritages operating as false transcendence usurp a normative dimension to meaning and value, and run a risk of subverting religious values in their very presentation. The act of differentiating between these acculturated expressions and the transcendent realities they are intended to express requires a boldness in inquiring as to the authenticity of meaning in the lives of students. Meaning making is essential to the possibility of communicating a personal realisation of the transcendent which goes beyond either the silence of mysticism and private language or the repetition of descriptive structures enshrined in heritage or culture. A descriptive account of acculturated religion will fall short. This realism is reflected, as shall be seen, in much of the pedagogy of the case study schools.

While Conroy addresses educational sites in general, the particularly *religious* character of the cultural domain of this ethnographic study demands further analysis as a meaningful dimension of the mediating effect of pedagogical encounters. At its mystical extreme, religion is an ‘anti-discourse... the deconstruction of the sign and representation’ in which the presence of the Final Reality itself renders void any attempt at signification (Baudrillard 1993, 195).

While Borgmann (1999, 31) views this imparting of final reality as putting an end to any signification and therefore any contextualised understanding of meaning, Baudrillard stresses the power of this extreme end of language as fundamental to the value and meaning of symbolism, resisting simplification and triviality (1993, 204). In Baudrillard’s account of symbolic exchange in language, a ‘symbolic rule, which has very largely been lost in the free circulation of things’ (Baudrillard and Noailles 2007, 29), associated with the sacrificial order of premodern societies, grants a value to language by its very limitation, analogous to the value accorded a commodity by its rarity. Religious discourse of the kind which characterises the religious education classroom stands in the liminal space between the ‘liberated’ discourse of subjective opinions and emotions, wherein representation floats freely of its reference, and may be reproduced freely without value (Boorstin 1961, 204) and the salience of religious experience as mysticism, wherein the signifier is put to death by the presence of its Ultimate referent (Baudrillard 1993, 214). It is this threshold between the silence of the Ultimate and the valueless void of the endless reporting of particulars (Baudrillard 1994, 18) which gives to religious education its liminal quality with regard to the holistic personal, interpersonal and transpersonal dimensions of education.

To rephrase Baudrillard’s argument, it could be suggested that all language is a liminal site, a point of encounter between the realm of words as values and words as signs – it is precisely the illusion of neo-individualism (Baudrillard 1994, 106) with its atomistic approach to meaning which flattens the power of language and meaning, rendering void the space wherein imaginary networks and self-representations may be exchanged for meaning. As Conroy’s critique of reductivist numerical and performative conceptions of education posits a genuine human engagement in which emotional and spiritual attachments are not elided out, Baudrillard sees in the order of language with meaning-as-exchange-value a truly sacrificial order. The avoidance of this sacrifice leads to expunging the question, avoidance of controversy by eliding out what is disturbing and discordant (Conroy 2004, 180), but it is also

‘entirely profane... but is, above all, sad, like everything that exhausts meaning. Lastly, it’s utterly boring’ (Baudrillard and Noailles 2007, 10).

The Baudrillardian model of language, interpreted in the light of Conroy’s work on liminality and enstrangement, suggests there is a need for managed discomfort if religious education is to be emotionally transformative. Religious language must escape the mundane, the ‘circuit of “liberated” words, gratuitously useable, circulating as exchange value’ (Baudrillard 1993, 203), resisting simplifications or totally alienated significations. Neither the language of the familiar as familiar, the facile reduction of a religious pilgrimage to the analogy of a football match, nor the language of the other presented as estranged other, the ‘religious’ as an alien, free-floating in a world of abstract spiritual values outside the cultural domain of students’ lived experience, will permit a truly transformative encounter. Religious experience makes demands – it invites the enquirer to enter a space which is at once neither the property of the atomised individual nor of the community as a structurally closed static phenomenon, a space which belongs to the Ultimate. In this context, the individual, student and teacher, is brought face to face with the incompleteness of their condition, their enstranged self. Religious language, to remain meaningful to the users of that language, remains on the threshold, the limen, of that space – this limination, this limitation is ‘neither restrictive nor penurious in this context: it is the fundamental rule of the symbolic’ (Baudrillard 1993, 204).

#### d) Spiritual development – paradox and sublimation

Drawing upon the sacrificial account of meaning advanced by Baudrillard and Girard, a frame of reference may be considered which permits the consideration of religion on its own terms. In the cases of Brockton and Dungally, the schools are notable for mediating a liminoid space for dialogue between two broadly Christian communities in tension. This may account for the ways in which classroom discourse illuminates the liminal space inside Christian theology, while avoiding the risk of relativising religious truth. This sets the observed data apart from much of the theoretical work on religious education as a vehicle for community cohesion, which has tended to centre on ‘other people’s beliefs’ (QCA 2004A). The cases of St Athanasius and Linden diverge in this respect. While St Athanasius conforms more to the traditional model of liminal experience advanced by Turner – a single community representing itself to itself within the focal lens of Catholic Christianity, reproducing itself through transformative encounter, Linden by contrast exists in a space of encounter between a student

community attached to and within its Bangladeshi Muslim heritage and a staff body which retains a critical distance from Islam and Bangladeshi culture, facilitating the encounter with the spiritual from without. The particular effects of these distinctive approaches to spirituality will be explored in subsequent chapters.

A Christian anthropology, open to the level of meaning as belonging to the Ultimate, is provided by the work of John Milbank. Drawing on the work of Blondel, for whom

Every action demands the supernatural... in every action there is present an implicit faith that a new and 'correct' synthesis will be discovered... the meaning of all synthesis is 'mediation' [and] successful action is sacrifice (Milbank 1993, 214),

Milbank posits a social theory based on *paradox*. Drawing together the aspects of liminality, sacrifice and meaning developed in the preceding account, echoes of Milbank's analogical and normative paradigm may be seen to be of relevance. Milbank sees both Marxist dialectical approaches and the postmodern emphasis on difference and discourse as bound up with similar modernist presuppositions (2009, 112), positing instead a *paradoxical* paradigm, associated with analogy, 'real relation' in the sense of normative value as discussed above, bearing many similarities to Byrne's theological realism within the intersubjective domain, giving rise to a similar philosophical anthropology to Conroy's conception of the enstranged self, with its acceptance without fatalism of the paradox of the irreconcilability of self and Ultimate.

Returning to the understanding of spirituality advanced in chapter 3, an understanding of spiritual reasoning as concerned with a life open to the ultimate may be advanced. Within the context of Christianity, Milbank advances an account of a 'pregnant' Christianity, drawing on Newman's idea of the development of doctrine, and presenting Christianity not as a culture to be transmitted but as a transformative power (2009, 116). This perspective draws on foundational texts in the Christian narrative, such as the parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31) and the leaven (Matthew 13:33) – '[t]herefore every scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like to a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure new things and old' (Matthew 13:52). It is to this ongoing exploration of the Ultimate dimension of Christianity which Newman alludes in stating that 'opinion, while a raw material, is called philosophy or scholasticism; when a rejected refuse, it is called heresy' (1989, 187). While Milbank associates this dimension of ongoing sacrifice, synthesis and sublimation of meanings

to an overriding Christian faith perspective, it can be seen to have its parallels in other faiths, and even in secular areas of life:

A faith is not primarily a factual belief, the acceptance of a few extra propositions like ‘God exists’ or ‘there will be a revolution’. It is rather the sense of having one’s place within a whole greater than oneself, one whose larger aims so enclose one’s own and give them point that sacrifice for it may be entirely proper... This kind of faith is plainly something widespread and very important in our lives. It need not be formalized at all. People, in fact, often do not notice that they have it until whatever they have faith in – perhaps their culture or their occupation – is threatened (Midgley 2002, 16).

Capitalism functions inherently, not as private egotism and greed but almost as a kind of religion – profit matters, things must expand, things must develop, and even if we all go to hell it has to reproduce itself (Žižek on Al Jazeera 2010).

These secular incarnations of faith of course serve as reminders of the possibility, as Girard’s work draws attention to, of false transcendence in spiritual education. Milbank’s account of paradox adds to the liminal and sacrificial approaches to meaning already addressed an important dimension of realism about the possibility of the Ultimate. The conception of a sacrificial language advanced by Baudrillard, which sees language value as akin to commodity value, Milbank labels ‘sacrificial positivism’ wherein the values of exchange between individual and society are predefined by material social conditions (1993, 124), raising the spectre of a potential undifferentiated sacrificial deference to the false transcendence of community. In Baudrillard’s symbolic exchange objects are accorded value only in their symbolic construction as gift (Milbank 1993, 186) whereas for Milbank a gift has both its ‘thing aspect’ and ‘sign aspect’ (Milbank 2008, 130).

While taking nothing away from the sign aspect as theorised by Baudrillard, this conception of gift recognises, drawing on a Christian theology of the fall, that just as facts in themselves may become devoid of meaning and significance, so also signs themselves within the signifiatory system of a cultural domain may ‘seem deficient in reality’ (Milbank 2008, 3). Milbank’s account of paradox, therefore, recognises in the relation between object and analogy, gift-as-thing and gift-as-sign, an ontology of difference which is analogical rather than alienating (Milbank 1993, 279), noting that ‘Christianity actually promotes *preferential* love, rather than



a generalized respect for all others in their otherness' (Milbank 2009, 122). In the conception of paradox advanced by Milbank, preferential love mediates the recognition of difference, otherness, incompleteness, enstrangement, 'fallenness' without giving way to a hopeless nihilism. This preferential love ties in with a personalistic anthropology, and adds a spiritual dimension to the holistic picture of change, volition and engagement with the other advanced above.

#### e) Summary

An ethnographic methodology has been expounded which seeks to understand the intersubjective constructions not only of rich description but also of meaning in the context of four schools, four critical sites of enquiry. Description alone will not suffice. Within this methodology, attention is paid to language and to context, and within context to complex factors of place, imagination and concealment as they impact upon meaning. Having established an overall ethnographic paradigm, data has been carefully selected based on specific themes, commonalities and differences, illustrating both breadth and depth in an enquiry into the schools in question. The themes which emerge from this data, as shall now be explored, lend themselves to the deployment of a range of analytical frameworks concerned with the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of young people. Drawing upon the work of Turner on rites of passage, a liminal model was proposed and then critiqued, making use of Conroy's concept of *enstrangement*, suggesting that a merely dialectical picture between individual and society is incomplete with regard to religious and spiritual development. In explicating this concept, the ideas of Baudrillard, Girard and Milbank on paradox, negation and sacrifice prove to be significant, furnishing an account of encounter as not only concerned with social 'others' but with the other within, what Conroy terms the estranged self, and with the transcendent Other. These encounters cannot be understood as four separate aims of the curriculum, rather it is argued here a truly transformative encounter needs to broker an internal emotional and spiritual encounter as well as an interpersonal social encounter, all of which takes place either within the space of lived culture or in the liminal space between cultures, but in a way which students can make sense of in the practical knowledges of lived experience in order for encounter to have meaning.

While Conroy's work addresses educational encounters in general, the particular religious character of the language in the ethnographic sites requires further analysis as a significant

dimension of the liminal encounter observed therein. The work of Baudrillard on language and value is of particular significance – Baudrillard’s spaces for symbolic exchange are points of sacrificial exchange, where a personal gift bearing a non-market value is offered up – this is not compatible with a pedagogy of the accumulation of knowledge alone – something more personal is required: ‘[m]en “know” less or more’ in this regard ‘as a function of the quality of their relationships with other men. Gnosis, “deep knowledge”, is highly characteristic of liminality’ (Turner 1974, 258). A further dimension to this sacrificial exchange is provided by Girard’s distinction between true and false transcendence – a person may sacrifice for many purposes, but a genuine normative distinction must be made between transpersonal transformational encounters and those which merely subjugate the individual to socio-cultural norms. Milbank’s realism about the relation between persons and the Ultimate further allows the construction of an account of spirituality in which the place of the liminal encounter is envisioned not merely as exchange but as transformation, pregnant with possibility. It is precisely such transformation that we see enacted in the ethnographic sites at their best presented in the final section. How these concepts are embodied in the observed encounter in the classroom and what this can tell us about models of effective practice in religious education are the focus of the final part of the thesis.

## Chapter 8: The Cultural Domain: Place and Displacement

In order to broker the necessary environment for the kind of encounters described above, which enable engagement of the whole person with inter- intra- and trans-personal openness and transformation (Lealman 1996), a high trust environment must exist within the school, and within religious education in particular. The liminal encounter which excavates the roots of deeply held commitment, in teacher as much as in student, is reflected in a range of pedagogies in the schools in this study. This approach stands in defiance of a dominant world-view of individualistic relativism which prevails in much of contemporary British schooling. It is precisely because students at these schools are not the free-floating particles envisioned by global consumer capitalism and postmodern theorists (Baudrillard 1993) that such liminal encounters may be enacted to positive effect, and it is only because of the methodological sensitivities of the model developed above that the factors which enable this enactment may be excavated in the chapters which follow. Nonetheless, the theme of examination performativity as representing at times a conflicting value system, interjects itself and demands a response on a number of levels.

At the outset, the schools in this study could be identified as sites of success, academically successful despite contexts of historically marginalised communities, fragmentation and change in the wider culture, and multiple deprivations. It would be inappropriate to limit the causes or measures of their success to a merely performative academic level, however, as even the initial overview of school context and ethos above has demonstrated. What the forthcoming analysis illustrates is not a singular model which can be termed ‘liminal education’, ‘liminal pedagogy’ or ‘liminal schooling’, and it is not a pedagogy of grand epiphanies – the cultural conditions of the school and wider community contexts preclude such an approach. Rather, what is demonstrated is that the quiet conviction of the teachers and their determination to broker a depth and authenticity of encounter in the religious education classroom opens up the possibility of an ongoing and potentially deepening pedagogy of encounters with the socially and spiritually unfamiliar in a context which demands a reaction not of final resolution but of reciprocal offering of self in the seeking of understanding at a personal level. At their best, such approaches combine intersubjective encounter with the other with a deep personal-transformative encounter with transcendence, evidencing the possibility of escaping the false dichotomies in religious education’s aims, whether between content and

personal engagement, plurality and truth, or between examination success and the wider spiritual and social dimensions, which were subject to critique in the first part of the thesis. Indeed, in keeping with Milbank's theological anthropology of paradox (1993), it may be argued that one is only found along with the other in the best observed practices. Even in these cases, however, inconsistencies and flaws appear, rendering the schools in this study, as any organisation understood in its real-world context, far from exemplary or ideal, although nonetheless inspirational, perhaps more so for their imperfection. Should these encounters fail to cohere with the cultural domain of lived experience among students, however, the potential for a genuine critical engagement with the truth claims of religion risks being divorced from the social, cultural, emotional and spiritual development of students (Tomlinson & Engelke 2006), resulting in the encounters above being reduced to a form of 'therapeutic education' (Ecclestone & Hayes 2008). Enquiring as to the impact of these transformative encounters in the classroom requires the verification of students' own intersubjectively constructed representations, visual and verbal.

Excavating a sense of the cultural domains, the totality of concepts which define the field of education (Borgatti 1999), culture and social relations within the intersubjective constructions of the school, requires an holistic approach to the structures and actors within the school. Beginning with the formal pronouncements of management, exterior public-facing pronouncements present unique ambiguities, reflecting the foundational anxieties uncovered in chapter 4. While the unique values and ethos which are of foundational purpose to Dungally and St Athanasius Grammar are evident in foundational documents, and in the physical environment, Linden Girls School's policy documents, for example, make scant mention of Islam or Bangladeshi heritage, the only references being in the school's Community Cohesion Policy, which notes 'we are keen that the local community is present at all levels within the school and work with a large number of Bengali teachers, support staff and Governors' [B\*Linden\*1.4] and a single line in the school's Spiritual, Social, Moral and Cultural Development Policy to the effect that Linden 'is an inclusive school; however, more than 90% of its pupils would describe themselves as Bangladeshi and/or Muslim' [B\*Linden\*1.4]. The salience of Bengali and Muslim themes in the school's policies and practices is conspicuous by its absence. This elision allows a different discourse of 'community cohesion' to be foregrounded at a managerial level:

By community cohesion, we mean working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people's backgrounds, religions and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community. [B\*Linden\*1.4]

Much of what is foregrounded here verifies the rhetorical moves explored in chapters 3 and 4 in which particularity is elided in favour of broad normative claims. In its foregrounding of the language of national policy, it is possible to locate the cultural domain of Linden's leadership clearly within a generic domain of school management language, undifferentiated by local culture, subsuming local difference within a commitment to broad performative entailments.

In contradistinction, Irish identity is foregrounded at St Athanasius Grammar, with Irish language compulsory up to Year 10 and plans to establish Irish medium education in the coming years. The school's relationship to academic attainment nonetheless remains an overriding priority. While the Catholic Church in Northern Ireland has formally declared an interest in abolishing academic selection in its schools, the governors of St Athanasius have decided to retain selection, prompting confrontation with neighbouring Catholic schools. While the Church hierarchy, as the owners of the site, have the ability to force a change in this regard, their acquiescence in this matter is represented by school managers as a pragmatic recognition that Catholic parents may favour selective education in the Controlled sector over comprehensive education in a faith school environment. The cultural domain may be seen to be one of intersecting particularity and acquiescence within broader cultural normativity in the educational system.

Borgatti defines salience in cultural domain analysis as a measure of how often a particular item in the domain is mentioned and how prominent it is in lists of the domain (1999; 23). In considering the salience of items in the domain of school values and ethos, it is imperative to examine the frequency with which they are invoked and by whom, and the levels to which teachers and students are exposed to the values they entail. The high salience given to items associated with all three of the value terms of Catholicism, Irish heritage and academic success at St Athanasius Grammar by the school's management, for example, is illustrated in the architecture of the school – the entrance hall of which features large prominent statues of

the Virgin Mary and the school's patron saint on high plinths, a cabinet displaying trophies for Gaelic sports and a prominently displayed newspaper cutting showing the school's high ranking for academic performance. Such items form an aspect of the physical environment, conditioning the visual culture of the school (Pink 2007), and present a higher salience to internal perceptions of the domain than formal policy documents produced for an external audience. Religious identity has a high salience within this visual culture, with frequent references to religious education, religious charity appeals and religious observance in wall displays, the presence of a crucifix in all classrooms, as well as in the staffroom and assembly halls, and large wall murals depicting the nuns and the school's religious foundation.

