Practitioners' understanding and implementation of moral education in a Scottish non-denominational primary school.

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Abstract

This thesis aimed to understand how moral education is implemented in a non-denominational primary school context through explicit and implicit approaches. Previous research has explored the curricular area of 'Religious and Moral Education' within Scotland; however, very few studies have focused specifically on the 'moral' aspect of it. Consequently, this is a significantly under-researched area in Scotland. In an international context, research related to moral education has been heavily influenced by scholars in psychology who have developed several theories of moral development. However, these often lack empirical evidence, and in-school research is primarily used to test the effectiveness of moral education tools developed by psychologists. Therefore, understanding what moral educators implement in their daily practice and why is scarcely reported in the academic literature. This study utilised an interpretivist qualitative single-case study approach to gain rich and detailed accounts of moral education implementation. Semi-structured interviews with educators, researcher observations of moral education lessons and the school's environment, and document analysis provided insights into the explicit and implicit approaches within the school. The present thesis found that moral education faced many challenges relating to its explicit and implicit implementation in the case study primary school. Educators shared that the performative nature of Curriculum for Excellence placed a focus on three 'core' areas, resulting in moral education being 'squeezed out' of their timetables. It was found that a lack of initial teacher education and continuing professional development opportunities related to moral education significantly impacted practitioners' curricular knowledge (understanding of materials, learning objectives and pedagogies in a subject). Finally, the implicit moral education curriculum in primary schools was going unnoticed by educators, and there was a focus on compliance with school rules, whereas values were poorly communicated to students and staff. Overall, these findings are timely and provide unique contributions to both the Scottish and international literature on moral education implementation at the primary school level.

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Author's Declaration

"I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution."

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Definitions/Abbreviations

CfE – Curriculum for Excellence

DPT – Dual Process Theory

Es and Os – Experiences and Outcomes

fMRI – Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging

H&W – Health and Wellbeing

ME - Moral Education

NCCT/s – Non-Class Contact Teacher/s

RE – Religious Education

RME – Religious and Moral Education

SCCORE – Scottish Central Committee on Religious Education

SIMD – Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

Glossary

Term	Definition
5-14 Curriculum	Introduced in the 1990s as the first national curriculum in Scotland.
Curriculum for Excellence	Implemented in 2010 with eight curricular areas.
Health and Wellbeing	Developing an understanding and the skills which learners need now and in the future. Includes mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing.
Literacy	Language and literacy are important on a personal, social, and economic level. Language is an expression of emotions, thinking and personal identity. A fundamental skill to explain thinking, debate ideas, and read and write.
McCrone Time	A term commonly given to the time Scottish teachers are provided with weekly to prepare resources, correct work, and attend training opportunities. This came from the

	McCrone report around teachers' pay and working conditions.
Non-Class Contact Teacher	Teachers who cover the learning activities when the regular classroom educator is entitled to their McCrone time. May be a supply teacher or another educator in the school.
Numeracy	Mathematics in real-life situations which are also related to areas such as science and technologies. A life skill which supports all areas of learning.
Religious and Moral Education	The exploration of beliefs and values through the context of Christianity, World Religions, and belief groups independent of religion.
Social Studies	Developing an understanding of the world by learning about people and their values, in different times, places and circumstances.

Chapter 1 : Introduction and Rationale

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the present thesis, which aims to understand the explicit and implicit implementation of moral education in a primary school context. The current chapter has several aims which provide an overview of moral education in an international and Scottish context. The first section of this chapter aims to define key terms, as the language relating to moral education has been described as a 'semantic minefield' (Berkowitz, 2012). The main distinctions between character, citizenship, religious, and moral education are provided. It will discuss the differences between the terms 'values' and 'virtues' as the definitions of these can also relate to the types of educational approaches that are being implemented in character, citizenship, religious or moral education (Arthur et al., 2017a; Chowdhury, 2016; Kristjánsson, 2015). The main aspects of moral education, including its emphasis on cognition and the importance of the environment in moral development, are discussed.

The second section provides an overview of moral education in the Scottish context, as the curriculum has undergone significant changes since the publication of the Millar Report in 1972 (Scottish Education Department, 1972). This report proposed a more moral approach, where students could form their own beliefs based on non-religious perspectives and highlighted some of the main challenges within this curricular area (Conroy, 2014; Nixon, 2012, 2009, 2008a). Additionally, the Millar Report (1972) had a crucial impact on the development of curricula in Scotland, with the first national curriculum for Religious and Moral Education introduced, specifically in the non-denominational context. In this section, there will be a brief discussion of the 5-14 curriculum and Curriculum for Excellence, which continues to recognise the place of moral education in Scotland.

Third, this chapter aims to discuss the relevant Scottish literature relating to moral education, where the curricular name for this subject is Religious and Moral Education (Education Scotland, 2017a). This outlines the significant gap within the academic literature for further research into moral education at the primary school level, as scholars currently focus on philosophical studies in high schools

(Nixon, 2012) or religious education in primary schools (Matemba, 2018). There is also a discussion around the current debates relating to this curricular area, including the confusion around terminology (Scholes, 2024), teaching approaches implemented in the classroom (Grant and Matemba, 2013), and the importance placed on RME in educators' practice (Education Scotland, 2014).

Finally, the rationale for the current research is outlined, as this study aims to provide an understanding of moral education implementation through a qualitative case study in a primary school. In an international context, it has been recognised that most literature related to moral education comes from the field of psychology and primarily focuses on theories of moral development (Dahl et al., 2025; De Ruyter, 2019; Berkowitz and Bier, 2014). This thesis aims to provide an understanding of educators' current knowledge of moral education and the approaches that are implemented in their practice. Additionally, in the Scottish literature, there has been an overlook of the 'moral' aspect of RME (Matemba, 2021; 2018; 2015), which has left a gap in understanding what educators and researchers know about moral education implementation at the primary school level. The main research aim and sub-questions, as well as the overall structure of the present thesis, are provided in the final sections of this chapter.

1.2 Defining and Distinguishing Values, Virtues, Character, Citizenship, Religious, and Moral Education

1.2.1 Values and Virtues

To investigate moral education, it is important to explain its relationship with cognate terms, which will be outlined in the following subsections. The terms 'values' and 'virtues' are used almost synonymously in the academic literature and educational policies relating to character and moral programmes, which can lead to confusion in the distinctions between this terminology (Espinosa and Gonźalez, 2024). However, both virtues and values are grounded in distinct theoretical positions, which have implications for the pedagogies and approaches used in moral and character education (Thoma and Walker, 2017). One of the main distinctions between the terms is the way they are acquired by individuals and how they influence behaviours. Drawing on Aristotle's virtue ethics theory, some scholars describe virtues development as a natural process thorough habituation, practice, and formal education (Peterson and Kristjánsson, 2024; Reilly and

Narvaez, 2018). More recent literature has emphasised the role of holistic approaches to virtue development, through everyday life in schools and not reliant upon only a formal curricular area (Pike et al. 2021). The habituation process has been compared to the development of learning any new skill, where the individual must practise continuously over a period of time (Jerome and Kisby, 2019; Arthur, 2003). Formal education would develop an individual's phronesis, which is their 'good sense' of knowing how to react in situations that provide a conflict between virtue and vice (Reilly and Narvaez, 2018; Arthur et al., 2017b). Additionally, it is believed that a person can be virtuous only when they act virtuously; it is not enough to simply know virtuous action (Espinosa and Gonźalez, 2024; Pike et al., 2021). Therefore, virtues are based on an individual's actions, and the endeavour to become a virtuous individual is a life-long process that requires guided practice.

In contrast, values are believed to be the standards that guide an individual's behaviour, based on reasoning, rather than the actions themselves (Espinosa and Gonźalez, 2024; Thoma and Walker, 2017). Values are a set of standards that an individual holds to guide their own behaviours as well as their evaluations of others' actions and beliefs (Pike, 2019; Schwartz, 2012; Halstead and Taylor, 2000). The literature on values suggests that these are judgements about what is right and wrong in given situations where social environments and interactions are much more important than the development of virtues (Dahl, 2023; Ellemers et al., 2019). In their paper, Ellemers et al. (2019) state that values "are used by individuals living together in social communities, for instance, to make them refrain from selfish behaviour" (p. 333). In this sense, values are not only about the individual's own development but also how they are used for social cohesion within communities (Ellemers et al., 2019). In contrast, virtues are much more rooted in how an individual acts in accordance with their own traits that have been developed (Jerome and Kisby, 2019; Reilly and Narvaez, 2018). Therefore, the social aspect of the development and enactment of values distinguishes it from virtues, which is a more individualised process.

A second main distinction between the terms 'virtues' and 'values' relates to their universality which continue to be debated within the literature. Scholars such as Arthur and Carr (2013) argue that certain there are basic virtues that can be observed across cultures and form a "universal currency". Similarly, Carr (1991) claims that societies are aware that traits such as tolerance, compassion, and

honesty are the ones that should be taught, while vices should be avoided. Even within the virtues literature, there are debates, as Liao and Lambert (2011) suggest that because individuals strive to become virtuous agents, their thought processes consequently become similar to one another. Scholars working within values education place more emphasis on values being influenced by external factors such as family, community, and the media (Gökçe, 2021; Halstead and Taylor, 2000). Schwartz's (2012) value theory goes even further to argue that values are contextually and situationally dependent, rather than universally fixed. This theory suggests that values such as obedience may be important in the workplace context, but in a friendship, honesty may be more important. Individuals can then create their own hierarchy, where values prioritised in one person's perspective could be very different from another's, and even within certain contexts, these values can vary in importance (Dahl, 2023; Schein, 2020). Hence, the impact of external factors on the development of virtues and values has been addressed in the academic literature, highlighting that values are more often dependent on the contexts and cultures in which they are developed.

This section has discussed some of the main distinctions between the terms 'values' and 'virtues' with respect to how they are expected to be developed and how they drive an individual's choices or behaviours (Pike et al., 2021; Ellemers et al., 2019). Discussing these as two distinct terms is essential, as this has implications for how they are explored through character and moral education, which will be outlined in the following sections. Additionally, within the Scottish context, Religious and Moral Education documents continuously use the term 'values' whilst 'virtues' does not feature within the Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2017a). Therefore, the development of values in relation to moral education will be the continued narrative within this thesis, with a clear discussion of the pedagogies and approaches utilised to nurture this at the primary school level.

1.2.2 Character Education

When discussing moral and character education, Berkowitz (2012b) uses various metaphors to describe the current landscape of academic literature in this field. One of which is the 'Tower of Babel' to highlight that "terminology is a major obstacle… because it varies so widely" (Berkowitz, 2012b: 247). Although character and moral education are closely interwoven, there are key differences

between the two, which are important to outline to develop our understanding of the pedagogical approaches used in these forms of education.

One of the leading scholars on character education in England, James Arthur, has provided several definitions and features that underpin this type of education (Arthur, 2014; Arthur et al., 2017a). The link between character education and virtue development is frequently mentioned in the literature (Peterson and Kristjánsson, 2024; Arthur et al., 2017a; Kristjánsson, 2013). However, four distinct categories of virtues have been discussed: moral, intellectual, civic, and performance (Arthur et al., 2015; Arthur and Carr, 2013). It is argued that positive human flourishing can occur only when these four categories of virtues are developed and work in collaboration with one another (Walker, 2021; Arthur et al., 2018). This view is supported by American scholar Berkowitz (2012a), who argues that character education develops various aspects such as thinking, feeling, and behaviour. It can be argued that character education provides a more holistic approach to virtue development by incorporating several categories. However, this broad scope also means that character education is not always concerned with moral issues, as performance virtues such as "confidence" or "leadership" (Jubilee Centre, 2017: 9) have no moral grounding.

In the literature, it has been outlined that a key challenge with character education is that it is often associated with more direct teaching approaches where adult transmission of virtues has been criticised (Mills, 2021; Thoma and Walker, 2017). Character education has been criticised for "a mostly behavioural and authoritarian approach" whilst "more constructivist and democratic approaches tend to be identified by… *moral education*" (Berkowitz, 2012a: 254). In an educational sense, it has been recognised that character education tends to utilise approaches such as direct teaching, role modelling, and service learning (Peterson and Kristjánsson, 2024; Thoma and Walker, 2017). Arguably, the more traditional forms of character education required students to be passive learners who seldom critiqued the virtues they were being taught, which could, consequently, reproduce inequalities within society (Thoma and Walker, 2017; Kohlberg and Mayer, 1972). In Britain, Arthur (2010) explains that character education has a responsive attitude to address the "ills facing society which originate in the behaviour of juveniles" (p. 33). This has been famously critiqued by Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) as a "bag of virtues" approach (p. 54), which they

believed to be an ineffective type of education based on heteronomous moral thinking. Despite this, it has been suggested that character education is moving towards more constructivist approaches by including strategies such as service to others and cooperative learning opportunities in society (Arthur, 2014; 2003; Arthur and Carr, 2013). Even though there may be a movement towards more constructivist approaches, the traditional form of character education is still dominant in the literature, where there is a focus on cultivating virtues through an adult transmission.