Excavating the explicit entailments of managerial values and discourse illuminates the root cause of the difficulty in classifying Linden and Dungally within the liminal/liminoid distinction drawn in the previous chapter. While the religio-cultural domain at Linden is *de facto* monoglot with regard to the student population, Linden's managers remain committed to a form of official pluralism signified by the entailments of 'community cohesion' (DCLG 2007). In contrast, while Dungally's population is quite deliberately drawn from a highly diverse catchment, Dungally's commitment to inter-community engagement proceeds from within a domain of hospitality internal to the institution's explicit Christian commitments.

The unique role of Dungally College as a liminal institution (Conroy 2004), mediating conflict as a foundational value, is reflected in the school's public policies and documents, and also in the physical environment. On one of my early visits, I noted:

In the Dungally College reception there are two large poster boards, 3ft wide by 8ft high, of newspaper clippings relating to the College itself, from its founding 30 years ago to the present day, including awards, high profile visitors, controversies and famous former pupils. The school is part of the 'cross of nails' fellowship with Coventry, and a cross of nails is in a display case near the reception. A number of banners advertise a reading campaign and various groups to which the school belongs. There is a plain cross with a cloth draped across it in the colour of the liturgical season.  
[B(&C)\*Dungally\*1.4]

The role of media in the school, and the gatekeeping structures which allow schools to make permanent the normally transient news media, constructing a collective self-image by displacing media stories from their journalistic norms into the evaluative domain of the school

is itself a significant theme in the data, and is discussed elsewhere (Lundie 2011). In Dungally's case, more integration may be observed between the school's explicit mission and values in brokering engagement between communities in conflict and the school's negotiation of its' public place in the wider educational culture than was observed in the conspicuous divide in Linden's case. In an interview with me, one of the senior managers remarked on the school's success criteria:

It would be lovely to think that many of our parents send their children here because it's an integrated school. I firmly believe that the majority of people would send their children to our school because it's a successful school, it gets good marks. It can keep children who may have been deemed a failure by the 11+ system and turn them into successful learners, to high achievers... that's the law of the jungle, that's why parents would send their children to our school and then secondly, yes it's an integrated school. I want my children to mix with Catholics or Protestants and so on.

[B\*Dungally\*1.4]

These less formal enumerations of the cultural domain give the opportunity for unstructured lists of the items in the cultural domain of religious education. Lists can be gleaned from conversations with teachers and senior management. In many of these encounters, the language of examination and performativity is presented as forming the familiar, salient, dominant element of education, presented as a naturalistic given, 'the law of the jungle', with the liminal often making itself evident in intense and often violent ways, sublimated at times by the professionalism of the teachers, at times in ways which even suggest a language of divine intervention. The senior manager at Dungally quoted above, for example, relates to me an incident during the Troubles, when he, unusually, checked in at reception before leaving for work, and in so doing avoided falling prey to a car-bomb. Such extreme incidents frame the mythos and ethos of the cultural domain (Milbank 2008), reminding teachers of the foundational realities of the radical rarity of their commitment to inter- and trans-personal encounters in the world outside the school gates.

Perhaps due to the unique status of Northern Ireland remarked upon earlier as a small polity in which personal and communal connections carry more significance, this discourse of personal agency is more evident at both Dungally and St Athanasius. On my first day at St Athanasius, Mr Donnal, the Headteacher, takes me on a tour of the catchment, after which I note:

- it is a large area, mostly wealthy, the towns are mostly Catholic, I am told, while the villages and farms are mostly Protestant owned, a remnant, Mr Donnal tells me, of the plantations. Tricolors are visible in towns, with occasional pro-IRA insignia on walls. Mr Donnal's nationalism and feel for division in the area is tempered and reasoned, but clearly evident. At lunch in a country club with him, I observe his interaction with a teacher from one of the school's feeder primaries, a chance meeting. During this interaction, he agrees to accept a pupil with a borderline 11+ result and to pray for a dying pupil at the primary school, after which he says to me 'that's Catholic education right there' of his personal approach to these issues... Mr Donnal gives me a gift of a bottle of holy water distributed by the Legion of Mary [B\*St Athanasius\*1.1]

And on my first morning at the school I note:

Mr Donnal begins [the staff briefing] with the sign of the cross and a prayer. He holds up a copy of 'Alive' (April 2009, p10) and talks about the threat posed by integrated education, in a polemical style he says to the staff body that it was Catholic schools that 'set us on the right path' in the first place, and reminds them of the need to defend Catholic education... Mr Wexford, the husband of [the head of religious education] is an Irish [language] teacher, he tells me that Citizenship is taking up much of the traditional domain of religious education, i.e. issues of tolerance and discrimination. [B\*St Athanasius\*1.4]

These encounters, both on the first day of the ethnography, seek to establish my role as an 'insider' in a particular cultural domain (Pole & Morrison 2003). The gift of holy water illustrating an awareness of a shared faith commitment, establishes my place on the inside of the religious and cultural practices of this community, a place which must be borne in mind in all subsequent analysis. From within this position, assertions about the cultural domain need to be heavily circumscribed and qualified, as no claim was ever advanced as to 'objectivity' in observation, but always of intersubjective understanding of meaning, the notion of an 'insider' perspective need not make the data reported with regard to St Athanasius Grammar any less meaningful than in other domains such as Linden in which I felt more of an outsider, provided an appreciation of context remains foregrounded.

That lessons and staff briefings at St Athanasius both begin in a similar manner with prayer illustrates an apparent singularity of narrative, establishing the whole school as the domain of



the religious. Shared religious and moral values guide the normative claims of the school as a social institution – illustrated by Mr Donnal’s alluding to a ‘right path’, tacitly appropriating for his own sector anti-sectarian aims advanced by proponents of integrated education. This does not make either encounter any less of a social performance, but suggests that the performative selves or personae adopted by teachers are singular with regard to religion in the domain of the school, not, as occasionally observed elsewhere, a duality between student-facing and staff-facing. In the context of St Athanasius, there is no ‘outside’ to the realm of Catholic culture within the cultural domain of the school – this is true in other lessons besides religious education, which almost invariably open in prayer.

The contrast between Fig. 10 and Fig. 11 below demonstrates the sense of place from which students’ speak of their community. In the case of Fig. 10, Linden’s Year 7 scheme of work encourages students to locate their lived experience within a story of the Bangladeshi community as situated within a wider history of immigration, Huguenot, Irish and Jewish. This creates a very different sense of place within which to situate academic, religious and heritage values. While in many ways the experience of place at Linden and St Athanasius rests similarly comfortably within a shared environment for meaning making, the effect of shared strong religious and cultural attachments at St Athanasius is presented as an end in itself, while this is in many ways subordinated to a broader community cohesion agenda in the Linden case.

In contrast, Fig. 11, a Year 8 geography project, requires a complex process for the excavation of meaning. The poster represents a collective construction of meaning-making (Bornstein 2006, Pink 2007), being the work of a group of students, it presents in microcosm the processes of collective meaning-making, offering a rich contextualisation of the visual culture of St Athanasius’ students. Multiple layers of expectation colour the construction of this work – firstly, the task is undertaken, performed or fabricated as part of a school project, to demonstrate particular learning objectives, students are thus acting as gatekeepers, mediating their knowledge of their local community to the school, and their knowledge of school learning objectives to their interpreted awareness of their locality. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that photographers always have a preconceived image in mind of the photograph they wish to take and the meaning they wish to capture before the image is created (Pink 2007, 78), and so the source is further mediated as a selection from the various possible acts of mediation I experienced during the ethnography. Furthermore, much of the content of

the poster is gathered from the internet, mediating the students' ideas through selections from the culture of online media and the existing constructions of local identity provided by others.

The immanence and importance of the religious domain to student experience of their wider community is present here in the form of St Bridget's Church and Mother Angelina Teresa – the largest pictures in this presentation – further insight into the ways religious understandings (or misunderstandings) are mediated is provided by the bottom-right portion of the text, which mistakenly conflates the two, labelling Mother Angelina (Bridget McCloy) 'Saint Bridget'.

Other aspects of the community represented include sports and natural features. A naive reading of this poster would suggest that religious features of the environment are of primary importance to Brocagh's residents. The context of the source, however, permits alternative readings, such as the effects of students' apperception of the salience of values most prominently stressed within the school, stressing a presumed continuity between lived local experiences, the Catholic faith and Irish identity. Furthermore, the linguistic content of the source suggests familiarity with a range of practices within the school, represented through such media as drawing, acrostic poetry, historical and geographical texts, the use of information technology. Further, the source is a work of mediation between a project-based pedagogical paradigm prevalent in primary schooling and single-subject work, the focus and conventions of which begin to further predominate in subsequent school years. Students have already become astute mediators of data and judges of audience, recognising the salience of faith and heritage to the aims and practices which percolate the fabric of the school from its avowed values. The visual culture suggested by work such as Fig. 11 is one in which the importance of religious and heritage values is clearly communicated to students. It does not follow, however, that such a conception of religion encourages a genuine transformative engagement with transcendent values beyond an acculturation to heritage and tradition. As the next chapter will demonstrate, merely enunciating a cultural domain does not necessarily open up liminal spaces for students to negotiate a sense of meaning in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural realms.

Bearing in mind the importance of absence (Battaglia 1997), a further thread can be gathered from this visual source. The Brockagh represented here only has one church, only a Gaelic sports team, the 'Emmetts', the name and prominence of which passes without comment from students or teacher. An insight into a sense of 'place' as lived student experience is afforded

by this, as well as by an observation I made outside of the cultural gatekeeping structures of the school:

On my last day... I did see St Athanasius students in the same place as students from other schools, at the bus station. Students from a school with red uniforms stood in two separate groups, one group of white students speaking English and one group of black students speaking another language I couldn't identify, they did not mix with each other or with the St Athanasius students. There were a smaller number of students in other uniforms. One girl in a red uniform crosses herself when an ambulance passes. When most of the St Athanasius students have left, the last girl in a St Athanasius uniform moves to stand around the corner from the other young people, then moves even further away when some of the black girls walk by her. [I\*St Athanasius\*1.1]

Such observations of the broader context expose what is absent in the cultural domain of St Athanasius, what is excluded by choice or chance. In Fig. 11 the items in photographs are 'transformed because the conditions in which they are viewed are different' (Morphy and Banks 1997, 16), separated from the world of experienced reality, they become symbols of a multiply mediated encounter between the domain of lived cultural heritage and the domain of the classroom. The pedagogical task sets the bounds for what places are valued, and the valuing of places adds to the salience of dominant values. Again such values perpetuate a mimesis of values ordered towards a mono-communal cohesion, a liminal rather than a liminoid encounter, the cohesion of a Catholic Ireland whose symbols (another RE teacher who also teaches history has a copy of the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic on her classroom wall) predominate without challenge. In this context, the encounter observed above perhaps suggests a failure of meaning-making with regard to the lived experiences of the students, a theme which opens up for deeper exploration in Chapter 10.

A genuinely multimodal analysis of the sense of 'place' communicated to students by the school environment, place not merely as observed but also as acculturated, is not exhausted by a photographic record of the geography and iconography of the school. Nonetheless, this is of significance – the visible disconnect between the suburban geographical location of Dungally college, photographed in Fig. 16 and the communities which are the focus of much of the school's curriculum, such as presented in a student's work in Fig. 17. Much of the discussion I have with teachers, chaplains and management in the school focuses on the peace lines in

West Belfast, illustrating a sense of place and culture distinct from the lived experience of geographical place (Gerhart 2003). Turning to classroom language, while the verbal content of what is communicated is foremost and cannot be ignored, hidden within the linguistic encounter are a range of meaning making devices which offer further elucidation of the salience of particular values within the cultural domain, the 'place' as experienced by students.

The classroom ethnography in fact draws attention to some very important factors in evaluating the genuine effectiveness of religious education, although these are often in places and spaces which may be considered peripheral to more quantitative and performative measures. In St Athanasius and Linden, for example, a beneficial symbiosis is presumed to operate between the high levels of religious commitment present in the feeder community and success in religious education examinations, as well as between strong religious values and the cultural valuing of academic success more generally. Mr Cantle explicitly states that academic success in this regard is his leading priority, offering students from an area of deprivation enhanced chances of success in further and higher education and the social mobility which that entails, this in no wise occludes the practice of a religious education aimed at engaging students in spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

At St Athanasius, examination success is held up by teachers and students together as being a good of particular salience and a shared value, to the extent that the school's leadership is willing to provoke confrontation (a confrontation more in theory than in practice) with the Church hierarchy to retain academic selection to this end. Classroom discussion frequently turns to examination related themes and competitive approaches to examination technique are evident, as demonstrated in Fig. 14. As well as acting as a gatekeeper to certain religious truths and values, the St Athanasius religious education teachers also function as seers with regard to the seemingly transcendent significance of examinations. Of course it is important to remember that here examination success is closely identified with certain virtues such as self-fulfilment, achievement, the realisation of talents; virtues that are imbued with religious significance. Hence within the shared and deeply acculturated space of faith and heritage with its function of meaning making and community reinforcement, the various actors appear capable of moving easily and comfortably within this cultural domain, examination success interposes its seemingly absolute value; a value which depends upon an obvious and disruptive pattern of mimetic rivalry and mimetic desire (Girard 2004) visually represented in

the wall display, shared ‘goals’ and ‘targets’. These external drivers of success often drive and underpin students’ motivation in ways that are, on one interpretation, potentially antithetical to the normative values of the cultural domains of faith or heritage; humility, just re-distribution, fellowship and so forth. However, within this apparently contradictory world, the teacher presents her authority as underpinned by ‘sight’; that is her direct experience and apprehension of the realm of examination processes and its form and structure including marking, tactics and techniques. But this insight is, for the teacher, cast within another realm, another cultural domain, in which a series of values hold which are not self-evident to students – much of the classroom discourse recorded from Year 11 onwards at St Athanasius concerns the bringing of students into this realm, while at the same time retaining the mimetic distance between teacher and student.

The values on which the examination system is predicated are not themselves self-evident to all students. In an examination revision lesson at Brockton, for example, the teacher is involved in sublimating the presumed values of many students (whose initial suggestions belie a bibliocentrist intuition about what religious education ought to value) into the normative and epistemic commitments which underpin the examination system:

Mr Cantle asks his class what they need to write in answering a question on animal rights:

Teya: “The Bible”

John: “quoting Genesis 1:26”

Jake: “What the rest of the Bible says about it?”

Mr Cantle's points are different entirely, “What do you think? I encourage you to make that answer as complex as you can... is your answer logical, coherent, complex...” He writes on the board:

“How should we interpret Genesis 1:26 -> what about the rest of the Bible

What do you think.

Why might people disagree with you.

What do religious people believe? Why?

Conclusion”

The distance between students’ self-assessment of the requisite knowledge and the entirely different linguistic and conceptual lens which Mr Cantle trains upon the same object of study, driven by the examination requirements, is a mimetic gulf which requires great sensitivity if both student and teacher discourse are to be respected. The exploration of such gulfs and points of encounter between divergent systems of meaning making forms the focus of the next chapter.

The cultural domain of religious education in each school, as excavated in the above chapter, is a broad sense of ‘place’, not only the physical location of religious education within the school, but the place as standpoint from which teacher and student address one another as object and the object of study, the religious truth claims, concepts and phenomena. There is no such thing as an Archimedean point of total neutrality which can be conceived of as the place for a value-neutral common schooling. By recognizing the objects which form the cultural domain, the furnishings of the place in which religious education takes place, we may not be able to move the earth, but teachers and students may still find a space within which to move into contact with one another’s’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural values, with religious education forming a place of encounter, where the other inhabits the same space of meaning making.



Fig. 10 [B\*Linden\*1.3] above,

Fig. 11 [E\*St Athanasius\*4.3] below

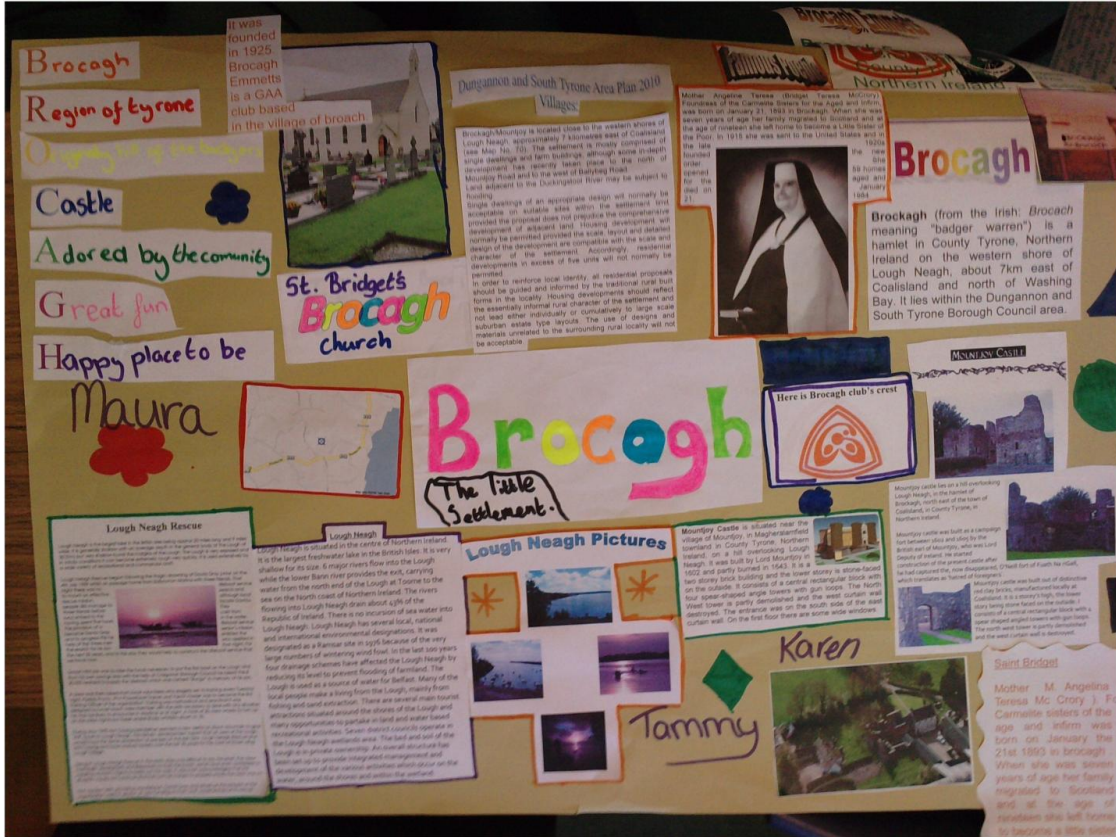






Fig. 12 [B\*Dungally\*1.1]



Fig. 13 [I&J\*Dungally\*4.3]



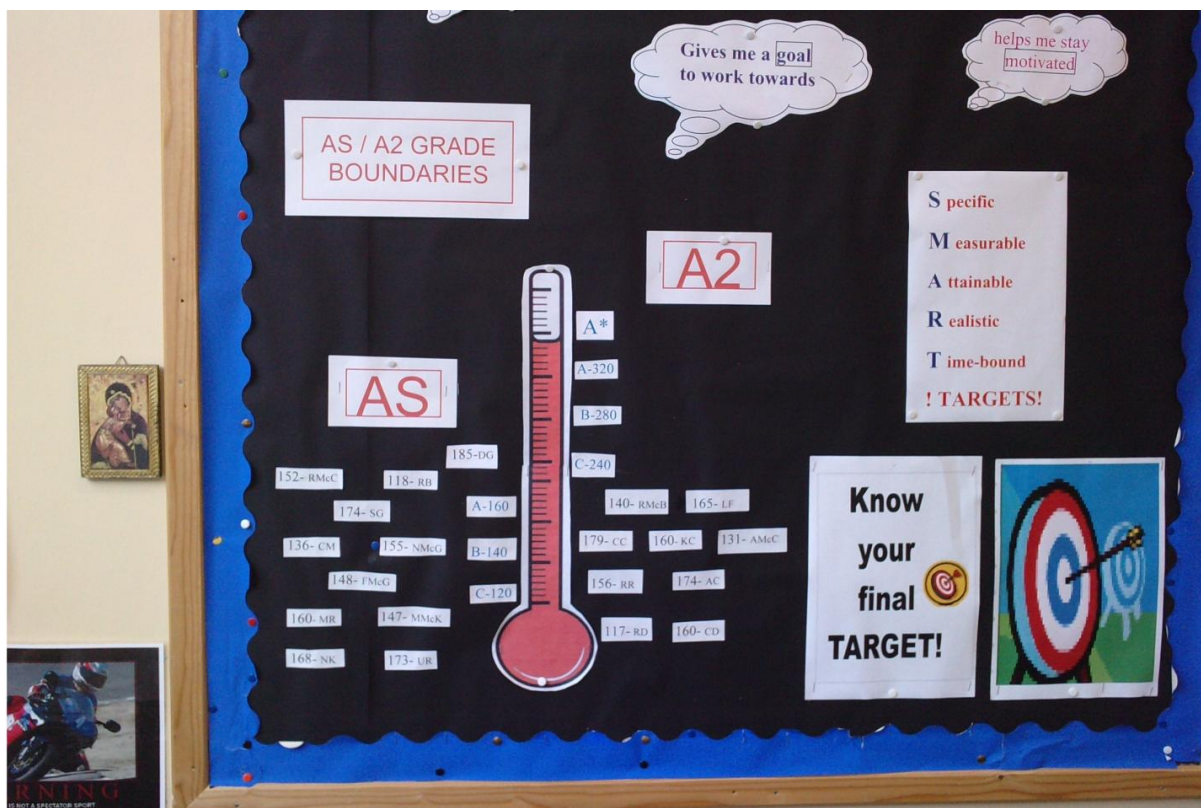


Fig. 14 [B\*St Athanasius\*1.3]

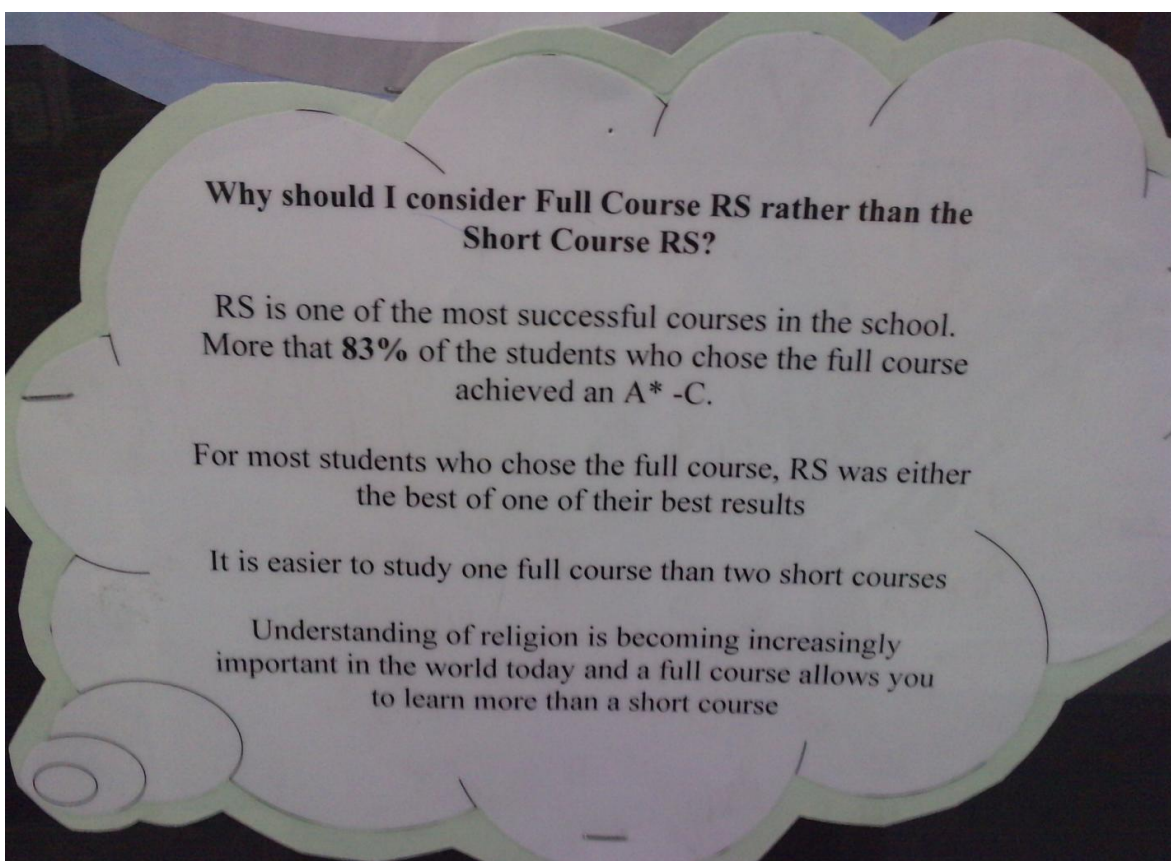


Fig. 15 [B\*Linden\*1.3]





Fig. 16 [B\*Brockton\*1.3]

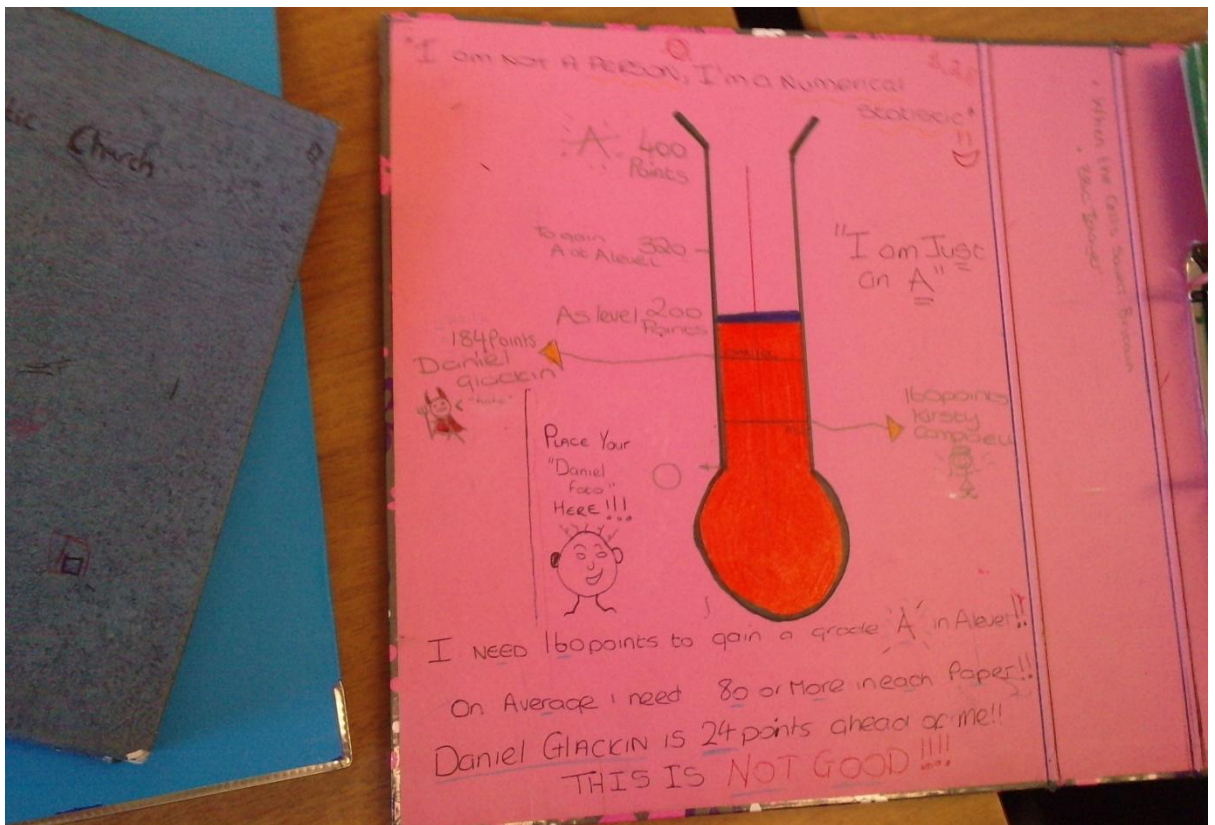


Fig. 17 [B\*St Athanasius\*4.3]

## Chapter 9: Teacher Identity, Commitment and Openness

Every teacher knows the feeling of moments of spontaneous connection and pedagogical success. While much of Turner's conception of *communitas* overlooks the intricacies of intersubjective complexity, the teacher can empathise with Turner's description here of:

Spontaneous *communitas*... 'a direct immediate and total confrontation of human identities,' a deep rather than intense style of personal interaction. 'It has something "magical" about it. Subjectively there is in it a feeling of endless power.' Is there any of us who has not known this moment when compatible people – friends, congeners – obtain a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level, when they feel that all problems, not just their problems, could be resolved, whether emotional or cognitive, if only the group which is felt (in the first person) as 'essential us' could sustain its intersubjective illumination. This illumination may succumb to the dry light of next day's disjunction... But when the mood, style, or 'fit' of spontaneous *communitas* is upon us, we place a high value on personal honesty, openness, and lack of pretensions or pretentiousness. (Turner 1982, 47-48)

At the outset, a particular conception of the impact of religious education, which was common to the participants in the Delphi process and to many teachers, as well as to many lay people's understanding of the subject's impact (although not, to the best of my recollection, expressed by any of the teachers at the four schools studied here) was discounted. The '40 year-old fallacy', which suggests that the impact of religious education on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is best measured not at the end of formal schooling, but by the normative and affective values held by former students at some point later in life, e.g. when they are 40 years old (e.g. Egan 1988). Evidence presented below, and the liminal and transformative paradigm to which it alludes, suggests that it is the spontaneous illumination of moments, not the passage of decades, which proves most significant. Indeed the totality of transcripts presented in these three chapters, played end to end in real time, would likely last under 10 minutes. While the dangers of overly rigid performative measures of pre-defined expectations have been explored in the policy discussions above, to pursue the 40 year-old fallacy is to obscure entirely the reasonable claim that we attach to measurable outcomes from religious education, and seems to lack validity as a model of effectiveness.

Perceived decreases in the levels of religious knowledge are presented to me by staff at Linden and St Athanasius schools as a symptom of the decrease of religious terms within the broader cultural domain inhabited by students. At St Athanasius Grammar, the social changes to which this decline is attributed are alluded to above, and their symptoms, as reported in teachers' conversation, include concerns that students no longer know traditional Catholic prayers such as the Hail Mary or Memorare. These concerns suggest a thematic similarity to Linden, but in a very different constructed sense of place, a very different cultural domain. It may be argued that the imagined ideal place of Linden's staff and students is in a state of contestation, caught between different ideals, different ends. In contrast, the imagined ideal place of Mr Donnal, his staff, his students, and the wider Catholic community which supports the school appears more homogenous, and yet a clear mimetic gulf exists between ideal and reality, as teacher comments illustrate.

Returning to the salient performative features of the educational culture in its normal state, a focus group with religious education teachers at Linden focuses on criticality, examinations and attainment targets until one teacher states: 'they seem to have a skewed view of Islam and what they think they know about it – isn't necessarily what the religion teaches about it' – when questioned on this further, this statement yields a depth of understanding of the aims of religious education, aims which are largely excised from classroom discourse and entirely absent from policy:

A – Yes, we've talked about this at length before, haven't we? ....I mean I've been here, however many years I've been here...and the level of knowledge and understanding of Islam has got less and less and less and less...to the point that the number of misconceptions and the amount of misinformation, actually not just misconceptions, misinformation that you have to sort out before you start is... I'm quite worried about it actually from the point of the community... when you talk to parents about it they almost say, 'well, what do you expect? Because, actually who taught me?' Who taught parents? Who taught them? You get some of the people who are teaching in the community maybe able to teach them how to recite the Koran... no idea what those words meant... some of them could actually recognise the letters from the calligraphy and say what the word meant, which was very interesting but that was as far as you could get. Single words, wasn't it? And that's the book that they would

profess to be the guide to their lives and yet they don't know what it means. And that's quite alarming actually. And they come to Ramadan...why are you fasting?

B – 'For the poor'.

A – For the poor. Well yes, ok that's about number 6 down the list, you know. Self control. What's that? ... you mustn't lose the focus on the knowledge and understanding is very important because they've got such a void.

C – It's also... you know when you told them well this is what the Koran says, or this is what this religion says and they'll go, '*really?! Wow!*' That's nice. That feels quite nice. ...

D – And I do... try to get them to realise that actually there is nothing in... [the Koran] that tells you how many times a day you pray, there's nothing in there that tells you what the movements are...all the things you actually think you want to know. I do that to try and debunk really what the Koran gives you, as opposed to what they think.

[The conversation returns to pedagogy, comparative approaches to the teaching of Christianity and Islam, and the effect of changes to A-Level.]

A – ...you ended up with a community who put religion right at the very top of the ladder, but actually if you ask them to rate on a scale of 1-10 how confident they are about what they know about their religion, they put it down in the bottom three. So, don't know much about it but it's the most important thing in my life.

E – As far as promoting cohesion though we're not really in a position to answer that given that we...it's a mono-cultural school. [B(&A&E)\*Linden\*2.1]

Importantly, and in contrast both to its own policy documents and to Dungally with its explicit outworking of hospitality from within the religious traditions of its students, teachers represent community cohesion as something which cannot happen in a 'mono-cultural' environment – this points to a fundamental disjunction in the interpretation of community cohesion as understood by the teachers and by formal policy documents alluded to above.

This data introduces several key items to the cultural domain – a community with high levels of religious commitment but low levels of knowledge, worries about a community which

includes ignorant parents, madrassas that only teach Koran recitation, and, as a teacher mentioned to me elsewhere in the data, ‘an uncle who has some unhelpful views on jihad’. These characters, absent from the scene during the data gathering process, populate the cultural domain for Linden’s religious education teachers, a cultural ‘void’ of knowledge or even ‘misinformation’ that requires ‘sorting out’, ‘debunking’, bearing affinity with the work of Conroy and Davis (2008) on religious illiteracy. The perception of such a domain colours a sense of the imagined place in which Linden’s teachers operate, a place which is unrecognisable from official policy pronouncements, and difficult to locate, as we shall see, in student perceptions.

The data presented above, as well as conveying a linguistic content, also constitutes a social performance. This is a rehearsed performance, one which has been talked through by the same participants ‘at length before’, it is a performance of mutual reassurance and reinforcement, rhetorical questions: ‘single words, wasn’t it’ and repetition intensify and reiterate mutually agreed understandings, creating a mimetic clustering (Girard 2004, 94) similar to that observed during the Delphi discussions. In the course of the performance, teachers take upon themselves the roles of their interlocutors: ‘for the poor’, ‘who taught me?’ ‘I don’t know much about it but it’s the most important thing in my life’, mediating control over the listener’s experience of the wider community as context and domain and at the same time ritually recreating a collective personality against which to define themselves (Girard 1988). This performance sets a scene, placing objects and characters in the set in which religious education is played out at Linden Girls School. This oppositional social performance, reliant on the explicit sharing of knowledge of shared values, may be contrasted to a more ambient knowledge of values which pervades the cultural performances observed at St Athanasius. No comparable evidence can be presented of the performed enunciation of St Athanasius’ place in its wider cultural domain, with the possible exception of liturgical prayer, yet the values which present themselves in the cultural domain of the school are no weaker, no less evident, indeed at times appear all-pervasive.