Another feature of character education is that virtues can be "caught, taught, and sought" (Peterson and Kristjánsson, 2024: 278) through the life of the school. Teaching virtues has been discussed in the above paragraph, relating to the more direct approaches often associated with character education programmes (Peterson and Kristjánsson, 2024; Thoma and Walker, 2017; Berkowitz, 2012a). However, scholars in this field have noticed that even in early childhood, virtues can develop through an individual's interactions with others who perform just or unjust actions through role modelling (Jerome and Kisby, 2019; Arthur et al., 2017b; Arthur et al., 2006). According to this approach, the teacher plays a significant part in role modelling virtues in the school community as pupils develop their own traits through observing these behaviours and the consequences of these actions (Arthur et al., 2017b; Kristjánsson, 2006). One criticism of this is that role modelling may encourage students to copy certain behaviours rather than develop the virtuous actions themselves (Arthur et al., 2017b). In response to this, character education researchers have introduced a third category of virtues being 'sought' where "the school provides varied opportunities that generate the formation of personal habits" (Peterson and Kristjánsson, 2024: 279). In this sense, students should become internally driven by their virtues and seek opportunities to develop these externally (Peterson and Kristjánsson, 2024). Through this 'sought' aspect, character education then tends to become very closely related to citizenship education, as this aims to reinforce the explicit teaching of virtues that is done in the classroom and allows students to put these traits into practice (Revell and Arthur, 2007). Therefore, there are clear areas where character education differs from moral education, with more focus placed on adult-transmission of values, development of non-moral virtues, and a stronger link to citizenship education, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

1.2.3 Citizenship Education

In the academic literature, citizenship education is closely related to character education, with the belief that effective citizens in society should have certain virtues instilled (Revell and Arthur, 2007; Althof and Berkowitz, 2006; Davies et al., 2005). From the perspective of character educationalists and politicians, these two approaches do share similarities as they are concerned with the development of individuals who can participate in society and are seen as a way to address societal issues (Whiteley, 2014; Davies et al., 2005; Arthur, 2003). According to Arthur's neo-Aristotelian theory, 'good' societies are formed on the foundations of ethically good characters who understand what behaviours enable the flourishing of life within democracies (Arthur et al., 2017a). The Jubilee Framework (2017) sets out the 'civic virtues' that claim to contribute to the 'common good', which include community, volunteering, and neighbourliness. Ultimately, this theory suggests that if the individuals in a society are good, then the society itself will also be good (Arthur et al., 2017a). This perspective has also been attractive to politicians as they are aware that the values and virtues taught within schools could have an impact on the behaviours of society members (Veugelers, 2025; Revell and Arthur, 2007). This has been evidenced in the Scottish context as citizenship is mentioned in Curriculum for Excellence documents as part of the four capacities where students are expected to become "responsible citizens" (Scottish Government, 2021: p.1). But recent research conducted by Education Scotland (2022) found that "the concept of 'responsible citizen' was a particularly contested term with the research participants" (p. 18). It raised issues around what defines a responsible citizen, whether it is someone who is obedient to the rules or if it is an individual who questions and holds society accountable for their actions (Education Scotland, 2022). Therefore, the relationship between character and citizenship may be clear in the literature; however, the link between moral education and citizenship in curricular documents in Scotland leaves a sense of confusion.

Although there are similarities between citizenship and character education, those who advocate citizenship education are clear that there are significant differences (Mills, 2021; Jerome and Kisby, 2019). One of the main distinctions is that citizenship education "focuses on the collective and has both moral and political dimensions" whilst "character education focuses on the moral and

individual" (Osler, 2016: 13). In defining citizenship education, Jerome and Kisby (2019) state that it should provide individuals with knowledge around political ideas, institutions, and processes; develop critical thinking and debating skills; allow participation in democratic activities as well as instilling certain values for engagement in political experiences throughout their lives. This definition is much broader than that for character education, which narrowly focuses on the shaping of virtuous character traits. Citizenship education enables individuals to take their character development and place it in a political, economic, social, and environmental context (Veugelers, 2025; Althof and Berkowitz, 2006; Davies et al., 2005). Thus, character education has been described as an approach which focuses mostly on the development of certain virtues at the individual level, whereas citizenship education aims to place these traits within a wider sphere for students to understand how their behaviours can collectively impact society.

It has been suggested that citizenship education should include active participation from students both in school and through extracurricular activities (Keating and Janmaat, 2016; Whiteley, 2014). Research has suggested that participating in political activities such as debates, demonstrations, and volunteering can have a positive impact on students' engagement with political activities such as voting (Keating and Janmaat, 2016; Whiteley, 2014; Hoskins et al., 2012). Unfortunately, these activities have been in decline within schools, which, arguably, coincided with a decrease in the number of those participating in elections as well as a decrease in community cohesion (Whiteley, 2014; 2012). Furthermore, it has been suggested that active participation in democratic activities has a greater impact than instructional methods often used in character education, which do not always link the learning to students' attitudes towards participation in society (Hoskins et al., 2012). Jerome and Kisby (2019) have criticised the Jubilee Centre's Framework as although it includes the 'civic virtues', this is about developing an understanding at the individual level rather than participating at the collective level. But Arthur's theory and framework recognise that citizenship is about more than just knowledge of democratic systems and political structures, which requires participating in citizenship activities (Arthur et al., 2017a). However, there is also an argument that pupils should understand political ideas and issues before putting them into practice, as it is suggested that doing so would be 'putting the cart before the horse' (Davies et al., 2005). Although there is a suggestion that active participation in democratic

activities impacts individuals' engagement in political opportunities in society, there is also an argument that students need an understanding of these ideas, as well as being able to practise them. Ideas around active participation are also discussed in moral education, as there is a suggestion that students' moral development can be developed when being involved in decision-making within schools (Wahidah and Maemonah, 2020; Oser et al., 2008; Power et al., 1989) through Pupil Councils or being involved in the creation of school values.

1.2.4 Religious Education

Whilst the relationship between religion and morality has been debated within the literature (Hand, 2023; McKay and Whitehouse, 2015; Manea, 2014), the current thesis aims to distinguish between these concepts, as the aim is to further understand the implementation of moral education in a primary school context. Skitka et al. (2018) state that "religion shapes people's values, and these values…indelibly shape people's conception of morality" (p. 2-3). There is a view that an individual's religious beliefs are intertwined with their moral values and their moral behaviours (Shariff, 2015; Manea, 2014). Additionally, there is an understanding that religion has historically shaped societies and practices, which are still prevalent in individuals' current lives (Holt, 2022). This is apparent in Curriculum for Excellence documents, where it has been recognised that "Christianity… has shaped the history and traditions of Scotland" (Education Scotland, 2009c: 2). Hence, the correlation between morality and religion is still not fully understood, but there is a suggestion that these are intrinsically linked with one another.

Religious traditions, often referred to as the 'big six', including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism (Holt, 2019) have a big impact on the conceptions of morality. This impact of religious traditions on individuals' moral conceptions has been discussed by Norenzayan (2014), who draws upon existing literature and states that "the evidence increasingly shows that there is an arrow of causality that goes from religion to a variety of prosocial behaviours" (p. 373). Additionally, Shariff's (2015) paper found evidence for a causal role of religion in relation to the endorsement of three moral foundations as elaborated by Haidt: ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/disgust. This supports the idea that religion shapes an individual's moral understanding on issues such as stealing, slander, unprovoked violence, and damage to others' property, which

are explored through religious scriptures and beliefs (Barnes, 2011; Halstead, 2007; Nucci, 2001).

It has been stated that religious education is crucial for students "to address fundamental questions related to human existence and the value and purpose of life" (Mogra, 2023: 63), which shape an individual's values and dispositions; yet this fundamental aspect of RE is, arguably, overlooked (Petrovich, 2022). One effective way to do this is through storytelling, which Morga (2022) highlights as being a "powerful and underrated source" (p. 7) for developing students' religious and spiritual behaviours or beliefs. It is also discussed that these traditional and religious stories can be central to communicating the community's values and prosocial behaviours throughout generations (Mogra, 2022). Therefore, there is strong evidence to support the view that the major religious traditions affect and influence moral conceptions, values, and behaviours.

Despite this, there is also an argument that societies are becoming increasingly secular, which raises questions around the relationship between morality and religion in education (Hand, 2023; Skitka et al., 2018; Hirst, 1974). It has been discussed by Holt (2019) that as populations trend towards secularism, there is an increasing "silent majority" in religious education classrooms (p. 2) who do not identify with a religious background. It is suggested that religious education programmes have to go beyond the major religious views and include more non-religious perspectives to meet the needs of contemporary societies (Holt, 2022; 2019). Hence, as societies change, there is also a growing recognition that morality can exist independently of religious belief.

In an educational context, there is also a distinction between learning *about* and *from* religions, which is important to outline (Holt, 2022). Religious education has often been criticised when a learning *about* approach is taken, where students are taught about the features and practices of religion (Teece, 2010; Grimmit, 1987). It has been suggested that this approach to religious education can often lack depth and relies upon the mechanisms of religion rather than understanding the reality of being religious (Teece, 2010). Holt (2022) summarises this by stating that learning *about* religions means that "pupils will be prepared for a pub quiz but not much else within society" (p. 5). A preferred approach is learning *from* religion where "pupils learn from their studies in religion about themselves – about discerning ultimate questions… and considering how they might respond to them"

(Grimmit, 1987: 226). It is suggested that learning *from* religions enriches the experience of the learner and is based more on their reflections of religious beliefs in terms of meaning-making (Fancourt, 2015; Teece, 2010). Providing deeper reflections would hopefully allow students to develop appreciation and empathy for a variety of religious and non-religious beliefs (Holt, 2022). It is also recognised by Holt (2022; 2019) and Matemba (2023) that the current practice tends to focus on the 'big six' religions, which marginalise minority and non-religious beliefs. So, the distinction between learning *about* and *from* within religious education can impact the pedagogies and experiences available to students in developing their own beliefs. Focusing on learning *about* religions can also overlook students who have moral values independent of religious belief, which is arguably becoming a contemporary trend in society and should be considered in educational contexts.

1.2.5 Moral Education

Within the United Kingdom, there are four jurisdictions where the issue of education is a devolved matter and different national curricula are implemented. The present thesis focuses on the Scottish context, where the Curriculum for Excellence has eight curricular areas. 'Religious and Moral Education' (RME) is one of these subjects. The current study will research the implementation of moral education in a Scottish non-denominational primary school; therefore, it is crucial to outline the definitions and ideas around moral education that have been presented in the literature.

Moral education is a term that saw a sharp rise during the 1950s and 1960s, which was significantly influenced by Lawrence Kohlberg's research, based upon Piaget's moral development theory (Althof and Berkowitz, 2006; Kohlberg, 1984), which will be discussed further in section '*2.2.1. Cognitive Developmentalism*'. One of the main challenges is that most of the literature relating to moral education comes from the field of psychology, and there remains no agreed-upon definition (Chowdhury, 2016; Berkowitz, 2012b). Some scholars suggest that attempting to define moral education is "ill-advised" (Wynn and Bloom, 2014: 436). However, Dahl et al. (2025) argue that "the wait-and-see approach to defining morality has outlived whatever usefulness it once served" and that "the lack of explicit definitions has fuelled confusion" (p. 86). It has been suggested that any attempt at discussing moral education relies upon some definition of morality, whether or not this is loosely or explicitly outlined, and that this allows the reader to

understand the purpose of the research (Dahl et al., 2025; Dahl, 2023). Therefore, the following section will discuss some of the significant characteristics of moral education which clearly distinguish it from character and citizenship education.

One definition of moral education, provided by Halstead (2015), states that "it may be defined as helping children and young people to acquire a set of beliefs and values regarding what is right and wrong" (p. 630). The notion that moral education is concerned with matters of 'right' and 'wrong' is shared by several scholars (Dahl et al., 2025; Ellemers et al., 2019; Kohlberg, 1975). However, there is also a shared understanding that these values around right and wrong do not always equate to moral behaviours; they serve as guides for individuals rather than prescriptive rules to follow (Pike, 2019; Chowdhury, 2016). Dahl et al. (2025) discuss that the intertwining of moral reasoning and emotions leads to "action tendencies" where "since we care about our moral concerns, we are motivated to act in ways that promote and protect those" (p. 98). However, individuals may also behave in contrast to their moral values, which Ellemers et al. (2019) summarise as "good people can do bad things" (p. 332). Moral values are also very context and culturally dependent, with scholars recognising that something 'right' in one society or situation may be considered 'wrong' in another (Waltzer and Dahl, 2021; Schein, 2020; Haidt and Graham, 2007). Therefore, although there are instances where moral values can be motivators for action, the main aim of moral education is not to list these values; instead, it is to explore the contextual factors influencing the development of these.

As previously stated earlier in this section, the academic literature has been dominated by psychological studies (Dahl et al., 2025; De Ruyter, 2019; Chowdhury, 2016) and, in particular, the cognitive-development theory around moral development has been most prominent (Walker and Thoma, 2017; Althof and Berkowitz, 2006; Kohlberg, 1975). This theory emphasises the role of cognition and reasoning within moral education, where it is believed that development occurs in progressive stages from lower to higher moral thinking (Kohlberg, 1984; 1975; 1969). However, this approach has been critiqued significantly by other scholars who have argued that cognitive-developmentalism overlooks the role of emotion in moral decision-making (Walker and Thoma, 2017; Nucci, 2016; Haidt, 2001; Gilligan, 1982). Additionally, Dahl et al. (2025) recognise that moral education itself "does not need to choose whether to target reasoning or emotion:

by targeting one, it will usually also target the other" (p. 97). This highlights that the domination of psychological studies in the moral education discussion has continued to steer the debate towards cognition versus emotion, whereas more research from an educational perspective could bridge the gap between these ideas.

Another main feature of moral education is that it is underpinned by constructivism, which recognises that this development occurs through constant interactions with the surrounding environment and others (Halstead, 2015; Rest and Thoma, 1986; Hirst, 1974; Piaget, 1932). It has been suggested that even in early childhood, moral values are influenced by environmental factors such as the family, community, peers, and the media (Dahl et al., 2025; Limone and Toto, 2022). Turiel (1983) discovered that children as young as five could understand concepts such as justice and were aware that not all moral rules are the same, which highlights that even before formal education, young children are developing their sense of morality based on environmental influences. Halstead (2015) further suggests that "schools often continue the moral education begun at home, filling in the gaps in children's knowledge of values and broadening their understanding" (p. 631). This can be developed through explicit and implicit moral education approaches. Explicit approaches can include providing students with opportunities to discuss, debate, and reflect on their values with peers (Halstead, 2015; Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975), and these approaches will be discussed in further detail below. But the school environment also provides moments where moral values can be 'caught' through school rules, extra-curricular activities, and the level of pupil participation in decision-making (Snarey and Samuelsson, 2008). The implicit approaches of moral education are more often overlooked in the academic literature, so understanding how the school's ethos and environment support the development of students' moral values is important.

Finally, explicit educational approaches related to moral development have primarily been focused on students' ability to engage in reasoning, which is the ability to justify decisions when discussing moral issues (Walker and Thoma, 2017; Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975). In the academic literature, moral dilemma discussions have been discussed frequently as it is suggested that they enable students the opportunity to develop their morality through interactions with others, allowing different perspectives to be shared and reflected upon (Nucci et al., 2014; Rest

and Thoma, 1986; Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975). It has been discussed that moral dilemma discussions can allow genuine moral, socio-cognitive conflict to arise and require the individual to reflect and justify their own judgements (Lind, 2002; Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975). Significantly, however, research from Binfet (2004) has suggested that pupils who engage in intrapersonal reflective activities show as much progression in their moral judgment as those who participate in interpersonal dilemma discussions, with the claim that it is the cognitive conflict which enables the progression rather than the social aspect.

One challenge with moral education approaches is that they often lack empirical research to support the claims (Dahl et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2023; De Ruyter, 2019). Moral dilemma discussions have been empirically researched with the existing cognitive-developmental theory of moral development, but other educational recommendations could be made stronger through the use of empirical research (Berkowitz and Bier, 2014). Research does exist around how stories and films can be used as stimuli for moral discussions in classrooms (Kim and Hachey, 2021; Russell and Waters, 2014; 2013; Russell, 2012) as well as how moral values can be developed and practised through physical education (Mihail and Elisabeta, 2014; Drewe, 2000). Hence, whilst moral dilemma discussions may be an effective tool for moral development, it is not the only approach, and more understanding is needed around other pedagogies within moral education that are being implemented in the primary school context.

1.3 The Origins and Nature of Moral Education in Scotland

Having discussed the unique characteristics of moral education in comparison to character, citizenship, and religious education, the following section will provide an overview of the development of moral education within the Scottish context. Debates around Religious Education remain highly contested throughout Europe (McKinney and Conroy, 2016), and within Scotland, discussions around its status, framework, as well as its motives have primarily focused on Catholic schools (Barnes et al., 2024; McKinney, 2008; Riddell et al., 2013). Unlike other curricular areas, Franchi et al. (2016) claim that "teachers of RE often have to defend their subject's actual right to exist" (p. 456) and that "any approach to RE will be open to challenge from both determined secularists and people of firm religious commitment" (p. 459). These quotes highlight just how controversial the

curricular area remains within today's society and how important it is to find a balance between secular and confessional approaches within education.

The history of Catholic schools has been described as "complex" (McKinney and Conroy, 2016: 107), and there have been several factors which have shaped the education system which exists today. Arguably, two key documents were produced during the nineteenth and twentieth century: the Education (Scotland) Act 1872 and 1918, which made education compulsory for all children ages between five and thirteen, introduced the right for parents to withdraw their child from religious instruction and saw the state funding of faith schools which eventually included Catholic schools (Barnes et al., 2024; McKinney et al., 2023; McKinney, 2019; 2018). Although these Acts were significant in the development of Catholic education in Scotland, the pivotal documentation for moral education was the Millar Report in 1972 (Nixon, 2012; McKinney, 2011). Therefore, the rest of this section will focus on the publication of this report and the preceding policies which have shaped the current Curriculum for Excellence documents.

The original Education (Scotland) Act of 1872 was historic as all education was to be compulsory for children aged five to thirteen (Barnes et al., 2024; Humes and McKinney, 2021; McKinney and Humes, 2021). Additionally, there was a change in educational control from churches to the state. It was proposed that denominational schools would transfer their land and schools to the state, and that education would be managed by elected local boards (Humes and McKinney, 2021). Despite this, the Episcopalian and Catholic Churches had strong anxieties about the preservation of religious observance and instruction, opting not to transfer their schools to the national school boards (McKinney and Humes, 2021). The 1872 Act also resulted in the ability for parents to withdraw their children from religious observance, resulting in this occurring at the beginning and/or end of the school day to be convenient in removing students from the timetable (McKinney and Edwards, 2021). Despite this, denominational schools that did not transfer to the national system faced several challenges: the increase in students with compulsory education, lack of funding, and teachers being paid significantly lower salaries (McKinney and Edwards, 2021). Therefore, the 1918 Act was introduced to include the remaining denominational schools in the transfer, offering compensation, and allowing them to retain their ability to follow their own religious education programme as well as approve teachers (Barnes et al.,

2024). From this point on, there was a branched educational structure within Scotland with the denominational and non-denominational sectors under one national system. These two Acts provided a complex historical background, which led to the Millar Report, which will be discussed in the following paragraph.

At the end of the twentieth century, the Millar Report (1972) aimed to audit the provision of religious education in non-denominational schools, and highlighted some significant areas for development (Laidlaw, 1972; Scottish Education Department, 1972). The Millar Report (1972) states from the very beginning that it aimed to examine the implementation of "moral and religious education" (p. 6) and highlighted that moral education can be observed across varying activities that take place within the school, and therefore the researchers focused on those approaches which also related to religious education. Within the report, the authors stated that:

> "Moral education was defined as education specifically aimed at developing an understanding of moral issues and personal relationships and the formation of a code of behaviour, distinct from religious education (though not necessarily exclusive of a religious viewpoint" (pp. 21-22).

The above quote highlights an important message from the Millar Report that moral issues and values could be explored through education without being related to a religious belief (McKinney and McCluskey, 2017; Nixon, 2015). It was suggested that pupils should embark on a Personal Quest to develop their values and empathy for others through reflection, comparison, discussion, and critical thinking rather than ascribing to a set of values from a confessional perspective (Nixon, 2012; 2009). However, at the time of this report, it was discovered that only seven percent of schools surveyed allocated specific time in their classrooms to explore moral issues with older pupils that were independent of religion, whilst only two percent of schools discussed these issues with pupils of all levels (Scottish Education Department, 1972). Despite this, the Report continued to emphasise the importance of developing pupils' morality in a non-confessional manner as there was a concern that if pupils decided to reject their religious beliefs, they may also disregard the moral messages (Scottish Education Department, 1972). Therefore, the Millar Report (1972) was key in the introduction of the terminology 'moral education' within Scottish schools and has been influential in current

educational policies where this title has remained for the curricular area known as Religious and Moral Education.

Additionally, the Millar Report outlined some of the main challenges that had been facing the implementation of RME at this time, which emerged from the shared experiences and opinions of headteachers, teachers and pupils (Scottish Education Department, 1972). One of the issues highlighted in this report was that the subject still very much relied upon religious resources (Scottish Education Department, 1972). It stated that much of the religious and moral education that took place in the early stages focused mainly on the teaching of Bible stories, with older students focusing on Bible knowledge, and with little reference to any other religious beliefs (Barnes et al., 2024; Scottish Education Department, 1972). This was recognised as an issue at the time, as society within Scotland was significantly changing culturally and ethnically (Barnes et al., 2024). It was suggested that the narrowing of resources resulted in learning that was less relevant to the lives and experiences of pupils (Scottish Education Department, 1972). In the report itself, pupils shared that they felt RME was a repetitive subject based on outdated stories and that did not represent other religious or non-religious perspectives (Scottish Education Department, 1972).

Furthermore, time allocated to Religious and Moral education and its importance within the curriculum were discussed as another challenge (Scottish Education Department, 1972). Religious education had been made compulsory in Scottish schools; however, the time allocated to this curricular subject varied from being taught between thirty minutes to two hours per week, with it being highlighted that students in the upper primary would often receive less time than younger students in this subject (Scottish Education Department, 1972). It was stated that pupils thought that "the time a subject has on the timetable is a guide to its importance" (Scottish Education Department, 1972: 44), and with there being limited time given to RME in schools, pupils found its importance less than that of other curricular areas. The lack of time provided to studying RME in conjunction with the scarce number of resources had an impact on the curricular area, as many educators, headteachers, and pupils placed a great priority on school subjects that were receiving funding and facilities (Scottish Education Department, 1972). Hence, the Millar Report was significant in highlighting the main challenges that faced moral and religious education during this time and aimed to encourage

policymakers to improve this subject by creating curriculum guidance for its implementation.

In response to the Millar Report, two bulletins were published by the Scottish Central Committee on Religious Education (SCCORE). Barnes et al. (2024) state that these documents, in connection with the report, "proposed some radical changes in terms of rationale, aims and scope of religious education" (p. 43). These were created by people who worked in or had constant connection with schools, so it was thought that the educators would take more note of them (Darling, 1980). One of the first 'radical' changes was that the curricular name changed to 'Religious and Moral Education' to recognise the moral viewpoints not connected to religious beliefs (Barnes et al., 2024). The first publication, known as Bulletin 1, produced a clear curricular framework which gave educators several practical examples to use within their classrooms (Scottish Education Department, 1978). Although Bulletin 1 provided a significant starting point for RME, there was a debate that still focused on learning *about* religion and critics suggested that there should be more opportunities for students to respond to these beliefs (Kincaid, 1985). In response to this, a further publication was produced in 1981, known as Bulletin 2, which addressed the critiques of Bulletin 1. Bulletin 2 set out a framework which combined students' learning *about* and *from* religions by providing educators with objectives that developed pupils' knowledge, understanding and evaluation within religious education (Scottish Education Department, 1981). Both Bulletins 1 and 2 were crucial in the development of RME as they were the first curricular frameworks provided for this subject, which could be used by schools and educators to provide a more effective education for pupils.

During the early 1990s, the 5-14 curriculum was introduced in Scotland, which aimed to provide a common structure by using the Religious and Moral education terminology (Barnes et al., 2024). This was a significant moment in Scotland as it was the first national curriculum for non-denominational schools to include Religious and Moral Education. It was a core subject which had now been branched into three areas of study: Christianity, other world religions and personal search (Barnes et al., 2024; McKinney, 2011). There were some critiques relating to the privileged position of Christian beliefs within the curriculum (Barnes et al., 2024), and it had been argued that the use of the word 'other' in 'Other World Religions' could have been viewed as "pejorative" (McKinney, 2012:43). Despite this, the

place of Christianity, which includes different Christian denominations, has been defended by scholars who explain that these beliefs have shaped and underpinned Scottish society historically, and that there remains a place to explore these in RME (McKinney and McCluskey, 2017; Conroy, 2014). Furthermore, in the 21st century, there has been a shift from Christians in Scotland being almost exclusively white. Increased migration by Christians from different parts of the world, such as India, the Philippines, and Africa, has led to more diversity in Scottish Christianity. So, although there were great changes made to the Scottish curriculum through the 5-14 guidelines, there were still areas which could be improved.

More recently, Curriculum for Excellence was developed and introduced into Scottish schools in 2010, where the curricular area of RME has remained. Similar to 5-14, Curriculum for Excellence has been described as a dual system since there are two versions of religious education provided: Religious and Moral education, and Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools (Matemba, 2015; 2013; Nixon, 2013). In RME, the curriculum has three elements of learning through 'Christianity', 'world religions' and 'developing beliefs and values' (Conroy et al., 2013). Curriculum for Excellence was intended to be an open curriculum which does not prescribe what content should be taught in schools, nor does it state which pedagogical approaches should be employed (Matemba, 2018). Experiences and Outcomes (Es and Os) for each curricular area were intended to be "a set of clear and concise statements about children's learning and progression…used to help plan learning and to assess progress" (Education Scotland, 2017b). Arguably, the broad nature of the Curriculum for Excellence has meant that many teachers, especially during the initial implementation, were still employing 5-14 teaching strategies that were more didactic in nature (Conroy et al., 2013; Matemba, 2013b). Despite this, CfE aimed to be more flexible, which could draw upon the use of interdisciplinary learning to interconnect learning experiences across the eight curricular areas (Barnes et al., 2024; Conroy, 2014). Hence, these opportunities to draw on learning across disciplines could provide deeper and richer learning experiences for pupils to develop their own beliefs and values.

Overall, this section has highlighted the significant changes in how moral education has been included and communicated within Scottish education, from its initial mention in the Millar Report (1972) to its current implementation in

Curriculum for Excellence. As detailed, there have been many challenges facing this curricular area over the last five decades. Hence, this section has outlined the historical background of moral education within the Scottish context, briefly highlighting some of the main concerns in its implementation over the years, which sets the scene for the following discussion on RME in the contemporary academic literature.

1.4 Key Research on Scottish Moral Education

Even though there have been significant developments in moral education provision in Scotland, as outlined above, the academic literature for this curricular area is scarce (Scholes, 2024). In Australia, research around values education has gained increasing interest (Bleazby et al., 2023; Bleazby, 2020; Brady, 2011), and emerging studies from Sweden relating to the assessment of ethics education have been insightful (Sporre et al., 2022; Sporre, 2019; Stern, 2017). However, the literature around moral education specifically continues to be dominated by scholars from the United States of America (Berkowitz, 2011; Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975). Even within the United Kingdom, there have been a significant number of scholars focusing on the provision of character education in England (Peterson and Kristjánsson, 2024; Arthur, 2014; Arthur et al., 2017a). Yet, according to Conroy (2014), the literature in Scotland has been focused on providing a historical perspective and analysis of the trends of moral education. There have been studies conducted on the philosophical rise in secondary schools (Nixon, 2015; 2012; 2008a), religious education in primary schools (Matemba, 2018; 2015), and more recent literature around primary schools' policies relating to RME (Scholes, 2024; 2022). But it is important to note that, from the literature in the Scottish context, there are no studies which focus solely on the provision of moral education at the primary school level.

One of the main contributors to the Scottish academic literature in this field is Graeme Nixon, who primarily focuses on the 'philosophication' of secondary education through the area known as Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies. In his 2008a paper, Nixon highlights that RME is a subject area which has undergone substantial changes and argues that one of the most significant of those has been the "move away from confessional religious instruction towards a faith-neutral philosophical approach" (p. 1). Nixon (2012; 2009; 2008a) goes on to suggest that social changes have been the key drivers in this trend as members of

society are becoming more secular, and therefore, the less confessional approaches to RME or RMPS are increasing. Furthermore, one paper highlighted that over half of Scottish RE teachers identified as having no religious beliefs (Nixon et al., 2021). This could also be a factor in why there is an increase in non-confessional approaches in which pupils express their own views in response to the ultimate questions and engage in discussions that provide ethical decision-making and moral conflict (Nixon et al., 2021; Nixon, 2012; 2009). Although Nixon's work highlights a trend towards philosophical approaches, these studies primarily focus on a secondary school context, which focuses on RMPS implementation rather than RME.

A scholar who focuses on the primary school context is Yonah Matemba, who takes a predominantly religious education perspective within his work (Matemba, 2023; 2018). Matemba has claimed that the prominence of philosophy has hindered the development of RME, resulting in a lack of rationale and focus within the subject (Matemba, 2015). It has been argued that the 'core' of RE is based upon the teaching of religions and how these inform the beliefs that shape our current lives and proposes that the shift towards more rational ways of thinking is a distraction in the subject (Matemba, 2015). Hence, Matemba (2018) stated that he would refer to RME as RE with the suggestion that this is "how the subject is commonly known" (p. 353). A common theme that can be interpreted from Matemba's work is that the terminology around Religious and Moral Education is unclear for practitioners and researchers (Scholes, 2024; Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Matemba, 2015; Grant and Matemba, 2013), which is detrimental to the subject. However, Nixon (2015) has critiqued this umbrella term of RE by suggesting it shows "an ignorance of the trajectory of Scottish RME since the Millar report" (p. 5). Within the current literature in Scotland, moral education is significantly overlooked and overshadowed by the continued reference to the religious aspect of RME. Therefore, there is a large gap in the literature for research that focuses solely on the implementation of moral education at the primary school level and provides a more holistic understanding of this element.