At Linden, this reinforcement has the effect of a collective ‘othering’ of the wider Bangladeshi and student community as against the teacher community, of defining the critical approach of the religious education department’s model of effectiveness as synonymous and identical with ‘knowledge’, ‘information’, to the extent that Ms Shalima, the one Bangladeshi member of the

teacher group present consciously distances herself from the authority she enjoys as an ‘insider’:

‘I always tell them don’t believe everything that I say. *Don’t Believe*. You have to make the decision for yourself. And it’s almost as if, if I said it... if I say something then it must be true. I am very sort of wary about what I say and make sure that it’s not an opinion that I’m expressing, it’s information... I don’t want them to see me like that. [B(&E)\*Linden\*2.1]

The liminal domain which the teachers construct for themselves at St Athanasius and Linden schools between insider and outsider with regard to Islam, combined with their concern for the development of students within an existing religious tradition, leads them to display different anxieties to those which the more liminoid models of effectiveness employed at Dungally and Brockton appears to engender.

The concepts of concealment and scapegoating, introduced as a solution to points of contestation by Girard (2007, 1987b) may be seen to be at work across several of these contexts. Arguably, school teachers and managers conceal from themselves and others conditions of poverty and disadvantage within the local community by populating a cultural domain with scapegoat threats to community cohesion and religious understanding. These fail to cohere due to insufficient correspondence to the cultural domain inhabited by students. The scapegoating of secularisation and integrated schooling by managers and teachers at St Athanasius represents a process of seeking resolution from within the domain of Irish Catholic social heritage, but risks eliding post peace-process developments in the wider society. In all four cases, a wider context of conformity to performative agendas of academic assessment exists as a paradigm within which meanings and values must be negotiated. Establishing the salience of competing conceptions of the broader domain of lived experience in the self-representation of students is a matter to which attention must be paid in the following chapter if the effectiveness of the cultural and pedagogical practices outlined here is to be evaluated.

The question of who has the authority to teach arises in certain classroom contexts, given the highly controversial nature not only of the content of religious learning but also of the method and context of the liminal encounter as instantiated in these contexts. The teacher faces the paradox of engendering trust and comfort among students in order to carry them with him into

a place of discomfort beyond, associated with liminal transformations and inter and transpersonal encounters. The liminal pedagogy required for the deep encounter on the social and spiritual levels in which these schools engage, requires a committed openness which does not elide or ignore areas of conflict and contestation (Thiessen 2007). Two very different forms of committedness are embodied by the two heads of department in the liminoid or interpersonally transformative approaches of their respective schools. At Brockton, I observe:

Although Mr Cantle [the Head of RE] doesn't share his personal faith, he does present certain views favourably. Though not confessional in his approach to Christianity, he is an unashamed apologist for a certain liberal rationalism. He mentions to his A-Level class a statement from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, that 'I wake up every day and I'm only just convinced that God exists'. Privately, Mr Cantle tells me he identifies with this statement in his own faith life. In the A-Level class, Jacob instantly replies disdainfully: 'What sort of Archbishop is this? He's in the wrong profession then!' Mr Cantle tries to explain the relationship of faith and doubt as being a question 'not between Christian and Muslim or whatever, but between liberal and fundamentalist'. [J&B\*Brockton\*3.3]

The disconnect between the conceptions of faith advanced by Jacob and Mr Cantle, between the liberal Christianity of the A-Level Philosophy and Ethics classroom and the evangelical Christianity of London's black majority churches, provides an exemplary illustration of the discursive plurality which the liminal space of the classroom environment cultivated by Mr Cantle affords. This is an encounter with paradox on the interpersonal level, paradox in religious language and its' meanings, and paradox within the theological language of Christianity. In the direct contradiction between Jacob's conception of faith as certainty and Mr Cantle's conception as its negation, a space of symbolic limitation opens up. In this space, no complete bridging is possible through the language of explanation alone, else the pedagogy of encounter would be unnecessary. There is no attempt to strip either conception of its contrariness, to reduce to a bland zone of neutrality between the two. Although words are of course needed to explain each perspective in more detail, it is not the two conceptions of faith as abstract, universalisable ideas that are at stake, but the person of faith, the irreducible self of each, which must be engaged if any further talk is to cross the threshold from the academic to the affective. It is precisely the penurious, the paradoxical nature of this space that makes it a site of sacrifice, a space of understanding as self-gift.



Looking more closely at Jacob's speech act, its instantaneousness suggests a number of possible functions to the speech act. It represents both interruption and certainty, the ability, noted above by Borgman (1991) of the language of religious certainty to close down any sense of context and conversation. As interruption, it is a student-initiated liminal encounter, changing the flow of teacher talk away from the definition of faith which Mr Cantle as authority was in the process of proposing. Adversarial in tone, this act also subverts, to an extent, Mr Cantle's attempt at pedagogical neutrality, picking up on the teacher's personal affinity for this statement. Finally, the language of 'profession' chosen by Jacob itself lays bare a number of possible assumptions<sup>7</sup>. The understanding of church leadership as a valid 'profession' in itself draws upon the language of the market, signalling a particular understanding of Christian ministry as legitimately involved in capital, and for which a faith which does not admit of doubt is a requisite qualification, coupled with an understanding of Christian authority as deriving, also as from a market, in the public recognition of such a faith. This understanding further reflects on the teacher's own 'profession', questioning on a meta-level the benefits which Jacob sees to Mr Cantle's acceptance of doubt and ambiguity as a contribution to Jacob's understanding of religion.

Jacob's intervention sheds further light on the nature of Mr Cantle's pedagogy – granting a dialogic insight through the interpersonal. The possibility of interruption demonstrates Mr Cantle's approach to the classroom as a space for dialogue. The depersonalisation of the quote, and its' attribution to an authority demonstrates Mr Cantle's liminal role, at once as an umpire of ideas and also as a participant bringing personal value. The subsequent explanation and its account of complexity in religious faith illustrate Mr Cantle's both personal and professional desire to have the 'last word', to ensure dialogue remains a managed dialogue. In particular, the labelling of this dispute as being 'between liberal and fundamentalist' retains control over the power of naming, the teacher appropriating to himself a claim of authority over the discursive context, while remaining open to discursive openings such as the one above in which a person attaches to the name. To that end, Mr Cantle's own depersonalisation of the initial comment, in not attaching his own personhood to that label, can be seen as part of his

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<sup>7</sup> To illustrate the difference between discourse analysis and linguistic ethnography, it may suffice here to note that a discourse analysis view may very well have drawn out the historic meanings of 'profession' as in a 'profession of faith', and the power relations of the capitalistic understanding of 'professional' and 'vocational' resting historically on Protestant Christian foundations. Such an understanding, I contend, is so remote to the situated speech act in this classroom context as to have only a distorting influence on our understanding of the incident.

pedagogical openness. It is, undoubtedly, however, a committed openness. The distinguishing categories of 'liberal' and 'fundamentalist' are also foregrounded in classroom discussion at Dungally College, both effecting a displacement of the more evident Protestant/Catholic divide and reflecting the impact of the language and categories imposed by the interpretive framework of the GCSE examination.

In many ways, Mr Cantle's approach encapsulates Conroy's model of the teacher as trickster, disclosing, reflecting, excavating the roots of students' assumptions (2004, 9), to the extent that this becomes a defining characteristic:

As I walk to assembly with Mr Cantle, one boy tells me 'Mr Cantle is good at confusing us', to which Mr Cantle responds 'Yes, because life is confusing, there are never any easy answers' [J&I\*Brockton\*2.1].

There are important boundaries to such trickster pedagogy, foremost of which is a careful respect for pupils' boundaries. Mr Cantle tells me that this is a persona he adopts naturally in life outside the classroom. His reason for not sharing his own beliefs with his students, in particular, derives, he tells me, from self-awareness of his own desire to win an argument, fearing this would get the better of him, and cause him to overstep a professional boundary. Mr Cantle's pedagogical methodology, at times Socratic in its pursuit of the horizon at which all assumptions have been excavated and all explanations cease, also extends at times to the moral entailments of his own claims to authority in regard to behaviour management in the classroom:

Mr Cantle: "I know you're going to need this for your exam."

Tom: "Sir, how do you know?"

Mr Cantle: "I don't, I just believe it to be true." [J&I\*Brockton\*3.3]

A further example of the discursive displacement which occurs around examination success may be seen in the only observed set of instances of Mr Cantle, the archetypal Socratic or trickster teacher, resorting to dogmatic and didactic patterns of language with his students:

Mr Cantle overhears a Year 10 girl talking about failing her exam. He immediately challenges, loud enough that the whole class can hear: "Look at me, in what universe would I let you fail. I won't allow that to happen, and you might hate that fact."

Throughout the GCSE classes, the exam is presented as something that everyone can pass if they know the technique for how to do so. For example, on one occasion, Mr Cantle says “Examiners are stupid and they assume you are too... and one of the ways we demonstrate we're more intelligent than they are is by stating the blindingly obvious.”

And on another occasion: “You shouldn't have a chance of failing, because it has absolutely nothing to do with chance” [A\*Brockton\*3.3]

Religious education at its best at Brockton creates a space in which the largely secular yet traditional communal values of white working class students, and the often highly religious Christian values of many of the black students are accommodated in dialogue within education. Mr Cantle's approach to this important role draws on a level of authority, trust and confidence, which allows him, in all but a few situations, to allow boundaries to be tested respectfully. This pushing and testing pedagogy rests, as we shall see, on the importance of encounter as gift, students invite one another into the world of their otherness, as guest, not as invader.

Conroy suggests the pedagogical type embodied by Mr Cantle is an approach to committed openness which avoids an overtly political pedagogy. The willingness to open up, rather than close down, sites of ambiguity in the classroom requires a confidence which challenges many teachers' ideas of classroom management, as we have seen above. In contrast, Mr Dunne, the head of religious education at Dungally College, in keeping with the overt religio-political agenda of the school, is both overtly political and religious in his approach. Such an approach, as the following examples demonstrate, is not necessarily antithetical to eliciting an honest encounter between students and the spiritual. Whereas Mr Cantle's Socratic approach sets him as mediator in an encounter between different student groups, Mr Dunne has a command of his class from within the political and religious domains in which they are engaged. I will argue that this approach is also conducive to liminal encounter. As with Mr Cantle, this persona is a professional performance of Mr Dunne's own personality, his classroom talk at times occupying a space between teacher and preacher, illustrating a very different attitude toward authority. For example, during a Year 12 class studying Christian discipleship in the context of GCSE revision:

‘Being a Christian is hard. Standing up for what is right is hard. Allowing wrong things to happen is easy.’ He talks about last week’s minute’s silence for soldiers shot in a recent dissident Republican attack, he quotes from Gandhi and Chesterton. ‘As I said to you earlier, there was no anaesthetic on the cross.’ [J&B\*Dungally\*3.3]

The overtly confessional nature of Mr Dunne’s teaching can be seen in his equivocation between ‘being a Christian’ and ‘standing up for what is right’, in the context of his talk, it can be seen that this confessional approach is also overtly political. The reliance on homiletic devices of aphorism and synonymia, seemingly spontaneous in the course of this lesson, demonstrates Mr Dunne’s openness with regard to his own commitments. The rhetoric of this particular statement has the effect of locating students within a space which opens out from the particular ambiguity of a community in conflict to the challenging and sacrificial complexity of Christian faith in general. The ‘you’ in the final sentence symbolically locates the students within the sacrificial order of the crucifixion, presupposing faith and commitment – this is evidenced as true because of the recent violence in Northern Ireland, and evidenced as ‘right’ by the opening aphorism. Were this commitment representative of the only element to Mr Dunne’s teaching, it would be difficult to categorise it as anything other than traditionally confessional, nor in any way liminal, but as we shall see, this commitment models a level of personal engagement which is also encouraged of students.

Mr Dunne has something of the role of a moral authority within the school. This role is one which Mr Dunne is unashamed to carry into Dungally from his previous career in the Catholic education sector. He speaks to me of giving young people a ‘lens’ through which to view the world, a concept drawn directly from an official vision of Catholic education (Conroy 2001; NICCE 2010). Mr Dunne’s self-understanding of his role is itself a challenge of committed openness to staff as well as students, embodying the value commitments of the school to be a *Christian* response to community conflict, modelling a practice of embracing the other without in any way compromising his own identity as a Catholic head of religious education, a role and identity which would be familiar to his own community, but alien to teachers more familiar with the Protestant-majority Controlled schools. His effectiveness in establishing this role is demonstrated in his interactions with other staff:

One morning, the head of Drama comes up to [Mr Dunne] on the way to assembly, she is deeply apologetic, has heard that he is not happy with a play, *Bouncers*, which a

group of Year 11 students have got hold of, she says “I would never allow a script like that to get out” – her speech is exaggerated and dramatic, a classroom/stage persona. Mr Dunne accepts that there has been a misunderstanding, but once out of earshot says “aye, right!” [J&B\*Dungally\*1.4]

The juxtaposition of Mr Dunne’s public and private responses to this incident, taken out of context, could suggest a merely hypocritical response. In the space of contradiction between professional persona and cynical self-reflection, however, is negotiated an identity and role within the school’s professional community, constructed through the repetition and accumulation of speech acts and encounters, and demonstrated by the very possibility of this encounter, the apparent need, in the context, for a professional colleague to justify her moral conduct before Mr Dunne. In contrast to the apparently singular sense of value and professional selfhood which appeared to be sustained at St Athanasius, here Mr Dunne grants me access to yet a further layer of the personal negotiation of his insider/outsider performance of teacher identity.

A superficial comparison of these approaches would suggest that one proceeds from an Archimedean point outside the student religious discourse, while the other proceeds as a participant, openly on the inside of religious identity. One could be seen as embodying a ‘committed’ pedagogy, the other a pedagogy of ‘openness’. The insights offered by a deep ethnography, however, give a greater depth, in which Mr Cantle’s Socratic approach can be located within the teacher’s own deeply held convictions – in such a context his questioning and searching may be seen to embody the same depth of commitment as Mr Dunne. Conversely, Mr Dunne’s homiletic approach, laying bare a particular committed approach to the students’ lifeworld in conversation, remains open to an encounter with the commitments of the other, an openness which we shall go on to see in interaction. The relevance of such approaches to encouraging an open encounter with the other will be seen as the ethnographic texts unfold.

There is much to commend such an approach, but it is not the approach that is observed at Linden or St Athanasius, instead what is presented below may be described as a recognition of the possibility of critique while standing within one’s culture. Such a pedagogy does not fall into the category of trickster, nor of full prophecy. While the trickster affords us clear sight of the rules of a culture by breaking them, by momentarily exposing everything the rules exclude

and conceal (Hyde 1998; 295), the teacher within a culture affords the opportunity to challenge cultural norms and rules from within a position of acculturation. In myth, one often finds tricksters paired with seers, the seer subverts the trickster – if cultural norms are founded, as Girard suggests, on a double concealment, the trickster uncovers the fact of shared desires, raising himself against the norms and injunctions to the status of the model, the seer uncovers the fact of shared status, reducing again the trickster to disciple, subject not object. In the process of this mutual subversion, much collateral damage is often done to the natural order. Such seer-trickster pairings appear between Tripitaka and the Monkey King (Wu Ch'eng-en 2005), Wulbari and Ananse of the Ashanti of Ghana (Belcher 2005) and in the Homeric Hymn between Apollo and Hermes (Hyde 1998; 284).

Seers, unlike full prophets or augurs, are not possessed of unmediated access to a metaphysical realm, but are involved in a process of meaning-making that includes access to the culturally excised or concealed realms, while those realms remain concealed. As with the trickster, such processes are uncomfortable and offer a challenge to culture. In her play *The Seer* (2006) the Scottish playwright Ali Smith uses the device of her antagonist's awareness of the stage and the audience to destabilize an otherwise closed culture – the encroachment of the audience on the scene establishes the seer, despite this distinctiveness, as part of the insider group, a fellow character, yet also as a doorkeeper. In so doing, Smith is drawing on a tradition of Scottish seers, such as the Brahan Seer, who claimed access not to prediction, but to 'sight', 'truth' (Sutherland 1974; 157)

The objects of this query are not only sad and dismal, but also joyful and prosperous. They foretel of happy marriages, good children, what kind of life men shall live, and in what condition they shall die... [yet this sight] seems a thing troublesome and uneasy to them that have it, and such as they would fain be rid of (Anon 1775; 259)

Just as the possibility of meaning includes the possibility of failures of meaning, the possibility of 'seeing' clearly entails the possibility of deception, explaining the mutual relationship of seer and trickster. '[T]he possibility of false prophecy means prophecy is mediated by imagination, and that the listener needs at least to be conscious of imagination itself if he or she is not to be deceived' (Hyde 1998; 296). Methodologically, this points us to the distinction between *seeing*, the visual, and *listening* as a necessarily interpersonal activity, reminding us of the need to be aware that our visual imagination is no less interpersonal, in

need of conscious excavation if we are to avoid misrepresentation. In the classroom context, this seer pedagogy has several consequences – most notably the status of the teacher as doorkeeper to a transcendent ‘outside’ balanced with the teacher’s own acceptance as an ‘insider’ to the culture. The teacher within a culture points a student to the *habitus* of that culture, the limits of imagination (Bourdieu & Passeron 2000), but the seer also sees the metaphysical, the limits of hope (Kant 2008), pointing to a hope that can transcend imagination. Where the trickster subverts the false transcendences of a culture, the seer surmounts them. Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, and both appear in the religious education classroom in the critical sites of value negotiation and meaning making in this study.