A commonly documented challenge facing RME is related to the importance placed on the subject within schools and, ultimately, the time given to explore this area (Scholes, 2024; Grant and Matemba, 2013; Conroy, 2009). This is a concern as it is suggested that a lack of time dedicated to moral education may result in less

content being covered in classes, but also the depth of knowledge being compromised (Grant and Matemba, 2013; Conroy, 2009). The Impact Report on RME, conducted by Education Scotland (2014), found exactly this, as they reported that "children are being asked to learn too much about the different religions in a limited amount of time" (p. 15). In this same report, it was highlighted that schools place a significant focus on three curricular areas: Literacy, Numeracy, and Health and Wellbeing (Education Scotland, 2014). A decade later, this situation has worsened with Education Scotland (2024b) reporting that this continued focus on the three areas has resulted in a lack of depth and breadth in learning experiences being provided to students. Even though Scholes (2022) has recently re-outlined the legal requirements of Religious and Moral Education provision in Scotland, his recent study has also suggested that "there is either no or very little RME taught in some primary schools" (Scholes, 2024: 3). This has added to already growing concerns around the importance placed on moral education in an "exceedingly crowded curriculum" (Conroy, 2009: 147) and how this may impact the challenges the curricular area faces in the long-term (Conroy, 2014). Despite this, research has shown that moral education can be explored through other areas of the curriculum (Huth et al., 2021), which highlights the possibility of interdisciplinary learning as a way to mitigate the challenges of a time-constrained curriculum at the primary school level.

A final aspect discussed in Scottish literature relating to the implementation of RME is how confident practitioners are in their curricular knowledge relating to this subject, and how this influences the opportunities provided to students (Grant and Matemba, 2013; Conroy et al., 2013). According to Shulman (1987), curricular knowledge encompasses an educator's understanding of "the landscape of such materials, institutions, organisations, and mechanisms" (p. 9). Shulman (1986) explains that lateral curriculum knowledge is related to practitioners' ability to relate content across different lessons, whilst vertical curriculum knowledge is an understanding of the materials available within the school to explore particular topics. In Scottish literature, issues around curricular knowledge in RME have been highlighted by Grant and Matemba (2013), who found that the resources and assessment tools often only developed pupils' lower-order thinking skills, such as labelling and colouring. This has been critiqued by other scholars who argue that moral education can be a vehicle for developing skills such critical thinking and reflection through discussions in a safe classroom environment can provide

students with the opportunity to encourage pupils to hold a 'mirror' against their own values and beliefs, through this they can open to the views of others around them (Conroy et al., 2013; Conroy, 2009). Furthermore, through these conversations, pupils can share their own experiences of religions and possibly challenges that face them, e.g., racism, sectarianism (Conroy et al., 2013). However, it has been highlighted through the literature that training for moral education in Scotland is crowded out as more funding and time are given to opportunities for development in Literacy, Numeracy, and Health and Wellbeing (Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Education Scotland, 2014; Grant and Matemba, 2013). Education Scotland (2014) described the continuing professional development opportunities in RME as "minimal" (p. 33), which has led to "fundamental gaps in teacher knowledge" (Grant and Matemba, 2013: 10) within this curricular area. These findings highlight that limitations in curricular knowledge and professional learning opportunities may negatively impact the depth and criticality of moral education experiences available to primary-aged pupils.

1.5 Rationale for the Study

The previous sections of this chapter have provided a historical and contextual overview of moral education implementation. It has been discussed that moral education has, and continues to be, an area of interest in fields such as education and psychology (Dahl et al., 2025; Scholes, 2024; Matemba, 2018). Yet, several gaps exist within the literature, both from a Scottish perspective and internationally. The first of these is that the confusion around terminology in this field has impacted the number of scholars focusing their attention on moral education (Dahl et al., 2025; Scholes, 2024; Dahl, 2023). Within the Scottish context, it has been outlined that the majority of the studies primarily focus on the implementation of Religious Education within RME, with the moral aspect overlooked or completely absent (Matemba, 2021; 2018; Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Grant and Matemba, 2013; Conroy et al., 2013). Additionally, the interchangeability between the terminology of 'moral' and 'character' education has resulted in an increase in studies often referring to character education approaches as part of moral development (Peterson and Kristjánsson, 2024; Conroy et al., 2013; Berkowitz, 2012a). Therefore, there is scope in the academic literature for clarification around what is meant by moral education, to relate it

to the development of values, and discussion around how these can be nurtured through explicit and implicit moral educational approaches.

Another issue that has been discussed relates to the lack of empirical research into the approaches utilised in moral education. Internationally, this has been identified as a challenge since most of the existing literature relates to theories around moral development, with not as much known about what pedagogies and learning opportunities are implemented within moral education classrooms (Dahl et al., 2025; De Ruyter, 2019; Berkowitz and Bier, 2014). In 2023, Chen et al. conducted a review of 497 articles related to moral education and "the cluster research demonstrates a typical characteristic of the moral education research—the emphasis placed on theoretical research" (p. 10). This is further supported by Krettenauer (2021), who states that, in the social sciences, morality research has increased but that "the field of moral education has not been part of this movement" (p. 78). Despite this, there are some scholars who discuss approaches within Religious Education in various contexts and suggest that these are often based on learning *about* religions, which is described as unauthentic (Holt, 2022; 2019; Conroy and Davis, 2005). It is argued that the current practice in RE is prioritising majority religions and reaffirming the existing social and cultural structures (Matemba, 2023; Holt, 2022; 2019). Therefore, recent literature reviews and studies highlight a contemporary gap in the research to study the practical moral education approaches in a primary classroom context.

Furthermore, there is currently no literature which aims to understand what approaches and pedagogies are currently being implemented within primary schools, specifically in the Scottish context. In their literature review of moral education articles, Chen et al. (2023) found that the USA, UK, China, and the Netherlands were the top four countries contributing to research in this field, with the United Kingdom producing the second most papers. Yet further analysis of these results showed that the majority of these publications come from English institutions (Chen et al., 2023). This is significant to highlight as the education system in Scotland is devolved, resulting in differences in RME provision. In a recent publication, Scholes (2024) has stated that "research needs to move towards triangulating what is articulated in policy and handbooks with evidence of what teachers do in classrooms and schools" (p. 11) within the Scottish context. Thus, there is a significant gap for research to explore what is currently being

taught within moral education through empirical research methods which gathers perspectives from current practice as well as policies.

The challenges facing moral education implementation have been well documented since the Millar Report (1972), with pivotal changes being made to embrace the ethnical and cultural diversity within society. But, fourteen years since the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence, very little is known about what issues have arisen within RME for educators in the primary context. Research has shown that in secondary schools, the religious backgrounds of teachers have changed (Nixon et al., 2021) and that students' interest in exploring more philosophical topics has increased (Nixon, 2015; 2012). In the primary school sector, studies have highlighted issues in RME such as lack of time, rote learning techniques, and low teacher confidence (Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Education Scotland, 2014; Grant and Matemba, 2013). Even though these are beneficial in understanding the challenges in RME overall, they are not specifically focused on the 'moral' aspect of this curricular area. Additionally, these papers are around a decade old and events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and Scottish Census results, could have highlighted newer challenges in moral education implementation in primary schools. More recent research has conducted a document analysis of primary school handbooks relating to RME, which raises more up-to-date concerns around training, prioritisation, and provision (Scholes, 2024). Research in this field is slow but not steady, which has resulted in many of these pressing issues often being overlooked by researchers, educators, and policymakers (Scholes, 2024). So, understanding the contemporary issues facing moral education implementation in primary schools has come at a crucial time, as there have been several factors from an increase in secularisation (Scotland's Census, 2024) to a focus on recovery in Literacy, Numeracy, and Health and Wellbeing (Education Scotland, 2024b) that may present new areas for development.

Finally, approaches in moral education have been categorised into explicit and implicit, with much more focus placed on the explicit ways in which values can be taught, but growing recognition is being given to how these may be caught through the school environment (Halstead, 2015; Çubukçu, 2012; Power and Higgins-D' Alessandro, 2008). Significantly, Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) stated that implicit moral education approaches have "lurked beneath the surface in school" (p. 54),

and it has been suggested that if these are unexamined, then they can undermine explicit approaches (Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008). In the international literature, some scholars recognise and discuss the approaches included in the implicit moral education curriculum, as well as what impact these can have on the development of students' values (Halstead, 2015; Cox, 1998; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977; Hirst, 1974). Yet, in the Scottish literature, the only paper mentioning implicit approaches is Clanachan and Matemba (2015), who define this as "the teaching of religion as an accompaniment to an overriding moral issues" (p. 122). It is clear from this definition that they have not explored the extra-curricular activities, school ethos, and relationships within the context to examine how these influence value development. Thus, the current literature relating to the implicit approaches to moral education in primary schools is non-existent in the Scottish context, consequently leaving this aspect underexamined and uncritiqued.

1.6 Research Aims and Sub-Questions

The current thesis aims to understand how moral education is explicitly and implicitly implemented within a non-denominational Scottish primary school. Through interactions with primary school educators, observations of the school's ethos and an analysis of their policies within moral education, the main strengths and challenges within this curricular area will be discussed.

In academic research, it has been suggested that the researcher should aim to separate themselves from their study, with the disadvantages of the centrality of the researcher being outlined (Karagiozis, 2018; Brewis, 2014; Taylor, 2011; Tillman-Healy, 2003). However, it has also been suggested that "being able to draw on one's own experiences… can provide students with helpful and healthy examples of engaging in the process" (Jones, 2023: 15). Within a qualitative study, it has also been recognised that the researcher will have a specific interest in certain issues as they are closely linked to their own experiences which creates a personal connection to the research (Omodan 2024; Wa-Mbaleka, 2020). In the present study, the researcher has drawn upon their own experiences and knowledge. The inspiration for this topic has come from the researcher's background of being a primary school educator themselves and having firsthand experiences of some of the challenges in implementing moral education in practice.

Based on the researcher's personal connection with the implementation of moral education, and the combination with an extensive review of existing literature within this field, there have been several gaps identified which the present thesis aims to address. Reflections on the current literature relating to moral education within the primary school led to the creation of two research aims:

- How is Moral Education understood as an area of Curriculum for Excellence?
- How well is Moral Education implemented in a primary school context?

To explore these aims, six research questions will be answered:

1. How do primary school leaders and teachers understand the aims and terminology of Moral Education in the Curriculum for Excellence?
2. How are the CfE Benchmarks and Es and Os used by primary school teachers in the planning and teaching of moral education?
3. What do primary school teachers formally assess in ME, and what strategies are adopted to assess these areas?
4. How is moral education taught through explicit teaching approaches?
5. How is ME implicitly implemented through the life of the school?
6. What professional development opportunities are undertaken by primary school teachers and leaders to develop their knowledge and understanding of moral education, and why?

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

Following the introduction, Chapter Two will review some of the key literature relating to the moral theories that discuss the role of cognition and emotion within the development of values. Through the discussion of these theories, the present thesis will place more focus on the cognitive-developmental approach, as this has offered more suggestions in terms of moral education approaches compared to other moral development theories. The explicit moral education approaches will be discussed in this chapter, as well as how the 'hidden curriculum' can develop values through extra-curricular activities and whole-school assemblies.

In Chapter Three, the methodological and research design will be discussed to outline the interpretivist paradigm adopted, as well as the single-case study approach. Within this chapter, the selection of the case will be discussed in depth,

as this was based upon the researcher's existing relationship with the primary school's headteacher and staff members. The importance of reflexivity will be explored as there will be shared understandings between the researcher and participants. Additionally, three data collection tools will be utilised to explore the overarching research question and aims: semi-structured interviews, researcher observations, and document analysis. The ethical implications and pilot study phase will also be discussed in the concluding sections of this chapter.

The findings from the inductive thematic analysis of all three data tools will be presented in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Four is dedicated to the findings from the semi-structured interviews, whilst Chapter Five provides the results from the observations as well as the documents. This is then followed in Chapter Six with the analysis and discussion of these findings, in relation to relevant and present literature. These findings will outline the main challenges and strengths of the implementation of moral education in the case study primary school. Finally, conclusions will be drawn in Chapter Seven. In this chapter, the research aims will be revisited, and the main contributions will be outlined. Additionally, the limitations and implications of the present thesis will be discussed with recommendations for future educators, policymakers, initial teacher educators, and researchers.

Chapter 2 : Overview of Moral Development and Moral Education Research

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, some of the key terminology often used in this area of research was discussed, and moral education was highlighted specifically as the focus within the present thesis, which relates to the curricular area of RME in Scotland. It has been noted, however, that the term 'moral' has several meanings in the academic literature as well as in public discourse (Smetana, 2013; Smetana and Killen, 2008). Despite this, in the domain of psychology, it has been suggested that there is some agreement that morality includes affective, cognitive, and behavioural components, but theories place differing priorities on these areas (Smetana, 2013; Smetana and Killen, 2008). Additionally, moral psychologists have varying opinions on whether moral values can be universally applied or if they are situationally and culturally relative (Smetana, 2013). Much of the literature relating to moral education has been based on research conducted by moral psychologists as they have, arguably, dominated this domain for decades (Lee and Taylor, 2013; Gibbs, 2003; Rest et al., 2000). So, to provide a better understanding of the approaches being implemented in moral education, this section aims to outline the main contributors to moral development theory and discuss the ideas that have informed educational practice.

Firstly, a brief outline of each theory will be provided to highlight the developments within moral psychology research to give a background to the approaches that may be implemented in moral education. In the present thesis, the theories that will primarily be discussed are cognitive-developmentalism, the social intuitionist model/moral foundations theory, and the dual process theory. These three theories provide perspectives on the roles of cognition and intuitions during the moral decision-making process (Haidt, 2007; Greene et al., 2001; Kohlberg, 1958). In relation to moral education, it has been suggested that it "does not need to choose whether to target reasoning or emotion: by targeting one, it will usually also target the other" (Dahl et al., 2025). Therefore, having a holistic understanding of the main theories on moral development is significant for moral educators.