## Chapter 10 – Seeing (Through,) the Student Experience

Sufficiently broad discursive parameters to permit exploration from different subjective perspectives are essential in brokering genuinely liminoid encounters, in which individuals express critical meaning making in creative ways emerging from the distillation of intersecting cultural domains. Ms Shalima's performance at Linden enacts a range of meanings, but also non-meanings – 'the obligation to make meanings... can actually have the reverse effect, and call attention to the inability to make meanings' (Tomlinson 2006, 141) as Ms Shalima's anxiety about communicating her own beliefs and insider status to the class, noted above, places her in a contested space between the domain of religious commitment and social heritage and the domain of criticality and her status within the teacher culture of Linden, as the micro-analysis of her introduction to a Year 11 lesson below illustrates:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| November 5th 2009, Period 1, Ms Shalima's Yr 11 0:08:02.9-0:08:53.9 | Near beginning of lesson, time taken to get to class, get class settled, review previous lessons. Less than 1 minute to introduce purpose of topic.  |
| [at this point the room is silent except for Ms Shalima's voice]    | Authority – influence of ethnographer? – outside the classroom, Ms Shalima remarked to me that her class are not normally this quiet. Her remarks suggest she prefers a noisier, more interactive environment, or at least that this is the self-construction she wishes to convey to me, though there is no straightforward way of verifying her self-projection. |
| Ms S: "... know the Prophet lef, left, or should I say              | "the Prophet" – begins from 'inside' Islam. Girls are all or mostly Muslim. Ms Shalima tells me she doesn't share her own faith and beliefs with the girls, but is viewed as a Muslim teacher because she hails from the   |



|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>was forced out of Medina to live in, m, m, was forced out of Mecca to live in Medina,</p> <p>and whilst he was there, he began, ah, creating the perfect ideal society,</p> <p>and one of the things that he did whilst living in that community was introduce the idea of Zakah to help the community</p> <p>so that's what we're looking at today.</p> | <p>same Bangladeshi background as the girls.</p>  |
|   | <p>“was forced out” – exile – connects to immigrant community of Banglatown in London.</p>  |
|   | <p>Medina/Mecca – self-correction, no apology</p>   |
|   | <p>“and whilst he was there” – temporal, transience, connection with girls’ self-understanding of migrant identity?</p>   |
|   | <p>“creating the perfect ideal society” – pre-evaluated term, again from ‘within’ Islam. Double reinforcement, perfect, ideal. “creating” – power, de jure authority, not ‘trying to create’.</p>   |
|   | <p>“whilst living in that community” difference between ‘society’ and ‘community’. ‘Community’ understood in terms of ‘community cohesion’, an important government agenda taken up within the school, a Deputy Head in charge of community cohesion, the multi-cultural community. ‘Society’, more structured, Islamic society ‘perfect, ideal’, British society – ‘no such thing as society’?</p> |
|   | <p>“to help the community” again, community cohesion, purpose pre-evaluated.</p>  |
|   | <p>“so that’s what we’re looking at today” – ‘so’ – because the Prophet did this, it is worthy of examination. Value and reason, justification. ‘looking at’ – presented with ‘the facts’, to</p>   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>[door opens and closes]</p> <p>Ah, so this is what we're <i>aiming to do</i>* by the end of, end of today,</p> <p>I want you to know the Islamic definition for the word Zakah, some people get confused, alright,</p> <p>I want you to know specifically what that means for your exam.</p> <p>I also want you to know why, eh, it's important <i>for every Muslim to</i> give Zakah, and also how it helps the community,</p> <p>obviously Muhammad introduced it for a particular reason.</p> | <p>look at, not to construct, not to interpret, to see as it is, clarity and truth claims, authority.</p>  |
|   | <p>"we're aiming to do" – authority, collectivity. The enumeration of lesson objectives as phatic communication, defines a pedagogic event, universal across the school.</p>             |
|   | <p>"I want you to know" – authority, desire, presumes close connection, students 'on side', epistemic claim.</p>   |
|   | <p>"the Islamic definition" – from 'within', ours, language interpreted and defined within, by and for the religion.</p>   |
|   | <p>"for your exam" – additional motivation, success, factual knowledge, linguistic knowledge i.e. definitions, rote learning = exam learning = educational success criteria.</p>         |
|   | <p>"I also want", in addition to exam, in addition to aims necessary for academic success, 'I', reliance on teacher authority and shared aims. "why" question, beyond rote learning.</p> |
|   | <p>"why, eh, it's important for every Muslim" – emphasis. Every Muslim is inclusive, presumes consent, affective dimension, action, 'to'.</p>  |
|   | <p>"obviously", presumes consent, rhetorical device, 'obviousness', beyond challenge, presumes possible to know.</p>   |
|   | <p>"Muhammad", 'the facts', historicity not at</p>   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>We want to know if that actually benefits them or not...”</p>   | <p>issue, ‘obviously Muhammad introduced it’. Doesn’t say ‘peace be upon him’, neutrality about personal belief. Quick-fire presentation. Elaboration on purpose.</p>  |
|  | <p>“We want to know” – collective, teacher talk shifts between 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person didactic in reference to ‘knowledge that’ 1<sup>st</sup> person plural in reference to pedagogical activity – this knowing, ‘we want to know’, an activity, investigative.</p>   |
|  | <p>“if that actually benefits them or not” – critical dimension, ‘actually’, other criteria, pragmatism, personal benefits of religion, a move beyond presupposition of ‘perfect ideal society’.</p>   |
| <p>* - at this point, Ms Shalima is reading from a powerpoint [Fig.19] on the board at front of classroom which sets out the learning objectives for the lesson. On the powerpoint is “Understand the importance of Zakah in the Muslim community” compare with Ms S’s words “why it’s important for every Muslim to give Zakah”</p> | <p>“Understand the importance” – observer-neutral, doesn’t presume consent. Reading, power relations, power of resource, represents the work of ‘the Department’/ ‘the Head of Department’/ ‘the Exam syllabus’ – teacher relation to resource not one of total submission, modelling a co-submission and co-interpretation of aims with students.</p> |

Fig. 18 [J\*Linden\*3.3]



Fig. 19 [E\*Linden\*3.1]

In the incident reported above, Ms Shalima's physical cohabitation of two areas of her classroom, moving between a smartboard at the natural 'front' of the room (the direction in which all students' desks are facing) and a penboard at the side, embodies her shifting stance, between taking a place *before* her students as a representative of teacher authority and taking a place *alongside* her students as a fellow Bangladeshi and fellow learner. The shift between the mimetic clustering signified by the first person plural and the mimetic distance presented by the I/you division further reinforces this duality. In such a situation it is impossible for Ms Shalima to act entirely within her students' value domain, and therefore impossible to point beyond it, pointing instead to alternative conceptions of values, and modelling a divided identity.

What distinguishes the successful liminoid approach at Brockton from this awkward situation at Linden is the willingness of teachers to sublimate and engage with ambiguity and paradox, to hold authentic values of their own while engaging creatively with students where they are, with the values of students' cultural domains being allowed to speak their own names in their

own terms. The critical connection between truths ‘seen’ as part of a transcendent domain and students’ understanding of the ‘real’ world of their faith and values emerges as a key aim of spiritually, morally, socially and culturally transformative religious education. In contrast, much of the interaction observed, even in these broadly positive case studies, points to students ‘seeing through’ artificial or performative goals, which at times are presented as though the highest good of religious education, mirroring Girard’s ‘false transcendences’.

Linden Girls School shares a paradox with St Athanasius – students at both schools have high levels of religious commitment, which is viewed positively in the value systems of both schools. High levels of religious commitment, the teacher discourse suggests, appear to lead to high levels of motivation, and high levels of examination success in religious education. If examination success is to be regarded as the ‘final act’ in the performance of values which have been noted as significant to the ethos and purpose of St Athanasius, it may be seen from the high levels of attainment that this value pattern is indeed assumed by the vast majority of students. As Fig. 17 above illustrates, creative structures of mimesis develop by which students interpret their environment, making use of ludic devices such as sarcasm (‘I am not a person, I’m a numerical statistic ☺’) and mockery ‘[Name] is 24 points ahead of me, THIS IS NOT GOOD’ to subvert value structures which are exposed as false transcendences at the same time as reproducing them. At no point in St Athanasius is the value of examinations permitted to depose the authentic transcendence of the value of the human person in Catholic faith, instead being sublimated and accommodated within the Christian obligation to make the most of one’s talents – the icon of the Virgin Mary is displayed alongside the wall display on examinations neither oppositionally nor co-opted into the cause of examination success. In the meaning making structures through which students and teachers at both schools seek to construct the relation between these multiple cultural domains within their experience of schooling, nurturing understandings of shared religious commitment leads to examination success and the status of examination success motivates students to seek understandings of shared religious commitments, yet neither of these goals can be reduced to the other. Does the dominance of one value reduce the other to a subsidiary or instrumental value? In student discourse, the examination is ‘seen through’, performed without relevance to the cultural domain of students’ lived experiences.

DL: Are there any things that are different...are there any things that you've done in RS [religious studies] that have made you think, well that's not what I've been taught at home or at mosque or whatever?

Fatima: I think with RS, you know like when you look at the Koran and everything...you know when we interpret the Koran, it's different in RS than at home because at home we've been taught...we've got books that interpret it anyway...but in school we take it literally. Whereas you know in the Koran, you shouldn't take everything literally. So, that's something different...

DL: So, you think it's taken more literally at school than it is at home? Ok, well that's interesting. And would you feel comfortable to say to your teacher, well that's not what I've been taught before?

Rugina: No. We'd get in trouble, probably.

DL: Really?

Fatima: No, we wouldn't get in trouble. We might...i dunno.

Roshana: I think the stuff the school teaches us...i think we have to kind of accept it when we're in school because that's what comes up in exams. [J&A\*Linden\*4.2]

This discourse of acceptance is in many ways corroborated by the comments made by a more senior student, Rahima, the president of the student Islamic Society, whose assessment of the problem of religious literacy initially mirrors in many ways the teacher discourse represented above, but soon takes a different direction with regard to the role of religious education as corrective of this. Her comments in interview deserve to be reproduced at length:

R: when I came to 6<sup>th</sup> form they...I was asked to be the head of ISoc and I just thought... it's just something that I find really important because I think a lot of the girls in Linden, I mean they're Muslims, yeah but there's not much that they know about Islam or they don't...i don't think they even know why they're Muslim. I don't know if they have that much of a connection to it, so just like me, I like to go back to the basics just to make sure that...they go back to the basics and come to it themselves.

DL: You're saying that a lot of them don't really know why they're Muslim. Do you think RS helps with that at all?

R: No.

DL: No?

R: No. Because RS isn't, RS isn't philosophy. RS is just saying this is the way things are... I dunno. I think it's...the way RS is taught is, these are the rules. This is what people do, but Islamicly, the way I see it, the way Islam should be taught really is not about, these are the rules, it's these are the principles and this is how you come to the rules. So it's...I think that's kind of the problem. People will say, ok I have to fast and pray five times a day and this that and the other but for me that's not where it should start. It should start before that...

when we were reading something I'd say... that's not true, that's not correct. That's one view. That's not the real view. That's you know, what some people would have us believe...

DL: And do you feel...did you feel confident enough to actually say to the teacher, actually that's not...

R: Yes. Because I'm hugely into the whole...I'm getting rid of all the misconceptions and things. If there's a problem I'd say 'no, no, no! This isn't right. This is how it's meant to be!'

DL: Do most girls feel that way or is that just you?

R: Well if they knew then they would. I mean, I don't see why not. Because it is your own belief, you'd say 'hold on, that can't be right'. So if they knew then they would, surely! Definitely.

DL: Because I was talking to some of the younger girls earlier on today and some of them were saying that, like you they sort of see things in the way that they've been taught about Islam that aren't quite right, but a lot of them just bite their tongue about it and just say, 'right, that's what I'll write about in the exam, but that's not what I'm going to...that's not what I believe'.

R: Actually to be honest, some people in my class...i think it's because. I wouldn't say that they are intimidated but it's just...i don't know if they'd feel it's worth bringing up or how their reaction is going to be because, at the end of the day they are a student and they are in a classroom and how much value would be given to their view. But with me, I am a very outspoken person in that sense because I think, well weight should be given to my view because I am Muslim. This is what I believe, so you have to listen to me, you can't ignore me because this is what I believe. You can't tell me what I believe. [E\*Linden\*4.2]

In this critical source, it is possible to see themes emerge, reflecting the language and reflecting upon the themes drawn out of the teacher dialogue in the previous chapter, yet refracted through an entirely different meaning making apparatus, leading to a disjunction of values, a failure of religious education to communicate what is 'right', 'real', 'valued'. Tracing, at last, a pattern of meaning making within a cultural context from policy, through professional performances, environment, enacted classroom practices and student views, it is possible to draw significant conclusions as to the causes of failures to make meaning in religious education at Linden Girls School, contrasting these with relative successes at St Athanasius. Bornstein (2006) categorises certain failures to connect to the cultural domain of an audience as performances without final acts, likening these to the theatre of the absurd, and the encounter of the Bangladeshi students of Linden with the Islam of the examination curriculum is just such a failure of meaning. Like Ali Smith's *seer* (2006), students such as Rahima are able to see through the linguistically and conceptually impoverished caricatures of Islam in the examination syllabus, shorn of both cultural and personal significance. The characters which populate the teachers' cultural domain at Linden – strict, unapproachable Imams, ill-informed extended family, do not appear in student discourse, suggesting different points of entry, a different place or lens from which students come to the domain. A displacement of student and teacher in the shared physical environment of the classroom thus occurs, in which only the performative goal of examination success remains shared, 'acceptance' of which becomes a precondition for students' 'successful' engagement in religious education – in this discursive closure, performativity becomes the sole model of effectiveness. As with the characters in a play, it is impossible to tell from within the play whether or not they are real, and it would be beyond the capacity of the intersubjective paradigm to speculate as to the 'objective' existence of these characters in the world outside



the divergent intersubjective constructions of the students and of the teachers. What is significant, however, is that there is a failure to communicate a domain which allows for the sharing of agreed meanings between student and teacher – for Rahima, the Islam of Linden’s religious education classrooms is not ‘real’. Students do not see what teachers see.

This distinction cannot be dismissed as solely the result of the cultural differences which separate Linden’s largely white non-Muslim teachers from their largely Bangladeshi Muslim students. At Brockton, the effect of Mr Cantle’s style and approach in opening up a truly liminal environment encounters significant mimetic transformations as it is taken up in attempts by students to introduce such a questioning approach to a faith group with its origins in the black-majority Evangelical/Pentecostal Christian tradition, to which Mr Cantle does not belong, brokering a further space which exists in a context between the religious education classroom and the church. Attending the sixth form Christian Union, I noted:

The model for the discussion group appears to be Mr Cantle’s style of questioning. The group begins discussing some current issues, using newspaper clips, e.g. on the war in Afghanistan, the word ‘pacifism’ is introduced in a similar way to Mr Cantle introducing a keyword to his class... After this point, the discussion turns to how to evangelise friends. In Bible discussions, students go directly to the Book of Revelation, there is a discussion about the fear of hell, which focuses on physical descriptions of burning, one girl shares about a book she read about a woman who had a vision of hellfire. Students seem to be recounting ideas heard in sermons. The second half of the meeting departs from the RE model in that students ‘correct’ and encourage one another from within a framework of evangelical Christian commitment.

[J&B\*Brockton\*4.3]

In this mediated encounter, the students again mediate a range of repertoires and paradigms – between the patterns of moral discussion common in the religious education classroom and the value claims of evangelical Christianity; between the uncritical presentation of religious content and the introduction of key words as learning objectives; between the presumed permanence of Biblical sources as a source of personal value and the transitory nature of newspaper media. While Mr Cantle did not establish this group, it is clear that his influence is carried forward into the wider religious considerations and practices of students at the school. In contrast, a professional embarrassment, categorised by a refusal to engage or allow students

to engage with global-political controversies in the public spaces at Linden Girls' School reduces both subject and object of the pedagogical encounter to players in a theatre of the absurd.

Schools are in many ways sites of ritual performance. The social performance of Brockton's Christian Union has a genuinely liminoid character, distilling conflict and creating new forms and forums of dialogue. This owes more to spontaneity than to planning, in contrast to Dungally College with its complex admissions structures and committees aimed at addressing the complexities arising from sectarian tensions. The ambiguities of Dungally's status within the liminal/liminoid definitions advanced by Turner revolve around the planned nature of this liminoid/creative distillation. Whereas Brockton and Linden create from otherwise unconnected cultural domains a mediating framework, successfully at Brockton, less so at Linden, within which students are able to make meanings in the act of encounter, Dungally could be regarded as seeking to initiate students into an identity group, a minority which socialises across sectarian lines, which is itself an outsider group to mainstream Northern Ireland society. This is exemplified by Ms Arble, one of the religious education teachers, herself one of the first students at another integrated institution, with a long history of personal engagement in peace education and integrated groups – while Mr Dunne's Catholic identity is liminal with regard to the institution, it may be argued that Ms Arble is an insider, a liminal individual in a liminal institution. In the apparent freedom from societal structures foregrounded by Turner in his accounts of the liminal, the figure of elders in enabling, at times enforcing, the liminal encounter looms large yet is predominantly elided from analysis. Dungally's teachers and chaplains, with their avowed commitment to integration as an end, conform to this model of the elder in the liminal encounter.

The subversion of dominant values by students is a point of great significance for the seer pedagogy outlined above. Within the cultural domains of the schools, which values are 'seen' and which are 'seen through' by the students? Is the school in its totality capable of helping students to look into a value system and make meanings from it which prove adequate to expressing human experience, including experience of the transcendent? Is the school engaged in a trickster-like exposing of systems of meaning making as inadequate to the task of preparing students for life in a pluralistic society? Upon these questions hang the difference between a learning environment which enables religious commitment and one which frustrates it.

As has been shown, the necessity of a normative dimension to the study of the cultural domain requires the possibility of meaning making and of failures of meaning making. Differentiating between the seemingly transcendent power of social heritage and the authentic transcendence of these normative religious teachings requires an awareness not only of what is visible, but also what is concealed, and the cultural imperatives which mediate between exposure and concealment. Furthermore, imagination is mediated by doorkeeping structures which need to render unfamiliar the familiar if they are to move beyond cultural commonplaces to authentic processes of discernment and meaning-making.

At Linden Girls' School, two examples of the briefest kind excavate the doorkeeping structures which can either open up discursive space for meaning-making or close it down to bland commonplaces:

Ms Shalima says 'I know all of you are, to some extent practicing [Muslims]'...

While Ms S[halima] is out of the room, one girl wearing a hijab turns to her neighbour and asks 'Why does she assume we're all practicing?' [J&I\*Linden\*3.3]

During a group discussion in a recorded lesson, the following can be heard:

Rugina: 'But if there's no questions all I [ever know?] is when a person dies another person is born.'

Jumila: 'no, no, no, that's not right?' - several other girls are now speaking over one another

Mr James: 'Wait'

Rugina shouts 'If a person dies, another baby is born, another person is, yeah, a baby is [unclear] Sir. If a person dies another baby is born into life, get me?'

Indecipherable shouting.

Mr James: 'Scuse me, we have, wait, wait, is that right, what she just said?'

5 or 6 girls say 'yeah', the lesson is now very animated, lots of background chatter.

T: 'Ok, answer me this then, how, how, what was the population at the beginning of all this and what is the population now?'

Although there is a lot of noise and shouting, the teacher seems to be aware of what is happening, what girls are saying to one another, tolerates this.

Mr James is now shouting over the class: 'How can it be zero and now it's millions if it's only the person is born when somebody dies. [a girl says 'That's not what I'm saying'] How is that possible?'

Humarya: '... we believe'

Mr James: 'You do?'

Humarya: 'I don't believe in reincarnation, ok! I don't believe that it's the same person gets born again, I say, I'm saying, [several girls shout similar things, almost sounds like a single stream of thought coming from 3 or 4 mouths] One person dies, and another person is born.'

This is an interesting folk belief in life cycle, not reincarnation, pupils keen to avoid it being labelled 'reincarnation', at one point, not audible on tape, Mr Smith says 'so you're a Hindu?' to one girl to be provocative. [J&I\*Linden\*3.3]

Ms Shalima's presumption of 'practicing' perhaps surfaces differences in understanding of what it means to practice one's faith between the domain of school and the domain of cultural practices among the students, such that only strict practice is acknowledged by the girls. While this appears to be a 'safe' assumption, it forms so tight a circle as to close down discussion, not open to challenge in the teacher's presence. On the other hand, the provocative, controversial, profoundly unsafe assertion of Mr James: 'so you're a Hindu' to a group of Muslim girls, challenging them to reconcile their avowed views on a cycle of death and birth with the rejection of reincarnation in Islamic theological anthropology, opens up both the possibility of understanding, and, importantly, the possibility of misunderstanding. The notions of power and control exemplified by these interactions, the near-chaos of Mr James' girls, their overlapping speech, alternating between indecipherable, at times multilingual and multidialectal chaos and the instantaneous co-construction of an idea, and the apparent unchallengeable nature of Ms Shalima's normative attributions as to pupils' religious practice, are rarely more polarised in the same school environment.

The significance of religious and moral language as a space of symbolic exchange between the language of liberated free exchange and the ‘anti-discourse’ of religious encounter entails an appropriate use of silence and an appropriate breaking of silence, as illustrated in the following encounter:

Mr Dunne shows the class a DVD, *Time for Peace?*, produced by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. It is composed of news clips from the troubles, set to a U2 soundtrack – the students are attentive throughout and at the end there is silence.

Mr Dunne respects the silence, but after a few moments says ‘Now, first thoughts?’

‘Beatings’

‘It all still happens now’

Connor says ‘See that name, Michael Mooney [a man killed during the Troubles, his story is featured in the DVD], his son lives on my street.’

Mr Dunne asks ‘Does it all feel far away?’

‘yeah’

Connor argues: ‘No, cos there’s still dissident Republicans, that’s why they’re bringing in the Brits again, not to walk the streets again, but MI5 or SAS or that.’

Mr Dunne addresses a quieter girl by name: ‘Keosha, I’m really interested to hear what you think when you see that?’

Keosha: ‘J’s [just] upset.’

Connor: ‘It’s not really different/’ [interrupted]

Iain: ‘See if you wore a Celtic top round where I live, you’d be shot in a minute...’ says there are paramilitary ‘top men’ [senior paramilitary figures] who live in his neighbourhood... Mr Dunne asks Iain to explain what ‘top men’ are to anyone in the class who didn’t know...

Students are sharing their own experiences, every one of them has a story to tell about the way sectarianism and the Troubles have affected them. At the end of the

discussion, Mr Dunne says ‘I wanted to bring what Jesus told into a modern context’.  
[J&I\*Dungally\*3.3]

Beginning with the resource itself, again the theme of the use of media footage emerges as significant in delivering both a specific and a general message. The general message, perhaps best summarised by the first word from a pupil, ‘beatings’, the violence which makes itself manifest. A realism may be observed in relation to religious truth claims, and, not unconnected, in relation to the reality of death, at least as the ‘possibility of not having any possibilities’ (Conroy 2009, 151) in the cultural domain of the students’ social heritages and lived experiences. Baudrillard (1993) associates the reality of death, ever present to the sacralised discourse of pre-modern societies but expunged by the *actualité* of modern news media, where representations of death eclipse and render its reality unimaginable (Baudrillard 1994; Boorstin 1961) with an ability to conceive of a sacred space in language, an unliberated zone or zone of limitation. Unlike some other school contexts observed in the course of the project, where death existed only in *actualité* and religious language and truth claims did not or could not penetrate, a depth and maturity of religious understanding could be observed in both Dungally and Brockton. The reality with which *actualité* is imbued in this context is illustrated by Connor’s contribution first of an experienced reality: ‘his son lives on my street’, then of reported reality ‘they’re bringing in the Brits again’. The context of this speech act reveals a place of encounter with a world outside formal education, brought into the classroom in religious education but rarely elsewhere, a world wherein loaded dialect, bearing community value judgments about the troubles: ‘Brits’, ‘top men’, are brought into focus without judgment. Unlike the hidden unexplored student understanding of religious ‘practice’ at Linden, Mr Dunne here succeeds in mediating a space between silence as an exercise in authority, exercised in the name of the authority of the object of study itself, and the chaos of instantaneous debate – a liminal theatre for the exploration of depths of meaning in personal encounter with the object of study.

The brevity with which language begins to impose itself on silence in this case illustrates the importance of limitation, a sacrificial value placed on language, each word being an imposition upon the anti-discourse of a valued silence before the felt reality of violence. Mr Dunne introduces both a contradiction between silence and words, and later a contradiction in views, asking, in spite of Connor’s comment to the contrary, whether it feels ‘far away’, demonstrating a respect for contrary positions, even if only represented by the single word

which follows. Mr Dunne's role also retains the managed discomfort of the encounter, restraining through deeper questioning the hyperbole of Iain's statement, which threatens to trivialise the very reality which it seeks to represent. Mr Dunne's stated purpose in managing this act of encounter is itself of significance – to 'bring', as a gift, not to judge or to examine or rationalise, but to 'bring' the stories of his students, the stimulus for these stories – into encounter with 'what Jesus told', a religious experience in language, specifically, the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The primacy of direct experience, the personal, not as an atomistic phenomenon but located in its interpersonal context is illustrated by a contrast between the incident above and a scripted exercise which takes place within the same Year 10 scheme of work on sectarianism. The less successful scripted task can be seen to privilege a certain discourse, an ideological framing of the troubles, whereas the more successful discussion is open to student meaning-making:

There is a visible lack of purpose while students are rehearsing the dialogue they have been given. They are quiet while other groups present their plays, but this seems to be more out of respect for one another than for the task. One boy gasps in mock horror as a girl reads the word "fenian" in her script. The dialogue is clunky and there is a lot of repetition, e.g. "Sinead was standing up now and staring at Bronagh. Bronagh couldn't speak. Her face was getting redder and redder. Her heart was beating faster and faster. She felt sick in her tummy. She wanted to run away. She was frightened. Just then the bell rang and they all went into class."... At the end of one play, George says, quite accurately "that's the same as the last one". It takes about 12 minutes to complete the task, and the teacher, recognising that this task missed the mark, moves straight on to the next task without pausing for discussion. [J&I\*Dungally\*3.1&3.3]

In contrast to the previous encounter, some materials on sectarianism do not connect with pupil experience in a way that brokers an encounter with lived reality. The forced nature of the dialogue, with its pre-evaluated terms, with the discursive closure they entail, fails to provide a place of encounter with the cultural domain of the students. In the short plays presented, the lack of resolution requires the dramatic device of interruption, eliding the question of the possibility of resolution – the bell rings and they all go into class – such dialogue represents the stereotypical extreme of the modernist conception of estrangement and alienation, the other is presented in their otherness in a manner at once demanding resolution and rendering

any dissolution of boundaries or engagement with the person of the other impossible. In contrast, the success of the previous discussion lay in its presentation of the phenomenon of the Troubles in a rawness beyond words, engendering first silence, then limited speech, leaving the discursive evaluation to students' own descriptions in a language and register appropriate to the cultural domain. The sharing of experience, of story as gift, without final resolution, excludes the possibility that each interaction will be 'the same as the last one' – a transformation occurs. This is consistent with the account of enstrangement presented in chapter 7, emerging with wonder as an aspect of the student's own being, open to the language and experience of the transcendent, spiritual and religious, a spiritual and internal conflict with a social dimension, rather than a response of fear and anger as a result of encounter with some alien other.

The sense of progression evident in religious education at Dungally, in stark contrast to failures of understanding of progression criticised by Ofsted (2010) in some schools, is demonstrated by Mr Clive's discussion of the same foundational parable, the Good Samaritan, with more senior students. This progression demonstrates both an opening out of the complex allusions and denotations of religious language and a continuing relevance to the cultural domain of the student body:

With an older, Year 12 class, Mr Clive reflects on the shallow use of the parable of the Good Samaritan in the lower school, he says the parable 'is the RE teacher's dream... you do this in junior school and you get Celtic and Rangers... but I kind of think they miss the point of the story... "and who is my neighbor"... the guy who asked the question is a teacher of the law, almost certainly he's a priest [or] a levite... Jesus is having a dig at the man that asked him the question' - he goes on to point out that the story is told to a crowd, not on a page, says it is over-used by politicians, most notably by Margaret Thatcher.

To this, Shane responds: 'I hate Margaret Thatcher' and there follows a brief discussion on Thatcher's legacy in Northern Ireland, interrupted by the end-of-period bell. [J&I\*Dungally\*3.3]

The ways in which Mr Clive's discourse draws attention to the subversive dimension of Jesus' message in its original context effects a further layer of liminality, removing the parable from the ownership of now settled patterns of ritual performance within the context of the integrated



school, the now familiar discourse of ‘The Good Rangers Supporter’ [I\*Dungally\*1.3&4.2 – the title of a Year 8 pupil’s illustrated work which had been displayed on the wall of one of the religious education classrooms]. In taking the story out of the hands of the ‘teacher of the law’, Mr Clive executes precisely the kind of subversive leveling with regard to his own status as teacher which is characteristic of the trickster pedagogy outlined above. Mr Clive’s reference to Thatcher’s infamous and idiosyncratic interpretation of the parable to the Church of Scotland’s General Assembly (e.g. Gilchrist 2009) opens the discussion to normative claims with regard to the use of religious language, drawing close to the concept of authentic and false transcendence advanced by Girard (2004), which Mr Clive is in turn willing to permit Shane to present a community’s perspective upon. In the liminal encounter, the familiar is presented in unfamiliar context (Turner 1967), a familiar discourse, a linchpin of ‘integrated’ religious education is decentered and presented for critique in a forum into which is introduced, almost by accident, a scapegoat figure of a community’s hatred. Such continuing transformativity suggests that religious education at Dungally is more concerned with a liminoid perspective, challenging and creating, than with the liminal as a means to the reproduction of a particular ‘integrated’ perspective.

At Brockton, Mr Cattle’s approach remains fundamentally centred on a Socratic model of reflective questioning, but is capable of switching back and forth across registers, asking reflective questions of those whose values and beliefs are grounded in an understanding of the Christian Scriptures gained in London’s black-majority Pentecostal churches and those whose beliefs are derived from less definite sources in the wider culture, demonstrating an incisiveness in bringing to the fore precisely the kinds of deeply held values which these cultural registers underpin, enabling a mutually meaningful encounter between these community world-views to take place. This at times involves a preferential pedagogy, not answering students’ questions as presented, but leading students outside their own familiar registers while maintaining interest in the underlying truth claims, engendering a clear sense of progression.

Much of Mr Cattle’s method of questioning deliberately begins from outside of the familiar language of students. His focus on a philosophical conception of God, while building on the assessment criteria for the examination syllabus, begins neither inside the certainties of his Christian or atheist/agnostic students, bringing about both confrontation and paradox, but rarely resolution.

Mr Cantle: 'If God loves me, he wants to stop me dying of cancer, he wants to stop me feeling pain. If God's all powerful, he is capable, he is able to stop me dying from cancer. So what would any logical, reasonable person conclude from the fact that God can stop me but hasn't?'

Teje: 'That that was how you're meant to die.'

Mr Cantle: 'Well, I don't think that's the logical/'

Teje: 'Well, does you believe in death?'

Mr Cantle: 'Believe in death?'

Teje: 'Aye'

Mr Cantle: 'I don't know how you/'

Teje: 'Like you have to die at one point'...

Mr Cantle: 'Does everybody have to die?'

Sammy 'Yes'

Mr Cantle 'If God is all powerful, could God not have created a world in which nobody dies?'

Teje: 'He never done that though, you have to die!'

2 girls laugh at the intensity of Teje's statement.

Sammy 'Yeah but that world before like heaven and hell, so if this world was perfect, what was the purpose of heaven and hell?'

Mr Cantle: 'That's an interesting question we're going to come back to that.'

Jacob: 'Cos God created the world, but Satan/'

Mr Cantle: 'God loves everybody [pause] question mark.'

4 students say together: 'yes'

Mr Cantle: 'Right, so if God loves everybody, why does he send some people to have sticks poked at them for all eternity, that doesn't sound like/'

Sammy: 'Cos they done bad'...

Azim: 'I don't know about the Bible, yeah, but in the Koran it says, it says yeah that through the hard times you have to, you have to stay patient [Sammy: 'Yeah'] an' if people die you're not going to go "aw I don't believe in God" and all that, cos that's your problem and you're gonna go to hell for that. And it clearly states like bad stuff happens.'

Mr Cantle: 'So essentially what you're saying is that evil is a test of faith?'

Sammy: 'Yes'

Azim: 'Yes'

Sammy [to Azim]: 'I like that, you know' [J&I\*Brockton\*3.3]

Sammy and Teje's account of faith takes the sacred as obvious – death, as a natural process, is seen as part of the supernatural, an ontology of death which neutralises questioning, an afterlife, is presented as obvious. For Sammy and Teje, Mr Cantle's question, proceeding from a secular logic, presenting God as an ideal, bound by philosophical conceptions of logic, is less accepting of a faith language which accepts God as a final power – the God who 'could' against the God who made things as 'meant' to be. Echoing Zizek's critique of Scotist voluntarism, in which God is not bound by prior truths (2009, 84), this opens up a realm of paradox – Mr Cantle's question renders Sammy's question about the purpose of eternity absurd, which in turn renders Mr Cantle's question absurd in Sammy's understanding. The mutual interruptions in Teje and Mr Cantle's refining of the space of paradox illustrate a discursive equality which is maintained through a deliberate humility on the part of the teacher. In this space, different faith positions may find common ground, even preference, as Azim's intervention from a Muslim perspective, but, as noted earlier in considering Mr Cantle's professional identity, no final reconciliation between positions is possible. Such an account permits both perspectives to exercise reason, yet there is no final reduction of faith to reason, no final acceptance that a single discourse must emerge as dominant. It is in this space

that the encounter with the other as other, and the recognition of the self as other, may have a strikingly transformative effect.

While Mr Cantle refuses to share his personal faith, it is nonetheless clear that there is a depth of commitment which extends beyond a narrow academic pedagogy. There is a recognition that words in religious discourse carry a value, that deeply held personal conviction is essential to the liminal nature of the encounter, that difference is to be entered into deeply, and not merely accepted. The contrast between the success and failure of such a pedagogy can be marginal, and in some ways attributable to a dullness as to detail, in which the most significant personal aspects of student talk can be communicated. The following source records classroom discussion undertaken as a starter activity in a Year 9 scheme of work exploring philosophical issues around the definition and existence of God, students are asked to list the attributes of God:

Ms Raphael: "You can be as controversial as you like."

Audrey: "What does that mean?"

Ms Raphael: "It means you can say anything you want."

...

Jack: "What about the father of Jesus?"

Ms Raphael: "I'm just gonna put 'Father' [on the board]"

There are a lot of group discussions arising out of students' ideas, this is generating background noise in what is intended as a whole-class discussion, Ms Raphael sits at the front desk, with her arms folded, she looks fed up. "Is it possible to have a discussion with you lot?" (J&I\*Brockton\*3.4)

Firstly, to compare Ms Raphael's response to Audrey with Mr Cantle's explanation of his method to the boy in the corridor, it can be seen that similar terminology may have very different practical consequences. This returns us to the heart of Baudrillard's symbolic exchange, his juxtaposition of the 'controlled zone' of language carrying a sacrificial exchange value as against the profane zone of language in endless free exchange. While both teachers extol the virtues of facing up to controversy in the classroom, Ms Raphael's depiction of this as a removing of all barriers, 'saying anything you want' with impunity, is in direct contradiction to Mr Cantle's aversion to 'easy answers'. The concerns raised in recent Ofsted documents around the failure of much religious education teaching to engender a sense of

progression (Ofsted 2010) may often amount to the effects of an uncommitted pluralism in which the acceptance of all views finds expression in the valuing of none.

The definitions of the pre-personal and the trans-personal advanced in chapter 3 are of significance here. Rather than broker an engagement with the truth claims of a transcendent world view, the elision in this encounter, not only of the Christian narrative in Jack's comment, but also of the spontaneous discussion which arises subsequently, effects the double-negation Girard associates with mimetic power, in so doing, meeting the teacher's aims becomes the highest value to which students may legitimately aspire. Recent feedback from students gathered during the project's launch of findings conference suggests that the pattern observed above, of students having meaningful conversations with one another about the subject matter, while teachers exclude these, either out of professional embarrassment or based on a determination to achieve predetermined outcomes to a pedagogical encounter, is a common pattern of classroom practice recognised by young people as broadly characteristic of religious education. It cannot be denied that to transcend such a model is a challenging task for even a confident teacher.