The second section will highlight an area that each of these theories has in common: the role of social interactions. In the cognitive-developmental theory,

positive perspectives on social interactions are discussed with the view that these allow students to be open to new moral perspectives (Gibbs, 2019; Slater and Quinn, 2012; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). Whereas social intuitionist and dual-process theorists provide a more critical outlook, suggesting that social interactions require individuals to defend their intuitions through post hoc reasoning (Liao, 2011; Fine, 2006; Haidt, 2001). Furthermore, the importance of the learning environment will be discussed concerning social interactions in schools. Although the teacher can be accused of indoctrinating students (Hand, 2023; Hirst, 1974), their role is crucial in creating a safe learning environment and being a facilitator of moral discussions (Lind, 2006; Covell and Howe, 2001). Research relating to the role of social interactions on moral development is significant to the present thesis, which aims to observe the current implementation of moral education in Scottish primary schools, where peer learning may be used as a learning approach.

Finally, this chapter will define the explicit and implicit approaches discussed in moral education literature. On one hand, explicit approaches are often planned and defined ways of teaching and developing moral education (Hakam, 2018; Berkowitz, 2011; De Lisi, 2002; Cox, 1998). This can be through the curricular area of Religious and Moral Education itself, but more recent studies have suggested that interdisciplinary approaches are also common within moral education (Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Conroy et al., 2013; Grant and Matemba, 2013). Despite this, exploring moral issues through other subjects also raises concerns about the place of moral education in the curriculum (Scholes, 2024; Franchi and Robinson, 2018; Robertson et al., 2017). Implicit approaches to moral education are those which have not been explicitly defined and are said to be 'caught' from the school's overall ethos and culture (Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). Both explicit and implicit approaches to moral education are crucial within the primary school context, so both of these approaches must be explored in the present thesis.

2.2 Overview of Key Theories in Moral Development

The field of moral education has been heavily influenced by psychologists who propose varying theories of how moral development occurs from early childhood through to adulthood (Dahl et al., 2025; Kohlberg, 1980). Understanding these theories is important in the present thesis as they highlight how different types of

interactions and environments can impact moral development (Haidt, 2001; Piaget, 1932). These can be applied to the educational context to further understand how the interactions between peers and adults, as well as the school environment, can help or hinder students' moral development.

2.2.1 Cognitive-Developmentalism

The cognitive-developmental theory can be traced back to the writings of Jean Piaget (1932), who believed that moral development was constructed through social exchanges and interactions with the environment, which he observed from children as young as five years old (Moheghi et al., 2020; Piaget, 1932). In his research, Piaget observed the moral interactions that occurred amongst children whilst playing games and through the use of story pairs (Carpendale, 2009; Gibbs, 2003). From this, it was proposed that there were two main approaches to morality in childhood: heteronomous and autonomous (Piaget, 1932). Heteronomous moral thinking is "based on a unilateral respect and unquestioned obedience to authorities and the rules they prescribe" (Arthur et al., 2014: 4). As children develop, they move towards autonomous moral thinking, which relates to mutuality, respect and equality amongst peers, which develops in a collaborative environment (Hakam, 2018). Although Piaget's theory was significant within the field, it has also been recognised that this did not discuss moral development beyond the ages of twelve or thirteen (Siegal, 1980). So, there was still space within the literature to explore moral development into and beyond early adolescence.

A significant theorist who further developed the cognitive-developmental theory was Lawrence Kohlberg (1984; 1975; 1958), whose work dominated the moral psychology and moral education fields until the mid-1990s (Gibbs, 2003; Rest et al., 2000) and still has an impact on research to date. In his classic study, Kohlberg (1958) researched the moral development of boys aged between ten to sixteen and focused on understanding their moral reasoning when engaging with hypothetical moral dilemmas. In their answers, Kohlberg was much more interested in the moral reasoning and justifications given by the participants rather than their specific answer, as the focus of this theory is the 'moral judgement' aspect, based upon rationality and cognition, which was thought to be the most reliable way to gain moral knowledge (Haidt, 2013). Notably, this has led many to believe that the focus of cognitive-developmentalism is reasoning,

which provides little recognition to the impact of the affective and behavioural components on moral development.

From this research, a model was developed that proposed three levels of moral thinking, each with two stages, which are outlined in *Table 1,* that has been created by the researcher for this research based on literature from Mathes (2021), Giammarco (2015) and Kohlberg (1975). First, the preconventional stage mirrored the findings from Piaget's work that the early stages of moral development were based around the ideas of obedience and egocentrism, where decisions are made based on the rules from authoritative figures and then towards satisfying one's own needs (Mathes, 2021; Giammarco, 2015; Kohlberg, 1975). At the conventional level, moral decisions are made based on loyalty and conformity to the values held by families or groups in which individuals exist (Giammarco, 2015; Kohlberg, 1975). The final, postconventional level, is based on the ideas of what is morally correct rather than what is culturally and socially expected, as well as the principle of justice (Mathes, 2021; Giammarco, 2015; Kohlberg, 1975). Overall, justice was the key universal principle mentioned in Kohlberg's theory, which has faced criticisms for narrowing the theory's perspective and neglecting other values held by individuals (Mathes, 2021).

Table 1 - Kohlberg's Stages and Levels of Moral Development

Levels	Stage
1. Pre-Conventional	1. Obedience and punishment. Moral judgments based on direct consequences of those choices. 2. Self-interest. Based on the reward or satisfaction of personal needs.
2. Conventional	1. 'Good boy' and 'nice girl' attitude. Moral choices driven by social expectations and conformity.

	2. Law and order. Larger consideration of societal rules and maintaining social order.
3. Post-Conventional	1. Social contract. Recognition that societal rules are not rigid, and that these can be flexible tools for human purposes. 2. Universal principles. Moral judgments are based on justice and focuses on how every individual would be affected.

Despite the contributions of Kohlberg's cognitive-development theory to moral decision-making, there have been several critiques of this six-stage model (Lind, 2010; Gilligan, 1982). Firstly, it had been suggested that individuals had to achieve one stage of moral thinking before they could progress to the next stage or level, with no regression to lower stages of thinking (Mathes, 2021; Hakam, 2018; Gibbs, 2003). Yet, further empirical research conducted by Kohlberg and Kramer (1969) found that participants can, and did, regress in their moral thinking. Additionally, many have highlighted that empirical studies rarely found individuals showing postconventional stages of moral thinking, with stage six so rare that Kohlberg himself ended the empirical claims of this (Gibbs, 2003). Kohlberg's cognitive-development theory of moral development has been heavily criticised, with him describing himself as a "moving target" (Rest et al., 2000: 382) with his ideas continuously being refined. Even though this theory of moral development has been significantly cited in relation to moral education, its foundational claims are under-researched, with limited empirical research (Dahl et al., 2025). Kohlberg's original (1958) study, which is the basis for many of his claims, was conducted on a male participant sample, which has been famously critiqued for dismissing a female perspective of moral development (Gilligan, 1982). Therefore, the limited

amount of empirical research, as well as a reliance on an under-researched six-stage model, has raised concerns about Kohlberg's proposed cognitive-developmental theory on moral reasoning.

Even though there were critics of Kohlberg's stage theory, his work influenced several theorists, including Turiel and Nucci, who developed social domain theory, and Eisenberg, who proposed a stage theory of prosocial moral reasoning. Turiel's (1998; 1983) domain theory emphasised two main domains: the moral (concerned with issues like fairness and justice) and social-conventional (relating to social rules and expectations). Turiel (2008; 1978) suggests that moral decision-making is shaped through interactions of these domains, rather than viewing moral reasoning as separate from social contexts. Additionally, Turiel (2008) critiqued early stage-based approaches to moral development and particularly Kohlberg's use of hypothetical dilemmas, which arguably, overlooked the distinction between moral and social-conventional issues.

Building on Turiel's work, Nucci (1981) further developed the concept of the personal domain, which refers to individual choice and autonomy that are not contained within the moral or social-conventional domains. Within this theory, individuals may consider certain issues as personal, such as identity, friendships, or lifestyle choices. Nucci (2024; 1981) argues that recognising this distinction is important for moral education, which should not only address moral and social reasoning but also support students in navigating where personal choice is involved. Moral education, from this perspective, should "empower students' capacity for empirical inquiry" (Nucci, 2024: 135) and foster critical reasoning to support students in negotiating complex social situations.

In contrast to the domain-based approach, Eisenberg's work develops a stage-based approach to moral reasoning. Eisenberg et al. (2014) place greater emphasis on prosocial behaviour and empathy in moral development. In this stage theory, Eisenberg's work highlights the emotional dimensions of moral reasoning which contrast with Kohlberg's cognitively focused approach (Gilligan, 1982). Activities such as role-playing and perspective-taking are suggested by Eisenberg et al. (2014) to support primary-aged students in developing empathy and pro-social reasoning skills.

Overall, these perspectives demonstrate that moral development is complex and nuanced. Turiel (1978) and Nucci (1981) expand on the distinct types of reasoning, whilst Eisenberg et al. (2014) emphasise the role of emotional stage-based development. Each builds upon the earlier stage-based model provided by Kohlberg and provides a more nuanced approach to how children respond to moral and social situations.

It has been discussed in the preceding sections that much of the literature surrounding moral development has roots within the field of psychology (Dahl et al., 2025; Ellemers et al., 2019; Kohlberg, 1980), but Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental approach has also been influential in moral education (Wahidah and Maemonah, 2020; Salvador, 2019; Samada et al., 2018). The first contribution has been in outlining the purpose of moral education which aligns with the constructivist ideas that students develop their ideas of moral thinking through their interactions with peers and their environment (Zhang and Zhao, 2017; Boer and Boehnke, 2016) rather than "passively accepting cultural norms about morality" (Wahidah and Maemonah, 2020: 33). Following this, an educational tool developed by Blatt and Kohlberg (1975) was the Moral Dilemma Discussion where students were encouraged to discuss moral situations with their peers, engage in perspective taking, and be open to higher levels of moral thinking proposed by their teacher (Lind, 2002; Kohlberg, 1966). Furthermore, Kohlberg has been clear in his belief that the environment of the school can impact students' moral development and has discussed this through the Just Community approach (Zhang and Zhao, 2017; Power et al., 1989; Power, 1988). Turiel (2008) also found that students reacted to moral situations in varied ways in different contexts of the school, like the classroom or playground, which highlights the importance of understanding the formal and informal moral education that takes place across the school environment. Despite this, Kohlberg (1980; 1978) is also critical of the 'psychologist's fallacy' where educational practices are directly derived from psychological underpinnings. It is suggested that psychologists are often concerned with finding the 'true' meaning behind moral development, which may not be a goal that is shared by educationalists (Power, 1988; Berkowitz, 1981). It has been suggested that educational practices that have significantly derived from psychological research have received "an apathetic reaction by practitioners" (Berkowitz, 1981: 20). Although cognitive-developmentalism has attempted to impact moral education, which other theories have not, there is still a lack of

empirical research from solely a moral education field with no psychological underpinning.

2.2.2 Social Intuitionist Model

Although the cognitive-developmental theory was revolutionary, as it enabled the study of moral development from a psychological perspective to be combined with moral education, it became clear that this field was becoming focused on students' moral reasoning (Haidt, 2001; Pizarro and Bloom, 2003). As an alternative to these rationalist theories, Jonathan Haidt developed the social intuitionist theory, which placed a greater emphasis on the affective and emotional aspects of moral knowledge (Haidt, 2013; 2007; 2003; 2001). Despite there being a priority given to the affective impact on moral choices, Haidt was very clear to state that both affect and reasoning are components of the cognitive (Haidt, 2004). It was suggested that these concepts are two contrasting versions of cognition, where one is the automatic process whilst the other is controlled thinking (Liao, 2011; Haidt, 2004; 2001). Overall, the social intuitionist theory places more focus on the quick, automatic process believed to be responsible for an individual's moral intuition and the basis for making moral choices but recognises the place of reasoning.

The social intuitionist theory provides an insight into how moral intuitions impact an individual's moral decision-making, and where reasoning exists within this process, particularly within social and cultural contexts (Gibbs, 2019; Graham et al., 2013). Haidt (2007; 2001) has been known to draw upon metaphors in his explanation of intuition and reasoning within moral decision-making. Infamously, Haidt's (2001) paper '*The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail*' explains that "moral reasoning is usually an ex post facto process used to influence the intuitions… of other people" (p. 814). From this perspective, it is suggested that emotions enable individuals to initially feel moral intuition within a given situation that is automatic (Gibbs, 2019; Haidt and Bjorklund, 2008; Haidt, 2001). Reasoning, from a cognitive-developmental view, has then been likened to scientists who form hypotheses as they interact with the social world and use this information to make moral judgments (Ohreen, 2021; Turiel, 1983). Yet, this has been criticised by Haidt (2007; 2001) who argues that it is more like a lawyer trying to defend their beliefs rather than being on a pursuit for truth. Arguably, this post hoc reasoning process is used as a defence of an individual's initial moral

intuitions within social contexts (Fine, 2006; Saltzstein and Kasachkoff, 2004). Furthermore, it is argued that moral reasoning is biased in two strands: relatedness and coherence (Liao, 2011; Haidt, 2001). The relatedness motive suggests that individuals are inclined to agree with their peers or allies and less likely to take on the perspectives of strangers or foes (Haidt, 2013; 2001; Chen et al., 1996). Whilst the coherence motive relates to the fact that people are less ready to accept perspectives which directly threaten their current cultural beliefs (Ohreen, 2021; Haidt, 2001). Therefore, Haidt's social intuitionist theory challenges the significance that has previously been placed on moral reasoning, suggesting that the process of moral decision-making is much more complex than prior theories have outlined.

The social intuitionist theory of moral development has been described as "an important antidote to the rationalist tradition" (Ohreen, 2021: 290), but this approach has also faced several critiques (Dahl et al., 2025; Saltzstein and Kasachkoff, 2004). One term related to this theory is 'moral dumbfounding' (Haidt and Hersh, 2001), which is when individuals "know intuitively that something is wrong, even when they cannot explain why" (Haidt, 2007: 998). Arguably, this supports the belief that reasoning is based on defending intuitions within social contexts (Pizarro and Bloom, 2003; Haidt and Hersh, 2001). However, concerns around the empirical research in support of moral dumbfounding have recently been discussed, with other scholars finding no evidence of this (Royzman et al., 2015; Jacobson, 2012) and Haidt himself expressing that this occurrence is very rare (Dahl et al., 2025). Similar to the cognitive-developmental theory, social intuitionism has made theoretical claims that have to be revised when empirical research shows results that contradict the initial beliefs.