Furthermore, examining the method as well as the message, the treatment of interruption as potential space for precisely the kind of progress and dialogue required for liminal encounter is negatively perceived. While Conroy correctly observes that a liminal pedagogy, to be truly liminal, cannot be a permanent feature of the classroom, and the management of a task to avoid discussion at every stage may be prudent, it is clear that the ideas generated in this task, a brainstorming of ideas about God, have further generated reactions from students, expressed to peers, including value judgments and clarifications. Given the way the task is presented, this further imposition has the effect of eliding value from the items listed on the board. The teacher's description of this enumeration of atomised anything-you-wants as 'a discussion' further fails to engage a sense of encounter in the learning.

Finally, in Ms Raphael's response to Jack, the conceptual apparatus which Jack's words potentially carry is neutralised in their reduction. A key detail is elided out in reducing Jack's conception of God to 'Father' – while the concept of universal fatherhood is of significance to many religious accounts of God, the particular significance this acquires for Christianity in the unique claim to Sonship of Jesus sits at the heart of Christian understandings of God as Trinity, as incarnate, as well as of a Christian anthropology and eschatology of adoption,

sonship, redemption. The elision of Jesus from Jack's suggestion has the further effect of levelling the discourse, flattening it to facile universalisms. The place of the truly liminal teacher, then, requires careful judgment. This particular failure, which reduces the profound to the facile, may be contrasted with another class covering the same curriculum content. With a low ability Year 9 pupil, Mr Cantle's response elicits the profound from the facile, bearing witness, in a few brief words, to that concern for depth and detail which characterises the truly liminal encounter:

When discussing God's attributes, Chloe says: "He's got a beard" – rather than picking up directly on this comment, Mr Cantle replies: "Couple of interesting things", and points out to Chloe her assumptions that God is male and human. [J&I\*Brockton\*3.4]

The contrast between Baudrillard's zones of liberated and limited language, the language of individualistic capital as universal exchange value, and the language of symbolic, sacrificial exchange value, is illustrated by two incidents at Dungally and Brockton:

Mr Dunne takes the class outside for a task called 'walk the line' – the teacher calls out certain activities, the class stand on one side of the line if they believe the activity is sectarian, the other side if not, and on the line if they are unsure. The activities include 'wearing a poppy', 'going to watch an Orange Walk', 'playing Gaelic sports', Mr Dunne asks some students to explain the reasons for their choice...

'Wearing a Rangers top?' – 6 students are unsure, 1 thinks it is sectarian, the rest think it isn't...

[the final activity is] 'Shopping?' – everyone thinks it isn't sectarian. Mr Dunne asks Clare why she doesn't think shopping is sectarian.

'Because shopping, [hesitates] because shopping is for everyone.' (J&I\*Dungally\*3.4)

All of the other topics are areas of contestation, of varying degrees. In physically placing some students over against others, they broker an interpersonal engagement, an acknowledgement that, what belongs in the 'free' world of ideas for one person or community, belongs in a field of limitation for another, or indeed places the other in a space of limitation, imposing on them a climate of fear and intimidation. Only 'shopping is for everyone', only in the language of capital is all value exchange as attaching to persons dissolved. The incident below at Brockton

illustrates the dangers such a discourse of nullifying communally held value can pose in religious education when handled insensitively:

Veronica: 'If you're a Christian, you believe in God, you believe what the Bible is saying... you should be living by the rules that the Bible has set.' Veronica is a powerful speaker, she defends the traditional Christian perspective. In her defence, there is a generalised 'you' which implies the teacher and other students complicit in opposing this.

Ms Raphael challenges, she asks what if a Christian doesn't have the will power to resist.

Veronica: 'Please, this class is driving me crazy, can I just say this one thing...'

Jackie comes to Veronica's defence: 'If you're saying it's out of date, then you're saying the Bible's out of date.'

There is a heated, high energy atmosphere in the classroom.

Jackie: 'You know you said like marriage is pointless...'

Ms Raphael: 'No, I said is marriage pointless?'

There is some struggle with the concept of controversial statements, issues of teacher authority, 'you said'.

The atmosphere becomes chaotic, several girls talk heatedly about the cost of weddings. While one student talks to the class, others talk about her ideas to one another...

Veronica tries to get the teacher's attention: 'I've been good, I've only said one thing.' Although others support marriage, Veronica has taken on herself to be the sole supporter of a traditional Christian view.

Ms Raphael: 'You don't just learn from slides, from me, you're learning from each other.'

Ms Raphael tries to clarify what others have said to diffuse the confrontation.

Veronica: 'I'm not saying that it [premarital sex]'s wrong and you're not a proper Christian if you don't.'

Ms Raphael: 'Well done' – she praises the way Veronica has taken a view, listened to others, and revised that view to accommodate others.

3 or 4 students applaud.

What appears to have happened is that the only vocal Christian in the class has been forcibly liberalised by the dominant discourse of the other students with the support of the teacher. (J&B\*Brockton\*3.3)

The sample above is notable because two dialogues overlap, though it is a regrettable limitation of the text that only one of these dialogues is recorded in any depth, reflecting the ethnographer's prioritisation of the formal dialogue within the classroom over the informal. The power of the formal dialogue has a certain controlling effect, mitigating efforts by students and teacher to initiate an encounter which is open to a genuine encounter between divergent world views. Veronica in particular takes herself out of the Caribbean norms of dialogue embodied by some of her peers, and tries to stay within the formal norms of a whole-class discussion, in so doing, she places herself in a truly liminal encounter, one of managed discomfort for herself. This liminal space is dangerously determined by the broadly secular discourse of the teacher, academic environment and wider society, as we can see from the conclusion of this encounter. 'Good' is predefined as quiet, socialised into a certain set of norms.

In the formal discussion, as in Rahima's presentation of the model of religious education as perceived by students at Linden, both sides adopt an 'us'/'you' divide in their language. Veronica's rhetoric synonymises her view with the Bible, God and Christianity, and this is antonymised in Jackie's statement against the teacher, secularism and the wider culture. The teacher, to an extent, is carried into this divide, not deliberately, but in the place given her by the discursive context. Ms Raphael remains ultimately in control of a set of values which are not made explicit, not the values of secularism which Jackie and Veronica attribute to her, but values of compromise and socialisation which remain silent throughout the encounter. Veronica's gift of self-disclosure is not reciprocated but appropriated, redirected to another end – this amounts to an abuse of the liminal encounter, as in such questions of transpersonal



encounter the gift is inseparable from the giver. This closed commitment, as well as the passive bracketing out of the informal dialogue, in contradistinction to the committed openness observed in Dugally, has the effect of predetermining the outcome of the dialogue toward a unidirectional resolution. Such an approach fails to recognise the contested nature of religious value. Discussion in the religious education classroom, if it is to take seriously the transcendent truth claims of the object of study, cannot be reduced to debate. The level of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural operates by different, pluralist, pedagogical entailments, extraneous to the democratic levelling of the other to the same.

The interaction between faith commitment and questioning is an area requiring great sensitivity, to which teachers at these schools showed a great awareness. Bridging this divide without attempting to dissolve difference into a rationalistic relativism created a depth of understanding which enabled a critical engagement without discouraging students from expressing deeply held personal views. This engagement was further rewarded with significant successes at an academic level – in all four schools religious education was one of the most successful and popular subjects at GCSE and A-Level. Engagement with plurality and paradox on a personal as well as inter-personal level is a deeply intellectually challenging activity, which these schools are each to some extent willing to engage in, with results in direct proportion to the success of this commitment, which in turn may unlock the intellectual capacities of less conventionally academic students.

## Chapter 11: Conclusion: From Policy into Practice

### a) summary of findings

The thesis began with a broad overview of one of the most extensive qualitative research projects in British education in many years. Taking classroom enactment as the focus point for an ‘hourglass’ design for mixed methods research into religious education, it has been possible to trace some of the key themes current in topical debate – in particular the role of religious education in brokering an engagement with the values and attitudes for successfully understanding one’s place in a pluralistic, multicultural society. Examining the complex and often controversial history of religious education in UK curricula, it was possible to see, even at the levels of policy for the constituent nation states, the influences of a range of religious interest groups, nesting similar developments in pedagogical theory within divergent cultural domains.

Excavating the patterns of displacement which take place between a discourse of ‘choice’ operating at the levels of religious groups, families and teachers, and discourses of control exerted by increasing pressures for examination performance, inspection and resourcing, it became clear that religious education policy alone, understood as the formal legislative requirement, would not provide a sufficient lens through which to envision the state of the subject. Despite the protestations of a professional minority to the contrary (Thompson 2007; Barnes 2008), merely noting counterfactual models which could still conceivably be accommodated within the largely Christian focus of the legislative requirements will not bring about substantial changes in the *de facto* state of contemporary British religious education.

Recognising the diverse theoretical lenses which have been used in the translation of policy into practice, and in particular excavating a rich conception of pluralism, it was possible to trace a post-phenomenological approach to religious education, taking seriously the truth claims of religions as the object of study, while also retaining a commitment to forms of pluralism beyond the pretended neutrality of the phenomenological sympathetic imagination. A broad conception entitled ‘committed openness’ or ‘passionate impartiality’ was mooted by many key professionals as they discussed the state of the discipline. This concept has been fleshed out by much of the ethnographic data presented in chapters 8 and 9.

Additionally, the subversive element of religious narratives has come to the fore in these critical case studies – reflecting the transpersonal and enstranged dimensions of human development, an openness to the other in the toxicity of his or her otherness, a transformative encounter which displaces the familiar. Drawing on the concept of liminal and liminoid, and on the ideas of paradox and displacement developed in the anthropological literature, it has been possible to excavate some of the critical moments in which students have been brought face to face with a transformative encounter in the religious education classroom. In these examples, a depth of learning, a practical wisdom, emerges, with dimensions which exceed the performative aims of the examination curriculum. At times, these performative imperatives, while providing structure and accreditation in the curriculum, can serve to subvert or suppress such learning, functioning as a false transcendence, an idol of educational value.

The account of students' conative, affective, spiritual and normative development required more than a descriptive level of engagement. Introducing conceptions of religious meaning in chapter 7, it was possible to see, in their outworking in classroom experience and student dialogue, the importance of forging connections between dominant curricular models of effectiveness and the cultural domain, the lifeworld of the student, and the impact when attempts at such meaning-making connections failed to cohere. The importance of negation and displacement in the cultural domain raised fundamental questions about teacher authority. A fundamental theme running through the project has been the need for teachers to exercise a confidence rarely found, either within or beyond the subject discipline, a willingness to be vulnerable, to invite and include alternate discourses in the classroom, and to risk failures of meaning making.

Beginning by tracing two conceptions of religious education, a normative approach to culture and a metaphysical approach to transcendence, which lend their emphases to the attainment targets currently prescribed by national guidance in England, a rich contextual picture of the schools in communities of religious commitment has been traced. A visual and multimodal paradigm was proposed, drawing attention to the significance of marginal and elided items in the data, the sense of place as visually experienced, socially constructed and as an imagined space from which participating subjects speak and generate meanings. Within this paradigm, it was possible to dissect culture, drawing out a number of important themes, keeping sight of a transcendent dimension which is significant if understandings of religion and value are to remain sensitive to metaphysical dimensions and avoid mere description. Drawing all of this

together into a pedagogical approach, it was seen that approaches in liminal or single-faith schools differed in significant ways from the trickster pedagogy developed by Conroy and demonstrated in action in the liminoid or contested schools. This distinctive pedagogy I have labelled a seer pedagogy, although the distinction between the two is porous, and reflects the uniqueness and complexity of each of the four schools. At their best, these schools and their pedagogies offer a point of entry into the agreed meanings of transcendent truths from within a perspective of value commitment which remains open to the complexity which is present both between religious and educative cultural domains and between communities deeply held faith and heritage commitments.

At the outset, the schools in question could be identified as sites of success, academically successful despite contexts of community fragmentation, contestation and deprivation. It would be inappropriate to limit their success to a merely performative, academic level, however, as even the initial overview of school context demonstrated. By taking seriously the reality of deeply held individual and cultural beliefs, each of the schools instantiated a place not only of interpersonal and intercommunity encounter but a place of encounter with the estranged self through a decentring of enculturated values. Teachers in these contexts, where successful, were willing to enter into discussions of personal value, engaging in talk which went beyond abstracted academic content to the space of symbolic limitation – of the particular *isness* of their own and their students' value commitments – where this did not happen the pedagogy failed to effect a transformative encounter. Such approaches could be damaged by a reductive dullness, seeking to bracket out personal responses to value judgments or to exercise excessive control over classroom talk and its' meaning, creating a discursive closure leading students to reject rather than embrace the paradoxes of encounter with unfamiliar or plural cultural domains.

Paradoxes were explored in the conflicting values of managers, teachers and students, not operating only between one group and another, but as it were emerging from the 'inscape' of each domain, from paradoxes around the performative and personal, the values internal to faith and other value systems connected with attainment and multicultural awareness. In the case of Linden Girls' School, we began by illustrating the displacement which occurred in public professions of policy, concealing Islamic faith and Bangladeshi identity – this displacement set the domain through which paradoxes of limited religious literacy in both the

phenomenologically reductive conceptions of Islam advanced by the GCSE syllabus and in Bangladeshi cultural heritage came to be viewed as problematic by teachers and students alike. By displacing this core concern of religious education, the paradox of high value and low religious literacy could be re-drawn by teachers through the lens of community cohesion and examination success. The displacement of the core of this paradox from the publicly avowed domain of the school, evidenced not only by its absence in policy but also by anxieties experienced by teachers around discussion of major current issues in the public domain, as Battaglia theorised, has the effect of destabilising cultural norms, and as Girard postulated, this furthers the interests of a particular mimetic good, the good of examination performance. While students accept the premise, the need for increased understanding of Islam in the community, the lens through which teachers approach religious education at Linden, the solutions proposed by teachers, are not embraced so much as ‘accepted’ as the consequence of the exercise of authority by school and examination board. Within this structure, it is nonetheless observed that religious education can offer opportunities for discursive challenge. Spaces of creative meaning-making do open up during the course of the observed lessons, and in particular in places of contact with the other, such as observed during a field trip to a Hindu temple, but also in spaces where teachers had the courage to challenge the presumed lens of the school’s ‘debunking’ the ‘misinformation’ present in the cultural community, standing outside of this lens and permitting students to construct meaning and give value in their own terms in classroom encounters.

While similar paradoxes could be observed at St Athanasius Grammar, between high levels of religious commitment and perceived low levels of religious literacy, the cultural domain foregrounded by teachers and managers at St Athanasius held up religious and cultural values without problematising them. Within this very different context, religious education retained an openness to the transcendent Object of its study, the Catholic understanding of God, without compromising on examination success. While the same patterns of mimetic rivalry and clustering with regard to examination performance could be observed in this context as at Linden, a ludic subversion of these values was entered into, stressing their relative value with regard to a more dominant discourse of spiritual and personal engagement with religious truth, evident not only in religious education but throughout the school.

This emphasis on a shared value system could be observed at Dungally, where a concern with integration and a value commitment to Christian truth claims were both explicit and ubiquitous at the level of institutional values. In common with Linden, teachers manifested an active understanding of controversies and confrontations which students faced in the outside world, but at its best Dungally College's religious education teachers were able to broker spaces within Baudrillard's 'zones of limitation', areas for controversy in which language is invested with a sacrificial seriousness that comes from its connection to the realities of life (and death) in Northern Ireland, evidenced in the careful negotiation between silence and conversation. While St Athanasius offers a liminal encounter which seeks a mature encounter with the truth claims of a given faith position, Dungally's management and teachers quite explicitly seek a liminoid or inter-community transformative encounter. At times, formulaic attempts to broker such an encounter fall flat, but this encounter is saved from the pitfalls of merely becoming another cultural commonplace by a willingness of teachers to engage in active critique of the dominant narrative, standing outside of the dominant lens where appropriate, brokering increasing depth and reflection, ensuring a sense of progress on a spiritual and social level, as well as progress in academic attainment.

Both Dungally and Brockton may be held up as examples of liminoid education, education in points of cultural conflict, in which religious education explicitly counts inter-community understanding among its core aims. While initial comparisons between pedagogical and value approaches at Brockton and Dungally exposed significant differences on the level of cultural commitment, with their respective heads of religious education constructing both the curriculum and their professional identity from a Socratic philosophical and Catholic Christian perspective respectively, it became clear that both of these social performances were grounded in deeply held personal values, which both teachers were willing to model with sufficient humility and confidence in the model to permit a discursive openness in the classroom. In both cases, these teacher performances of identity were counter-cultural in the school, subverting academic norms common in other areas of the curriculum. In both areas, these identities were played out beyond the discussion of moral issues in the classroom, in dealings with the wider life of the school. Such an approach requires high levels of teacher confidence. From a position of commitment, it was possible to model a respectful openness to the other without pretending to neutrality. The impossibility of final resolution between the philosophical and theological repertoires represented in Mr Cante's classroom at Brockton did not preclude the

possibility of Mr Cantle's critical perspective having an influence in the world beyond academic religious education, such as was in evidence at Brockton's student Christian Union.