Additionally, social intuitionism has consistently been discussed in the field of psychology, with little to no educational approaches being made. But, in rejecting some of the claims made by cognitive-developmentalists, social intuitionists have made suggestions as to how moral intuitions develop, particularly in early childhood. A perspective proposed by Haidt and Joseph (2004) suggests that moral intuitions are innate and "knowledge about such issues as fairness, harm, and respect for authority has been built into the human mind by evolution" (p. 55). It has then been observed that children as young as three years old can express their moral intuitions when faced with situations related to injustice or fairness (Limone

and Toto, 2022). This innate perspective also implies that intuitions are formed through evolution, and that these are less subject to change (Ohreen, 2021), which raises questions around the role and purpose of education in the development of moral intuitions. Furthermore, the post hoc account for reasoning dismisses how moral viewpoints can be shaped through logical thinking (Saltzstein and Kasachkoff, 2004). Yet empirical research has shown that discussions based on moral reasoning do influence changes within individuals' moral decision-making (Lind, 2002; Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975). Despite this, Haidt (2004) defends his theory by stating that he "never said that all moral reasoning is post hoc" but that "moral reasoning is rare outside of social interactions" (p. 286). In this argument, he explains that individuals do not usually engage in moral reasoning when they reach a moral choice privately, yet social contexts require this verbal reasoning. Hence, there is a recognition that moral decisions are made through a complex combination of intuition and reasoning, but social intuitionists maintain the perspective that reasoning is a biased process that is required only in social contexts.

2.2.3 Dual Process Theory

The current debates in moral psychology relating to development have tended to emphasise a focus on either cognition or intuition (Greene et al., 2001; 2004; Greene and Haidt, 2002). Whereas the dual process theory (DPT) aims to highlight that both affective and cognitive processes are crucial in moral decision-making (Smith, 2015; Greene et al., 2004), as the interaction between these two areas has received little research (Greene et al., 2001). It has been suggested that Green and colleagues have been influential in the development of this theory within moral psychology (Bialek and De Neys, 2023; Kahane, 2012). The dual-process theory suggests that the quick, emotional processes lead to deontological decision-making, whilst the slow, cognitive process leads to more utilitarian moral decisions (Greene et al., 2004; 2001). Even though the dual-process theory has strong roots in moral psychology, it does highlight ideas around the relationship between cognition and emotion within the decision-making process, which could have implications for moral education.

At the core of the DPT, there is a suggestion that our minds have a System 1 and System 2, which are responsible for different areas of thinking (Kahneman, 2011). According to Daniel Kahneman (2011), System 1 "operates automatically and

quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control" (p. 20) whilst System 2 "allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it" (p. 21). Additionally, it is suggested that the capabilities of System 1 are innate and increase an individual's chance of survival by responding quickly to environmental threats (Limone and Toto, 2022; Smith, 2015; Kahneman, 2011). In contrast, activities that engage System 2 always require attention and focus from the individual; they are not automatic (Kahneman, 2011). It is suggested that when the model of the world that System 1 maintains is violated in some way, System 2 is activated, which then allows our attention to be focused on understanding this situation (Kahneman, 2011). One paper written by Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) emphasises the important link between emotions and cognition in moral decision-making and how this develops over time. The authors found that children are more likely to base moral decisions on emotional and social functions like those shown by other primates (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007). However, they also state that the role of education is to "cultivate children's building of repertoires of cognitive and behavioural strategies" (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007: 7), which enables students to act in more sophisticated ways when faced with complex moral situations. It is suggested that as individuals become more educated, they become more skilled in combining their emotions, cognitive reasoning, and social functioning in their moral decision-making (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007). Therefore, the role of education could be to connect the emotional responses with the cognitive thinking; in other words, education could bridge the automatic response with moral reasoning.

In the 2001 study conducted by Greene and colleagues, fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) scans were used to observe which areas of the brain were activated during the decision-making process of both impersonal and personal dilemmas. The results from this research suggested that the Footbridge dilemma evoked a more emotional response from participants (Greene et al., 2001). Also, participants who arrived at a utilitarian decision had a longer reaction time, which suggests that their slower cognitive processes overrode the automatic affective system (McGuire et al., 2009; Greene et al., 2001). However, these claims have been questioned by more recent scholars who suggest that deontological decisions are not arrived at faster than utilitarian choices (Greene, 2023; De Neys and Bialek, 2017), and that these suggestions are based on limited empirical evidence in an attempt to make broad generalisations on moral decision-making (De Neys

and Bialek, 2017; Kahane, 2012). One thing to note is that the studies conducted by Greene et al. (2001) as well as McGuire et al. (2009) included participants who were undergraduate students. The dilemmas used in these studies evoked an emotional reaction within the participants as they included aspects of harm, and it has been argued that these overly hypothetical scenarios do not tell researchers much about how people react in real situations.

From a moral education perspective, using scenarios including harm or death could be detrimental to the moral development of younger people (Lind, 2006). But Zembylas and McGlynn (2012) suggest a "pedagogy of discomfort" within moral education where both pupils and teachers need to experience uncomfortable emotions that relate to "dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequalities" (Zembylas and McGlynn, 2012: 41). Findings from their paper suggested that pupils aged ten and eleven expressed that the lesson was powerful in their understanding of inequality and allowed them to empathise with those experience this in real life through the reflection upon negative emotions such as confusion and anger (Zembylas and McGlynn, 2012). Despite this, there is a balance required within moral education as Lind (2006) states that moral dilemmas are only "educative… if it triggers moral emotions enough to stimulate learning, but not too strongly to prevent learning" (p. 193). Therefore, there is a suggestion that using different types of moral dilemmas engages and stimulates both processes of moral decision-making; however, much less research has been conducted on younger participants, so the implications for moral education are currently unknown.

2.3 Social Interactions and Moral Development

The above section '*2.2. Overview of Key Theories in Moral Development'* outlined the main ideas around moral development from the cognitive-developmental, social intuitionist, and dual-process theory perspectives. Each of these discussed the role of cognition, intuition, and emotion within the process of moral decision-making, but also suggested that social interactions can impact moral reasoning in different ways. Robert Coles (1998) explains that these social interactions contribute to an individual's moral intelligence, which "isn't acquired only by memorisation of rules" or through "a dint of abstract classroom discussion" (p. 5). Instead, moral intelligence is developed through interactions, observations, and participation in the social world (Coles, 1998).

Whilst cognitive-developmentalists provide a more positive outlook on how interactions with peers can enhance moral progression (Zhang and Zhao, 2017; Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975), social intuitionists and the dual process theory offer a more critical angle on how social contexts shape intuitions and require individuals to defend their initial moral choices (Ohreen, 2021; Lacewing, 2015; Haidt, 2007; 2001). In the following section, these social interactions will be discussed in two categories: co-operative and constraining. This has been developed by cognitive-developmentalists, where co-operative interactions include a more equal level of power and knowledge, whilst constraining relationships are based on an imbalance of power, often found in adult-child interactions (Li and Tomasello, 2022; Mammen et al., 2019). Overall, this will explore the role of social interactions and the learning environment within moral education based upon the understanding of moral development gained from the three theories previously discussed.

2.3.1 Constraining Interactions

In the academic literature, it has been recognised that children exhibit the ability to show moral intuitions and reasoning from early infancy (Limone and Toto, 2022; Smetana, 2013; Çam et al., 2012), which has significant implications for how these values are nurtured and enhanced within formal moral education. It has been noted that many of the relationships young children build can often be described as constraining, where adults impose moral values that are followed uncritically and without particular reasoning (Mammen et al., 2019; Carpendale, 2000). This is strongly related to Kohlberg's pre-conventional level, where stage one is dependent on obedience towards the existing moral order, with moral motivation stemming from avoidance of punishment (DeVries, 1997; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). During the early stages of childhood, social intuitionists suggest that the moral intuitions of an individual are innate, based on an evolutionary process, which provides a "recipe" (Haidt and Bjorklund, 2008: 245) for dealing with moral concerns. However, this theory has been criticised for overlooking the social environment of children in their moral development (Carpendale et al., 2021; Ohreen, 2021). More recent research from Greene's dual-process theory (2017) agrees that intuitions provide a 'map' for individuals to navigate some moral situations, but that this is influenced by the environment in which it is created. This is described by Vila-Henninger (2021) as socialisation where "through social interaction or instruction, actors internalise different cultural elements" (p. 107).

Therefore, even before formal education begins, there is an understanding that children are developing and shaping their moral values, mainly from constraining interactions with their family/parents, as well as from their cultural environment.

Within formal schooling, moral education has sometimes been critiqued for relying upon these hierarchical interactions between students and teachers, which have been suggested to be a form of indoctrination (Hand, 2023; Hirst, 1974). Notably, Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) stated that "educators have assumed naively that schools have been harbours of value neutrality" (p. 54). Historically, it had been assumed that the main influencers of young students were their family and Church, with many articles discussing the neutrality of schooling in this development (Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977; Kohlberg, 1966). However, this landscape has changed significantly with researchers recognising that schools do play a role in the moral development of students. But it has been suggested that educators may be imparting their own or predetermined moral beliefs, which could be viewed as a form of indoctrination, as students should be able to develop their own values objectively (Hand, 2023; Hirst, 1974). Furthermore, Tomasello (2018) states that "behaving morally by simply following adult instruction… is not really morality at all… it is motivated by conformity" (p. 260). Despite this, as has been discussed, education systems cannot be value-neutral, and teachers themselves will be displaying particular values even subconsciously. Hence, students objectively developing moral beliefs and values is improbable, as they are continuously shaping these through their interactions with others as well as the school environment.

Furthermore, hierarchical relationships often have negative connotations when discussed in relation to students' moral development as it described as uncritical or confirmative interactions (Mammen et al., 2019; Tomasello, 2018). But there are also benefits in having adults or peers with more moral knowledge, as this can encourage higher levels of moral thinking amongst students (Walker et al., 2000). These interactions are not based on teachers imparting their knowledge onto students but providing them with a 'devil's advocate' perspective where questioning techniques are used to require students to rethink and reconfirm their moral decisions (Wong, 2021). Additionally, it has been suggested that teachers' ability to provide counter-arguments within moral dilemmas has been another effective way of enhancing students' moral judgments (Lind, 2006; 2002). A more

implicit perspective of moral development through teacher-student transmission is through role-modelling. Lumpkin (2008) states that as "teachers interact with students, it is vital for them to serve as role models… by making professional judgements and decisions based on societal and moral [values]" (p. 45). In this paper, values such as integrity, trust, honesty, fairness, respect, and responsibility are discussed, and it is suggested that educators show these in their practice to role-model to students how these values are applied in daily life (Lumpkin, 2008). This is also relevant in the development of moral intelligence, which Borba (2001) explains is people's ability to understand right and wrong, and act in accordance with this knowledge. Coles (1998) also states that students' moral intelligence is formed by observing the actions of adults and teachers, stating that "what we think of simply as the unfolding events of the day… turn out to be the really powerful and persuasive times, morally" (p. 31). Despite this, Halstead and Taylor (2000) argue that teachers may not even be aware of the moral values that they are displaying daily, or that students may not be conscious of the values they are being shown. So, although the interactions with teachers can have benefits like providing more mature moral reasoning or role modelling values, these cannot be the only method, as students also require the opportunity to criticise the authoritative perspectives and critically reflect on their own beliefs.

2.3.2 Co-Operative Interactions

The second category of social interactions, discussed by Piaget (1932) are cooperative where "neither person has the right to dictate terms to the other, and neither person is obligated to obey the other" (De Lisi, 2002: 6). Unlike constraining interactions, it is suggested that cooperative relationships are based on mutual respect, and a more equal level of moral knowledge (Boer and Boehnke, 2016; DeVries, 1997). Arguably, cooperative interactions are most common in peer-to-peer relationships, which create a "safe haven" (Mammen et al., 2019: 4) for children to explore the moral norms of their group. It has been suggested that within these cooperative interactions, when a disagreement arises, a moral disequilibrium occurs where information contradicts an individual's prior knowledge (Li and Tomasello, 2022; Walker et al., 2000; Piaget, 1977; 1959). It is proposed that by exploring moral dilemmas in the classroom, disagreements about what is right and wrong will arise, allowing for various perspectives to be discussed

amongst peers and allowing space for the disequilibrium in moral thought to occur (Hakam, 2018; Kohlberg and Mayer, 1972). However, Binfet (2004) crucially states that "merely creating social opportunities for interaction does not ensure the generation of cognitive conflict in participants" (p. 186) and that conflict can be activated through individual reflection, not solely through social interactions. In this study, Binfet (2004) found that there was no significant difference in the moral reasoning increase between the intra- and inter-personal interactions. Despite this, Vygotsky (1978) developed the idea of the zone of proximal development, which is the difference between what an individual could achieve independently compared to what they could achieve when cooperating with a more able peer. Blatt and Kohlberg (1975) also suggest that being provided with higher levels of moral reasoning from elder or more knowledgeable peers encourages moral development. Therefore, simply participating in social interactions is not enough to develop students' morality; there needs to be conflict within these experiences to create disequilibrium and encourage higher levels of reasoning.

One of the main criticisms of the role of peer interactions within moral development comes from the social intuitionist theory, where Haidt (2001) has famously stated that reasoning in these social contexts acts as a "lawyer trying to build a case, rather than a judge searching for the truth" (p. 814). In this theory, much of the focus is placed on the place of intuitions, where it is suggested that these fast, emotional responses are the main drivers of moral decision-making (Haidt, 2012; 2001). A similar viewpoint has been shared by the dual process theory, which also suggests that moral reasoning is a post-hoc activity in an attempt to convince others of one's own moral standpoint (Killen and Dahl, 2021; Greene, 2014; Haidt, 2012). But, in a more recent paper, Greene (2017) has suggested that "intuitive decision-making is likely to fare poorly in a changing world" (p. 70), especially when the environment in which an individual's intuitions are developed differs from the world in which they practice these intuitions. In this paper, a further argument is made that when intuitions are developed in an environment which is biased or unrepresentative, then an individual's moral decision-making will display these (Greene, 2017). This highlights that both moral intuitions and moral reasoning have limitations in the decision-making process, where relying upon just one system is not dependable or free of bias (Greene, 2017). The role of moral education in this would be to provide students with

opportunities to interact with peers who hold differing moral perspectives, which triggers new intuitions and reasoning, and encourages challenging existing views (Boer and Boehnke, 2016; Tinker, 2017; Meer, 2015). Hence, participating in cooperative interactions with peers provides opportunities for students' values to be shaped, nurtured, and questioned through autonomous thinking rather than being based upon compliance.

2.3.3 Importance of Learning Environment

In the above sections, it has been outlined how both constraining and cooperative relationships impact moral development, but it has also been noted that the classroom environment is crucial for creating a context where these moral issues can be explored (Cassidy et al., 2024; Johansson et al., 2024; De Lisi, 2002; DeVries, 1997). It has been stated by Nucci (2024) that "moral education does not occur in a vacuum. It is connected to the entirety of the academic and social life of the classroom" (p. 138). Nucci (2024) goes on further to explain that respect and trust are the foundations of a moral classroom, as students are able to identify when their teachers display discrimination and unfairness. The idea of mutual respect has been discussed by other authors who suggest that learning can be enhanced when there is a two-way street of respect between students and educators (Schuitema et al., 2008; De Lisi, 2002). This level of respect in the classroom can also impact the interactions that take place within moral education. Lind (2006) and De Lisi (2002) suggest that if these lessons are too teacher-centred, then students may refrain from sharing their honest perspectives and provide answers that they believe their teacher wants to hear. This was discussed in a paper by Cassidy et al. (2024), who found that during philosophy lessons, some students would look at their teacher for permission to use specific terminology, which highlights how the classroom expectations and rules may impact the interactions within this context. Therefore, moral education lessons do require levels of mutual respect and trust between the students and their teacher for more open discussions around moral issues to occur.

Even though mutual respect has been discussed as an important factor in creating a supportive learning environment for moral education, it has also been discussed that the teacher does have a duty when exploring controversial topics within this subject (Bleazby et al., 2023; Boler, 2004). Some scholars have expressed that moral education lessons should allow students to have free discourse where they

are able to express their ideas and participate in debates around moral issues whilst still showing respect for others and their rights of opinion (Lind, 2006; Covell and Howe, 2001). But this raises concerns around the limits of discourse within the classroom, as some students may hold 'socially unacceptable' or extreme perspectives. Within moral education, it is becoming increasingly common practice to explore issues such as racism, sexism, and sectarianism with students at the primary school level (The Scottish Government, 2017; Education Scotland, 2015b). One author who holds the opinion that "all speech is not free" (Boler, 2004: 321) also has contrasting views around how the classroom teacher should make their environment safe, as Boler (2004) states that:

> "The obligation of educators is not to guarantee a safe space that is free from hostility… but rather, to challenge oneself and one's students to analyse critically any statement made in the classroom, especially those which are rooted in dominant ideological values that subordinate on the basis of race, gender, class, or sexual orientation" (p. 321).

Several scholars highlight the need to create a 'safe' place for ME to take place (Mammen et al., 2019; Lind, 2006; Piaget, 1932), which has connotations of mutuality, respect, and comfort. But Nucci (2024) also highlights that "children and adolescents expect schools and teachers to protect them from harm and exploitation" (p. 138). These discussions emphasise the conflict between having open and free discourse within moral classrooms and protecting students from potentially harmful perspectives, particularly in the younger years of schooling. Despite this, Zembylas and Papamichael (2017) claim that safe classroom environments are ones which embrace discomfort as they show that students can explore emotional discussions, challenge pre-existing ideas or beliefs, and develop an empathetic understanding. In moral education, it is suggested that students need a space to critically discuss and reflect upon a variety of issues where the teacher should assure each student that they will be supported both intellectually and emotionally (Zembylas and McGlynn, 2012; Boler, 1999). Borba (2001) also highlights that moral intelligence is developed when students put values like fairness, inclusion, and respect into practice in the classroom, which can be achieved when faced with others who share different or conflicting perspectives. Hence, the role of the educator should be to facilitate these discussions and to address any 'socially unacceptable' or extreme ideas, as these perspectives or

beliefs should be challenged within a place of safety. Thus, a 'safe' moral education classroom should encourage free discourse amongst students, and not shy away from uncomfortable subjects or emotions, but should address these appropriately with the students for the age and stage that they are at.

2.4 Explicit Approaches to Moral Education

The present thesis aims to research how moral education is implemented in Scottish non-denominational schools with a focus on two approaches: explicit and implicit. The explicit teaching approaches are those which are the formal learning opportunities provided for students in the classroom and school to learn or discuss moral issues through curricular areas. Whereas the implicit approaches will focus on the environment which has been created within the school through their organisation, practices, ethos, and culture, which are not directly taught by teachers, yet have an important impact on the development of morality. In this section, the explicit approaches will be discussed in relation to the impact of direct teaching, the resources and time in moral education, and how this can be linked to other subjects through interdisciplinary learning (Dahl et al., 2025; Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Conroy et al., 2013). Explicit approaches will be defined in the present thesis as any planned activities for moral education, whether it is in its own curricular area or connected to the other Curriculum for Excellence subjects.

2.4.1 Direct Moral Education Teaching

At times, more direct approaches to moral education have been criticised in the academic literature as it has been suggested that this authoritative teaching is less effective for encouraging students' moral development compared to more cooperative approaches (Hakam, 2018; Berkowitz, 2011; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). In moral education, Hand (2023) offers an insight into how educators can develop students' "moral formation" as well as their "moral inquiry" in terms of avoiding indoctrination (p. 32). Moral formation is the "attempt to bring about that children subscribe to certain moral standards: that they intend and incline to comply with those standards" (p. 32). It is suggested that this compliance is developed through rules, boundary setting and modelling within classrooms and schools (Hand, 2023). Within schools, it is ordinary for rules and expectations to be in place. But it could be argued that this is a form of indoctrination since

teachers are directly telling students what is right and wrong or how to behave, being viewed as a master who transmits their knowledge to pupils (Cox, 1998; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). Hand (2023) agrees with this by stating that it is not enough for students to only adhere to moral standards, and there should be opportunities to understand the reasoning behind these expected behaviours. Hence, moral inquiry requires students to "investigate whether and which moral standards are justified" (p. 33). This goes beyond simply not stealing or lying because an individual has been told that it is wrong; it is understanding the reasoning behind why this action is wrong. It is suggested that reliance upon moral formation only could lead to indoctrination (Hand, 2025), but the aspect of moral inquiry provides shows that educators are interested in "*how* children are thinking" and not only concerned with "telling them *what* to think" (Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977: 57). So, although there could be tendencies to slip into indoctrination through a sole focus on wanting students to follow specific moral standards, moral education also provides opportunities to reflect on why these are the expected behaviours within school and society more generally.

Within explicit moral education lessons, the role of the teacher has also been discussed as a facilitator in the learning rather than a master (Lind, 2006; Cox, 1998). An interesting statement from Cameron and Cassidy (2022) suggests that the educator is "a metaphorical midwife that delivers arguments and questions" (p. 176), where they support students in their engagement with philosophical concepts. In moral education, a similar role for educators is described by Lind (2006), who explains that they know their class and students best and can create or gather stimuli which will encourage discussion and debate. Educators' choices in moral education stimuli are crucial in two ways. The first is that resources around moral issues should be emotionally and/or cognitively stimulating for students to create a conflict in their current moral thinking (Lind, 2006). But educators must also be aware that if these are too emotionally or cognitively charged, then this may hinder moral development (Lind, 2006; Stoll and Beller, 1993). Secondly, it has been identified that lessons within Religious and Moral Education have been described as 'boring' by Conroy et al. (2012), as these often do not relate to students' lives or contemporary issues. It has been highlighted that teachers, especially at the primary school level, spend considerable time with their class and can select activities at the appropriate stage, which will also be engaging for students (Zhang et al., 2025; Lind, 2006; Stoll and Beller, 1993).

Therefore, educators' knowledge of moral education issues, as well as an understanding of their pupils, are crucial aspects in planning this subject to ensure topics that will be interesting to the students and are emotionally/cognitively stimulating.

As the above paragraph outlines, to have effective explicit moral education, practitioners require curricular and content knowledge related to this subject, but the academic literature suggests that training in this area is limited (Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Education Scotland, 2014; Temli et al., 2011). It has been suggested that educators' knowledge of a curricular area impacts their confidence in teaching within that subject, with less knowledge relating to reduced confidence (Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Matemba, 2015; Conroy et al., 2013). Ideas around the different forms of knowledge have been discussed by Shulman (1987; 1986), who distinguishes between seven categories, but the present thesis focuses on one of these: curricular. According to Shulman (1987; 1986), curricular knowledge relates to the resources, topics, and syllabus within the subject. Research has shown a gap in teachers' curricular knowledge within RME (Cameron and Cassidy, 2022; Clanachan and Matemba, 2015). Clanachan and Matemba's (2015) study highlighted this through teachers' lack of understanding around the Experiences and Outcomes for RME, suggesting that these are too vague and broad to provide them with a starting point in their planning process. A more recent finding has proposed that educators' lack of understanding around topics within philosophical and moral classrooms has resulted in an avoidance of 'controversial' issues through a fear of parental reaction (Bleazby et al., 2023; Cameron and Cassidy, 2022; Robertson et al., 2017). Issues around a lack of training have been apparent in Scotland for over a decade, with Education Scotland (2014) stating that development opportunities available to teachers within the curricular area of RME were "minimal" (p. 33). It has been further suggested that training in moral education has been crowded out by the increased focus on Literacy, Numeracy, and Health and Wellbeing, with practitioners saying that 'they simply "have not got round to Religious and Moral Education" (p. 34). The lack of continuing professional development opportunities in moral education is evident in other countries, as a study by Temli et al. (2011) found that ninety per cent of in-service teachers in Turkey reported that they did not participate in moral education training. Yet, teachers are suggesting that they would like to participate in more training to understand what resources and topics can be explored through this

subject (Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Temli et al., 2011). Therefore, further research is required to understand educators' curricular knowledge within moral education, to observe which resources and topics are being covered, and how teachers are supported or engaged with training in this subject.

2.4.2 Interdisciplinary Learning and Moral Education

Limitations to the direct teaching of moral education have been explored by several scholars (Robertson et al., 2017; Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Grant and Matemba, 2013); however, the most frequently cited challenge is that of time within the curriculum (Scholes, 2024; Education Scotland, 2014; Grant and Matemba, 2013). In an attempt to cover moral education topics within classrooms, an interdisciplinary approach is often taken where moral values or issues are explored through other curricular areas (Zhang et al., 2025; Hand, 2023; Robertson et al., 2017). Education Scotland (2023a) defines interdisciplinary learning as "a planned experience that brings disciplines together in one coherent programme or project. The different disciplines plan and execute as one" (p. 4). Dahl et al. (2025) explain that "adopting this 2 for 1 approach allows teachers and schools to contribute to students' moral development… without sacrificing instructional time" (p. 139). But whilst exploring values and beliefs through other subjects can mitigate time constraints, this approach also has downfalls for moral education.

The connection between moral education and literacy has been explored in the academic literature, as there is recognition that both subjects often utilise stories and discuss various perspectives (Zhang et al., 2025; Kim and Hachey, 2021; Robertson et al., 2017; Grant and Matemba, 2013). One scholar claims that "the roads to becoming literate and moral can be viewed as parallel journeys" (Vitz, 1990: 126) since both are developed over time through interactions and experiences with others. Exploring moral values through Literacy can often provide students with opportunities to develop skills such as critical thinking and active listening (Zhang et al., 2025). A study conducted by Kim and Hachey (2021) found that critical thinking amongst students was enhanced through the connection between moral education and fairy tales, by exploring issues such as gender roles within society. Furthermore, film literacy has become an increasingly popular way to stimulate moral discussions as films "serve as a catalyst… to discuss challenging moral topics in a safe environment that is appropriate for young

children" (Russell and Waters, 2013: 304). Through this medium, research has shown that students have been engaged in moral discussions around topics like bullying as well as peer pressure (Russell and Waters, 2014; 2013; Russell, 2012). Even though moral education can and has been explored through literacy, there has also been research conducted into the assessment of literacy skills within RME in Scottish primary schools (Grant and Matemba, 2013). Within their study, Grant and Matemba (2013) stated that "worryingly, no attention was given to ensure that religious terms were spelt correctly" (p. 8). Grant and Matemba (2013) also state that this work was submitted by educators to show their "best practice" (p. 9), which raises concerns about the everyday practice within RME around teachers' understanding of the importance of religious and moral literacy. This is differentiated from the curricular area of 'Literacy' as it includes an understanding of religions and values, and not just literary skills such as reading or writing. It is a significant issue as it is suggested that religious literacy is crucial in forming a deeper understanding of beliefs, rather than simply restating facts (Parker, 2020; Von Brömssen et al., 2020; Biesta et al., 2020). Although moral education and literacy can increase critical thinking and develop skills in both areas, the current practice in Scotland highlights that the links between these subjects lack coherence and clarity.

In the academic literature, moral education has been discussed in relation to all other curricular areas, including mathematics and science (Zhang et al., 2025; McKinney et al., 2014; Halstead and Pike, 2006), but there has often been more emphasis placed on its connections with Health and Wellbeing, and Social Studies (Dahl et al., 2025; Merzifonluoglu and Hamarat, 2022; Robertson et al., 2017; Elias et al., 2008; Mouratidou et al., 2007; Halstead and Pike, 2006). In Curriculum for Excellence, Health and Wellbeing is understood as "the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities, and attitudes which [students] need for mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing" (Education Scotland, 2009a:1). It is suggested that explicit links to values development can be made through the physical aspect through building peer relationships, developing affirmation and care, and creating a sense of membership (Mercia, 2023; Lumpkin, 2008). Additionally, this curricular area also encompasses student relationships with others where discussions around respect, equality, diversity, and responsibility can occur (Bleazby, 2020; Heyes, 2019; Steutel and De Ruyter, 2011). Another curricular area often linked with moral education is Social Studies, which relates

to students' knowledge around how historical, social, geographic, environmental, and political factors have influenced society (Education Scotland, 2023b; Byrd, 2012). A paper by Robertson et al. (2017) states that "there are numerous examples in Scotland where learning in RME has led to action towards positive social change" (p. 326) through topics within Social Studies. They suggest that schools have used Fair Trade to address global economic imbalances, Holocaust Memorial Day has led to the sharing of exhibitions, and recycling schemes within schools link to sustainability issues (Robertson et al., 2017). Additionally, Dahl et al. (2025) explain that providing the historical and societal contexts to values shows students that "morality changes perpetually" (p. 92). It is suggested that moral education provides a place to explore how moral values change over time, based on cultures and contexts, to discuss why certain values once held may no longer be appropriate or acceptable within societies, e.g., slavery or corporal punishment (Byrd, 2012; Halstead and Pike, 2006). Therefore, moral education has strong links with both Health and Wellbeing, and Social Studies, to understand the development of values over time, as well as providing students with opportunities to nurture their own moral values through peer relationships and exploring moral issues.