Within these diverse contexts, effective religious education, religious education which respects the subjective values of students and the transcendent object of study, exists in a space between two silences. At one end is the silence of 'acceptance' of an authority which imposes itself within the cultural domain of the school, the authority of a too-tight construal of meaning, what Conroy (2004) terms discursive closure, the silence of reducing subject and object to banality. At the opposite extreme is the silence of Baudrillard's zone of limitation, the awe of the religious believer before the suprapersonal, suprarational transcendent Other. When the former is mistaken for the latter, a 'false transcendence' is exalted, an idol which comes to impose itself as the supreme value through exercise of mimetic authority. Evidence drawn from the schools in this sample, and more widely throughout this study, suggests that students are much more astute at challenging these false transcendences than may be assumed – the threat facing authentic religious education is not the threat of indoctrination, as raised in chapter 3, but the threat of being 'seen through', of failing to find traction with the cultural domain, the life-world of the student, being reduced to a performance for the benefit of authority, shorn of spiritual, moral, social and cultural meaning. It is these failures of meaning which have been excavated in the preceding chapter. Where teachers are able to effectively manage the zone of limitation, drawing out depth from within the meaning-making apparatus of students' cultural repertoires, the possibility opens up for a religious education which allows students to enter into a point of encounter with the spiritual and personal commitments of the interpersonal other, and in so doing recognise their own *enstranged* otherness. Even in these moments, however, students cannot be forced into such encounters, but only invited.

The sheer complexity of the practice of religious education in UK schools is drawn out by a commonality of encounters clustered around a plurality of models of effectiveness. Drawing together the diverse theoretical lenses which have been trained upon religious education in the course of this thesis (Fig. 20 below), it immediately becomes clear that none of the crude dichotomies, such as between faith schools and non-denominational/secular schools, which

|                                 | Ch 3<br>model | Ch 4<br>model | Liminal              | Cultural<br>Identity   | Management<br>Values<br>foregrounded | Teacher<br>pedagogical<br>style                  | Student<br>cultural<br>domain   |
|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Brockton<br>Community<br>School | A             | 4             | Liminoid             | Incidental<br>Plural   | Community<br>cohesion                | Trickster,<br>Socratic,<br>committed<br>openness | Religious<br>education<br>connects to<br>Christian<br>and secular<br>domains                |
| Dungally<br>College             | A             | 1             | Liminal/<br>Liminoid | Purposely<br>Plural    | Christian &<br>Integrated            | Committed<br>openness,<br>faith<br>commitment    | Religious<br>education<br>integral to<br>'integrated'<br>identity,<br>then<br>subverts this |
| Linden<br>Girls'<br>School      | B             | 4             | Liminoid             | Incidental<br>Monoglot | Community<br>cohesion                | 'information'<br>'debunking'                     | Religious<br>education<br>'accepted'<br>for exam,<br>not<br>connected<br>to faith life      |
| St<br>Athanasius                | B             | 1             | Liminal              | Purposely<br>Monoglot  | Irish &<br>Catholic<br>identity      | Confessional,<br>faith<br>commitment             | Religious<br>education<br>has effect in<br>moral lives<br>of young<br>people                |



pervade public discourse and debate about the subject are sufficient to represent the pluralities of practice and aim which have come to typify the subject. Artificial dichotomies which are at times imposed by the examination curriculum, as the evidence above illustrates, can have a tendency to make relevant engagement on a personal level difficult if not impossible.

In summary, in the broad spectrum of practices and models of effectiveness presented above, a scale may be observed for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of religious education. At one end of this scale sits a bland sterility, at the other a dangerous toxicity in relation to the challenges it poses to students in living in an increasingly complex society. Once schools begin to treat seriously of the object of study in religious education, it becomes possible for students to engage meaningfully in an encounter with the truth claims of religious education. Only then, the evidence would suggest, will students be able to enter into transformative encounters with others in their otherness, nor can this be entirely detached from encounters with a transcendent Other. To attempt such an uncoupling is to fundamentally misrepresent religion, instrumentalising religious education as a cipher for a kind of bland civics curriculum.

#### b) recommendations and future directions

Such a complex task requires teachers to have support in answering criticism from parents, faith community representatives and professional peers who may struggle to understand this uniquely sensitive dimension of religious education. The relationship between teacher anxiety and discursive closure on the one hand, and teacher confidence and committed openness on the other could be observed across the full range of these contexts. In all cases, teachers struggled on their own to produce resources which engaged with students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural domains in meaningful ways, but in many cases, success came when students were able to speak from that domain in their own words and find acceptance in the classroom. The question of balancing acceptance and a sense of progression arose in several cases, such as illustrated with Ms Raphael's classes – a genuinely liminal, plural model of acceptance respects the differences between values which students hold on a deep level, which only rarely surface when freedom is given to the zone of limitation, language given tentatively, as a gift and a sacrifice, and statements which belong in a zone of free exchange, circulating as mere abstract concepts, free from value, when the student 'can say anything' but mean nothing by it. The importance of the teacher in brokering such a high-trust encounter

cannot be over-stated, and the damage which can be done to religious education by poorly prepared non-specialist teachers is easy to see, even in these rare examples in transformative institutions. Confident religious education teachers construct a professional identity from deeply held values, and are capable of articulating and enacting these values in the classroom without undue influence on students – teachers who attempt a pretended neutrality with regard to values in a great many cases create difficulties for students who wish to articulate conceptions of religious and spiritual meanings which are deeply imbued with a language of values. The dangers of this value-neutralising neutrality are illustrated above. This finding is corroborated by an audience of school students during a recent forum-theatre reflective activity staged during the project's launch of findings conference, aimed at distilling and triangulating key project findings.

While this thesis has focused as far as possible on positive models of effectiveness in religious education practice, even these schools, which prioritise the subject and its spiritual, moral, social and cultural aims, and in which staff often exhibit heroic levels of commitment, problems surface which are systemic and constitutive of religious education in its current form. Clearly, these flaws are not being captured by performative measures, such as increasing levels of examination success (Ofsted 2010). At times, the examination itself has the ability to displace and to mask deeper problems of meaning-making which are essential if the public social claims made about the importance of religious learning for life in a pluralist society are to be sustained. Nonetheless, in all of the cases explored above, examination success has played a role in commending religious education to students and managers, representing a thread of value in the British educational system which cannot be ignored. More sensitive measures, capable of accommodating the disparate world-views from which students approach the object of study, without subjectifying course content, are needed if religious education is to broker depth of encounter, meaning-making and religious literacy, and avoid a discursive closure around the compartmentalised learning of depersonalised and shallow phenomena.

Methodologically, a wealth of data has been generated by this project, but the smallest fragment of which has formed the basis of this extensive study, which has delved deeply into the practices of pluralism, multiculturalism and transformative transpersonal encounter in these four schools, practices which other teachers at times aim at, yet often fail to achieve. The remainder of the data remains to be analysed for its key conclusions, and efforts are currently

under way to generate open-source versions of the data, enabling a broader debate on the nature of the evidence. Ethnographic and multimodal studies, supported by quantitative triangulation, which formed the basis of this research, have the capacity to generate a depth, in particular with regard to the social and personal dimensions of student and teacher identity in complex nested social practices, which quantitative studies alone are not capable of capturing. While representing a significant investment of time and resource, such studies are necessary if educational researchers seek authentic insight into the foundational concepts which underpin the practices of education, and are not to be distorted or disguised by performative measures.

What this complexity demonstrates is a need for confidence. At its best, religious education in the British model, both in confessional and multi-faith settings, is capable of offering students a level of personal engagement, mature reflection and intellectual challenge at least equal to that of the other humanities in the school curriculum. The myriad professional and political anxieties which have for the past 25 or more years precluded prescriptive and ambitious guidance for the subject have led to the evolution of a range of aims and practices – out of this diversity and complexity, a number of models of effectiveness have emerged. All of these are categorised by confidence, commitment, and openness to the controversial and contested areas into which students and teachers bring holistic senses of meaning and value. A continued professional confusion, symbolised by the foundational confusion over whether it is even possible to pose the question, ‘Does RE Work?’, threatens to undermine these models of effectiveness, illustrated by their patchy operation even in these few critical cases of good practice. Having arrived at models of effectiveness, the time has come for a broader confidence to drive forward reforms aimed at the propagation of effective religious education and the elimination of bland, distorted, timid and outmoded practices which are sadly so prevalent in the subject.

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## APPENDIX A: Questions asked to the Delphi participants

Questions sent to participants in advance of the Delphi conference:

1. Who in your view decides RE policy for schools in the UK today?
2. What do you consider ought to be the main aims and purposes of RE in UK secondary schools?
3. Should all of these aims obtain in every school (if not, which should not be in every school and why not)?
4. There are a number of different paradigms operative in the study of RE today, which do you consider to be of most relevance to effective RE teaching in UK society?
5. What do you consider to be the most important learning goals for pupils undertaking RE in UK secondary schools?
6. Indicate what you consider to be the dispositions and attitudes towards religion with which young people should emerge from their secondary education.
7. What are the most important personal and professional qualities in an effective RE teacher in modern UK secondary schools?
8. What in your view are the most serious barriers to effective RE today?
9. Indicate some of the means that in your view might be employed to monitor the effectiveness of RE
10. In your view, how does RE contribute to the creation of a flourishing multi-cultural society?
11. Is RE inevitably a source of conflict and division in an ever more secular British society?

Questions distilled from the first day's discussion and presented on day two:

1. Who speaks for Religious Education in the various UK constituencies? How persuasive are their voices?
2. Is there a view among colleagues here that particular conceptions of the practices of Religious Education are educationally and morally more evolved and therefore more sophisticated than others?
3. Is there an authentic overlapping consensus on the chief aims of religious education?

4. Can religious education effectively perform several social and pedagogical functions simultaneously?
5. Is it possible to segregate the public and private functions of religion?
6. What are the criteria of success in the practice of religious education?



## APPENDIX B: Focus group questions to students in schools

1. Questions about the teacher
  - a) Which teacher(s) do you have for RE?
  - b) Are they different from other teachers in the school? How?
  - c) What do you think they want you to learn in RE?
2. Is RE different from your other subjects? (specifically History, Geography, Modern Studies, Citizenship & PSHE) How?
3. Is RE different in the upper school than in the lower school? How?
4. Are you taking GCSE/Standard Grade RE? Why? Why not?
5. Are you planning to take RE at A-Level/Higher? Why? Why not?
6. Is RE important?
  - a) Important to you?
  - b) Important in this school?
  - c) Important for getting a job/university place?
7. What is the best thing about RE?
8. What is the worst thing about RE?

## APPENDIX C: Interview questions to teachers on factors influencing their teaching

1. Tell me the story behind this lesson. Where did the idea for it come from?
2. Is this lesson typical of your teaching? Is it typical of the department?
3. What are/have been your main influences?
4. Tell me about the resources, where are they from?
5. How often have you taught this lesson? Has it changed?

## APPENDIX D: Full ethnographers' observation schedule

### **A. Spatial/Temporal Information**

1. Layout of classroom
2. Photos of classroom as a reference point (displays, desk layout, presence or absence of religious images, etc.)
3. Desk plan from the teacher (to facilitate knowing who the students are and identifying speakers)
4. How room/space is used during teaching (i.e. small group work Vs facing the front for a lecture)
5. Use of artefacts and teaching tools
6. Use/Availability of IT
7. Wider school layout (to place classroom in the wider context of the school)
8. How does the RE classroom compare to the rest of the classrooms
9. What kinds of resources are available in other parts of the school (i.e. library)
10. Communal areas (i.e. places where staff or students meet and talk about stuff). How are these used, what happens in them, how do teachers/students behave differently in them?
11. Community layout (to place the school within the wider context of the community)
12. Where is the school located (map) Urban/rural
13. Social/ethnic class of neighbourhood
14. Proximity of places of religious worship (Are these used for fieldtrips or as a source of guest speakers? Do these places have public events that students may attend without any link to the school)
15. Time of day when RE takes place (duration, format — how is it delivered etc)
16. How much time within the school week do students and teachers devote to RE
17. Whole school ethos and influence on relationships
18. Are aims shared and embedded (in pedagogical practice, in staff-student relationships, in student-student relationships, in behaviour management, in school's public presentation, in management values, in teacher values.)

### **B. Teacher-Student Interaction**

1. Power relations
2. How authority is managed and maintained and how this might be affected by social variables (age, gender, ethnicity, religious background) ex. Young teacher having problems controlling class and getting the respect of students, RE in a Catholic school taught by a nun as opposed to a lay person.
3. Does classroom activity follow a predictable routine?
4. How might students undermine the authority of the teacher (i.e. talking, saying 'you're not Muslims so how can you tell me, who is a Muslim, about Islam', etc.)
5. Do students buy into what they are being taught and the methods being used? (i.e. are they willing or reluctant participants, are they on task?)
6. The way the teachers presents themselves to the students (i.e. giving personal info to the students so that they can see what their biases might be (i.e. religious background, marital status, sexuality, etc; clearly expressing their values or just sticking to the curriculum; willing to be open about how they may or may not agree with the curriculum; or taking that attitude that 'you're here to learn and you don't need to know anything about me'). Note: this will clearly affect student-teacher relations and issues of authority and 'buy in'.
7. Quality of student-teacher relationship, (language used to maintain authority over students)

### **C. Discourse**

1. teacher talk about management and admin issues
2. teacher talk that merely provides a description (i.e. this is what happens during a Baptism)
3. teacher talk that looks at conceptual issues (i.e. what is 'sin', justice')
4. teacher talk that looks at more abstract issues
5. teacher's questions to students that deal with admin issues
6. teacher's questions that test student's recall
7. teacher's questions that examine student comprehension (i.e. what is justice?)
8. teacher's questions that examine how students can apply conceptual issues (i.e. can you give me an example of sin)
9. teacher's questions that examine student ability to analyse or interpret

10. teacher's questions that examine student ability to synthesise data (i.e. what are common elements when we make comparisons of rites of passage)
11. teacher's questions that invite students to make evaluations or judgements
12. students respond to such questions, if they answer in a way that is deemed 'acceptable' or correct by the teacher and classmates
13. how these interactions might change when students move to small group work
14. Teaching methods/ techniques, and how these intersect with pedagogical intentions
15. Teachers' self perception as against students' and other teachers' perspective (competence, rapport)
16. Inclusion — description or engagement, language of challenge or compliance, do teachers assume all students have same beliefs, or take account of different cultures in the classroom? Where work is differentiated by student ability, does the work of the low ability group have the same broad learning aims as the high ability group?
17. Student-Student Interaction
18. Do certain students seem to dominate?

#### **D. Teachers and students' interaction with curriculum/resources and values**

1. Content of lesson and methods used to deliver
2. Didactic/reflective
3. Content driven, topical, discussion, 'personal search'
4. Balance between student needs and exam cramming
5. Bias?
6. How do students, amongst themselves deal with diversity (i.e. differences of gender, class, ethnic or religious background and hierarchies) Where do students gain their understanding of diversity? From the RE classroom, from elsewhere in the school, from outside school?
7. What happens in small group or project work?
8. How does RE teaching compare with that of other subjects?
9. Teaching methods and course content
10. Perceived 'usefulness'
11. Status of RE as a discipline

12. Characteristics of teachers, are they promoted or unpromoted, active in wider life of the school etc.
13. Teacher-Teacher Interaction (outwith classroom)
14. Issues of hierarchy (how is RE syllabus designed and communicated) i.e. do they have group meetings or does the head RE teacher just dictate (note: it would be useful to attend a curriculum planning meeting)
15. how teachers talk about curriculum to other specialists (specialist discourse, buzzwords, current issues, hopes/fears)
16. how does RE fit in with school management structure (is there a Head of Department? Is it embedded within a 'Humanities' faculty structure? How many teachers are specialists? How many non-specialists teach RE?
17. how teachers relate to other subject specialists
18. how teachers talk about students
19. how teachers talk about school
20. how are RE teachers viewed within school (status)
21. Outside/guest speakers and partners involved in delivery and planning of RE. Field trips etc. Who is involved and why? how are they identified? What is the frequency of such visits what is their role and relationship with school? Do students find these valuable or useful? Do staff find these speakers' input useful?
22. What is the relationship between ethnographer/teacher/students We need to build and maintain rapport which facilitates openness and trust, we need to be aware of power variables (eg age, gender, ethnicity, religious background) and to establish professional relationship: researching not judging, building capacity with their practitioner enquiry. Recognising own limits and strengths.
23. There is a need to establish expectations about what they can expect to receive from us (reports, comparisons, presentations to students, etc.) Note: people are more willing to participant if we 'give' and not just take. There is a need to be aware of, and note, any impact our presence is having on the teaching and learning dynamic and context etc. Also there is a need to see how presence of the other might lead to teachers might sticking to or deviating from the set curriculum

## **E. Teachers' relationship with curriculum and resources**

1. Awareness of available resources within school and wider, awareness of role of resources and curriculum guidance
2. Are links made with other subjects, e.g. history, art, social education, are teachers able to make these links?
3. Teacher willingness to deviate from lesson plan and agreed syllabus or accommodate contrary views or discuss controversial topics (what might their motivation be for doing this?)
4. Control — are they planning own lessons or using what is given to them from others, teaching passively from text book (if a text is used, which one and why? What ones were rejected?)
5. Language used to talk about Religious Education as a subject, and subject matter within it
6. Teachers' views of inspection and examination regime
7. Teachers' relationship with values of curriculum and resources
8. Are teacher values made explicit?
9. Are teachers aware of their own values and how this might influence their teaching?)
10. Student relationship with curriculum and resources (e.g. values, content of curriculum and resources).
11. What values and influences do students bring to their learning — e.g. external influences (parents, religious communities, media, other students)?
12. There is a need to get a feel for the difference between the 'frontstage' (i.e. class room performance of the teacher (or student)) and the 'backstage' (i.e. curriculum planning meetings, how teachers go about making a lesson plan, how they are influenced by the need to get good exam results, what backstage student activities (i.e. gossip) might affect how they act in the classroom)
13. Non-Teaching Activities in the Classroom
14. Direct spiritual interventions, e.g. prayer — how conducted? Student or teacher led?  
Are all students expected to take part?
15. Behaviour management
16. Extra-curricular activities centred around the RE classroom — are these connected to RE in any way, e.g. Scripture Union, or are they unrelated, e.g. a chess club that meets in RE classroom because RE teacher supervises them?

17. General student talk, non-teaching student-teacher talk — is this different in the RE classroom than in other classes? Why might this be?
18. Questions to teachers about their influences and marshalling of resources.