Despite the positive ways in which moral education can be explicitly explored through other curricular areas outlined above, there are also concerns about how an interdisciplinary approach may impact moral education's place within the curriculum (Scholes, 2024; Franchi and Robinson, 2018; Robertson et al., 2017). Notably, Robertson et al. (2017) state that "it is important to ensure that where RME is delivered alongside or as part of other curricular areas that it does not become so subsumed in these that it loses its identity" (p. 328). It has been a concern that the only way moral education may be included within primary schooling is through interdisciplinary approaches rather than as a standalone subject (Franchi and Robinson, 2018; Robertson et al., 2017). Furthermore, there is a growing concern that RME only gains importance in schools when it is closely linked to either Literacy, Numeracy or Health and Wellbeing, and is losing its place in an increasingly performative curriculum (Scholes, 2024; McCluskey et al., 2023; Humes, 2022; Grant and Matemba, 2013). Overall, an interdisciplinary approach to moral education could be advantageous as there are ways to enhance the exploration of values through other subjects, but this comes with a growing

concern that this approach may lead to the depletion of moral education in its own respect.

2.5 Implicit Approaches to Moral Education

In the present thesis, another important aspect is to understand the implicit moral education curriculum that exists in schools, as "moral education should not be limited to classroom instruction alone but should also focus on cultivating a moral culture in the school" (Zhang et al., 2025: 258). There is a plethora of activities which contribute to the hidden curriculum within schools, including: school rules, interaction patterns, extracurricular activities, the celebrations emphasised, the school's physical characteristics and obedience to authority (Çubukçu, 2012; Power and Higgins-D' Alessandro, 2008; Cox, 1998). But it has been suggested that these implicit approaches have "lurked beneath the surface" (Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977: 54) and, if not reflected upon, could hinder and undermine students' moral development (Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008). Even though there is recognition that the school's ethos has a role in moral development, this is still an under-researched topic within the academic literature, so further understanding this aspect of moral education is significant.

2.5.1 School Ecology, Milieu, Social Systems, and Culture

In an attempt to categorise the components of the school's hidden moral curriculum, Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2008) proposed four dimensions: ecology, milieu, social systems, and culture. The first of these, ecology, relates to the school's physical attributes, such as the size or layout of the school, that may impact the type of interactions that take place. For example, interactions between classes or stages in schools may be impacted by using open-plan areas; the size of the school may impact classroom sizes, which could determine the types of learning interactions that take place, e.g., grouped seating vs row (Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008). However, it has been recognised that "space is a neglected field of moral education research" (Gao, 2006: 10) even though the places in which social interactions occur have implications for moral development. Limited research supports the suggestion that the physical layout of the classroom and flexibility of the furniture can affect learning in moral education, as these can either enhance or hinder students' ability to collaborate with peers (Bakhshi, 2019). Understanding how the overall layout of a school and its classrooms could

provide more information on how students are able to interact with others in the development of their values.

Secondly, Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2008) discuss the milieu of the school, which is the characteristics of the student and teacher population as well as the social environment created by these interactions. This is an interesting aspect to explore as Priestley and Humes (2021) have recently stated that "there is… considerable cultural diversity within the country… most evident in the major cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh" (p. 176). The Scottish Government (2018b) have also found that around twenty per cent of students are from Black and Ethnic Minority backgrounds. Yet, when discussing educators' backgrounds, it has been found that the "lack of diversity in the teaching workforce… is becoming increasingly pressing and visible, as the pupil population… is getting more diverse" (The Scottish Government, 2018b: 1). Another characteristic to highlight is that a quarter of all students living in SIMDs (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) 1 and 2, which are the highest levels of deprivation, attend school in Glasgow City Council (Education Scotland, 2019). This shows that the background of students within this particular local authority is culturally and socio-economically diverse, which may impact the implicit moral values or priorities that are communicated in primary schools.

Social systems are the third dimension outlined by Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2008), which deals with the organisational structures of the school and the processes of decision-making. Recent literature, particularly in the Scottish context, has highlighted that more opportunities for pupil participation in a school's decision-making process can positively influence the ethos (The Scottish Government, 2018a; Cross et al., 2014; Hulme et al., 2011; Cross et al., 2009). In their paper, Hulme et al. (2011) identified different levels of pupils' participation from the classroom to the community level. Classroom participation included activities such as working in groups; school-level participation was through Pupil Councils or whole-school assemblies; and community level involved charity work or local projects (Hulme et al., 2011). In this particular study, it was highlighted that in primary schools, there was a "greater tendency… to regard pupil, staff, and parental attitudes as 'assets' in promoting pupil participation" (Hulme et al., 2011: 14) compared to high schools. Yet, it has also been discussed that if activities such as Pupil Councils are viewed in a tokenistic sense, then this can

actually harm the levels of pupil engagement, which highlights the need for authentic opportunities (Hulme et al., 2011). This also closely links to the Just Community approach to education, where it is proposed that "participation is at the core of this approach to social and moral learning and to school reform" (Oser et al., 2008: 395). This approach developed by Kohlberg and colleagues was an attempt to make these 'hidden' aspects of moral education more explicit and apparent to schools, as their previous research had found that these elements of moral development were being left underexamined and unaddressed (Kohlberg, 1971; Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008). The Just Community school is based around democratic processes where students and teachers collaboratively reflect on the rules and shape the school's culture (Oser et al., 2008; Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008). So, this thesis will observe whether the pupils have a voice when it comes to choosing the school's values or, even within their own classrooms, if they have a choice about the learning that takes place in moral education.

Finally, the culture of the school is believed to be the accumulation of the previous three dimensions but can simultaneously influence them as this relates to the shared values in the community (Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008). As Kohlberg (1966) states, schools cannot be "value-neutral" (p. 2) as the physical building, relationships, backgrounds, and participation of those in the school's community ultimately build a certain culture which implicitly develops moral values. More recently, the Scottish Government (2018a) produced a document which recognised that a school's culture can positively impact student behaviour, create strong relationships between staff and students, and increase the feeling of connectedness in schools. Building a positive school culture is also crucial for moral education as it is believed that "the life of the school as a whole helps students develop the ability to conduct, change behaviour and increase morality" (Dewey, 1909: 5). Despite the benefits of creating a school culture which enhances moral development, the current academic literature is scarce and no studies in Scotland have explored this aspect of the implicit curriculum.

2.5.2 Extra-Curricular Activities and Moral Education

Increasing literature has discussed how extra-curricular activities within primary schools can contribute to the moral development of students (Zhang et al., 2025; Smith and Smith, 2013; Halstead and Pike, 2006). One of these has been discussed

by Smith and Smith (2013) relating to the impact of whole-school assemblies within English primary schools. They state that "assemblies are an exceptional vehicle through which moral and spiritual education can occur" (Smith and Smith, 2013: 5), where values like kindness, loyalty and responsibility can be explored. In a review of primary schools' handbooks in Scotland, Scholes (2024) noted that a small number of schools related their whole-school assemblies to RME. However, it was found that schools consistently fell back into old terminology, and the exploration of RME was not fully clear. Although these two studies show that there can be explicit links made to values and assemblies, the limited number of practitioners stating this in their school handbooks (Scholes, 2024) suggests that these links could perhaps be more implicit.

Additionally, it has been discussed that other extra-curricular activities such as clubs, trips, and competitions can help students "adapt to the society they live in and participate in solving its problems and issues" (Al-Laqani, 2003: 59). Extra-curricular activities are implicit in that they are organised and supervised by teachers outside of the classroom, yet the moral values which they develop may be less apparent in this organisation. One particular club believed to support moral development is Eco-Committees, where students work together to address issues of sustainability and the environment in their own school, and potentially beyond (Okoro and Amadioha, 2016). The social element of this extra-curricular activity has been identified as being an important aspect for moral development (Okoro and Amadioha, 2016; Halstead and Taylor, 2010; Al-Laqani, 2003), which was previously discussed in section '*2.3.2. Co-operative Interactions*'. Furthermore, Pupil Councils can implicitly develop students' moral values through "speaking up on behalf of others, listening to and taking account of other points of view, working as part of a team and taking responsibility for decision-making" (Dobie, 1998: 72). In Scotland, there has been an increased interest in introducing Pupil Councils in primary schools, to contribute to moral education and values development through critical debates and actively participating in a democratic process (Hulme et al., 2011; Deuchar, 2004). Finally, there has been a recognition that visitors to the school can contribute to the Religious and Moral Education curricular area (Ackroyd et al., 2024; Education Scotland, 2011). Ackroyd et al. (2024) discuss that the use of visitors requires teachers to be aware of the positionality of those who are invited in, as each individual brings their own context and experiences with their beliefs and views. But the use of visitors can

be significant as research has found that students are more engaged through active discussions with faith leaders, and it creates relationships between the visitors and schools within the community (Ackroyd et al., 2024; Lundie et al., 2022; Education Scotland, 2011). Therefore, the present thesis aims to gain further understanding of which extra-curricular activities are available to and undertaken by students that could potentially contribute to their development of values.

2.6 Assessment of Moral Education

Assessment within Religious and Moral Education has been debated, specifically in the Scottish context (Scholes, 2025; 2022; Grant and Matemba, 2013). Grant and Matemba (2013) outline the complexities of assessment in this curricular area by highlighting the differences in denominational and non-denominational sectors. In Catholic school systems, it has been discussed that assessing 'faith' is difficult (Halstead and McLaughlin, 2005) and means that "formal examinations have remained unpopular" (Grant and Matemba, 2013: 3). In non-denominational schools, however, formal assessments have been in place since 1984 (Grant and Matemba, 2013). In more recent years, Education Scotland (2017) has continued to produce Benchmarks for RME "to assess the knowledge, understanding, and skills" (p. 3) from Early to Fourth Levels.

Internationally, there continues to be a debate around the place of assessment in moral education, values education, or ethics education. In the Australian context, Brady (2011) highlights that whilst values education has gained increased interest, "the information provided about the assessment of values is at best modest" (p. 2). Additionally, Sporre (2019) provides insights from the Swedish educational system, where formal ethics assessment exists, suggesting that the instructions were ambiguous, and many teachers disagreed with the guidelines. Similarly, in Scotland, Grant and Matemba (2013) emphasise that educators in primary schools are not clear on the assessment guidelines for RME, resulting in ineffective moderation and communication of progression. These three countries highlight that guidelines and instructions for assessing morals, values, or ethics development can be complex and require clarity for practitioners.

Finally, assessment in moral education also contributes to a wider discussion around the 'consumerism' of education, which uses formal testing to evidence the effectiveness of schooling systems (Sporre, 2019; Stern, 2017). But scholars raise

concerns about a reliance on assessment in the development of values or morals. Halstead and Pike (2006) question the ethics of assessment in this curricular area, suggesting that this is also an evaluation of the values held by the student's family and community. This point is furthered by Stern (2017), who emphasises that, in Swedish education, Christian traditions and Western humanism are part of their ethical position, which would lead to "'different' values… simply…dismissed as 'incorrect'" (p. 179). Despite this, it can be argued that only "poor quality assessment… focuses on judging a pupil's attitudes and beliefs… rather than assessing their progression in awareness" (Arthur and Wright, 2001: 127). Therefore, ongoing debates around assessment in moral education are still prevalent in education systems globally, which highlights the need to reflect on the purpose of testing in this subject and what would be assessed.

2.7 Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter has identified three key theories in moral development: cognitive-developmentalism, social intuitionism and the dual-process theory. A summary of these theories was discussed in relation to how morality develops and what can encourage this development. In cognitive-developmentalism, scholars believe that morality is based on reasoning and develops in a way similar to cognition, where individuals move up in stages with little regression (Kohlberg, 1958). Contrastingly, social intuitionists believe that emotions drive moral judgements rather than reasoning, where individuals' judgements are biased and motivated by cohesion and relatedness (Haidt, 2013; 2007; 2003; 2001). In an attempt to further understand the development of morality, the dual-process theory suggests that reasoning drives utilitarian moral judgements, whereas intuitions drive deontological judgements (Greene et al., 2004; 2001). Even though all three theories provide suggestions for how morality develops, the majority of the research which discusses the implications for moral education is cognitive-developmentalism. The approaches implemented in moral education are often based on this theory; however, many education systems realise the importance of developing the child holistically. Therefore, the present thesis aims to understand what current practices are implemented, and if these include cognitive and emotional aspects of moral development.

Despite the differences in the theories, there is an agreement that social interactions play an important role in moral development. Social interactions can

be divided into two categories: cooperative and constraining (Piaget, 1932). Constraining interactions often have an imbalance of power and knowledge and can often be observed in adult-child relationships. These interactions tend to develop heteronomous morality where students are expected to follow the rules that are set by adults, such as teachers or parents (Mammen et al., 2019; Tomasello, 2018). Cooperative social interactions are more often found in peer-to-peer relationships, which are more likely to develop autonomous morality where students form their own ideas of right and wrong through discussion and real-life contexts (De Lisi, 2002). Social interactions are important in the development of morality, but the environment in which these interactions take place is just as crucial; the classroom and school should be a safe place built upon mutual respect and dialogue that encourages students to discuss and challenge their beliefs (Lind, 2006; Covell and Howe, 2001).

The final sections of this chapter discussed the explicit and implicit approaches to moral education, which have been highlighted in some of the academic literature. Explicit approaches, in this thesis, will be defined as the purposeful and planned activities that are implemented in schools to develop the moral development (Berkowitz, 2011; De Lisi, 2002; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977) of students. Whereas the implicit approaches are defined as those activities and values which are not explicitly defined and caught through the 'hidden curriculum' (Çubukçu, 2012; Cox, 1998). It is suggested that individuals develop morality through their environment more effectively than through direct teaching methods, so this area will be an important one to study (Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008; Cox, 1998; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). Thus, focusing on the two types of implementation will provide a deeper understanding of the impact both implicit and explicit methods have on the teaching and learning of moral education in Scottish non-denominational primary schools.

Chapter 3 : Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, an outline will be provided of the methodology used to study the implementation of moral education in a Scottish non-denominational primary school. The first section will discuss the overall research question and sub-questions used to guide the data collection and analysis. Secondly, the research paradigms will be explored in relation to ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. These four aspects have been described as the 'building blocks' of research and relate to the assumptions around reality, knowledge and ethical considerations (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021; Cohen et al., 2018). In this thesis, an interpretivist paradigm was adopted, and the relevant section will outline how the assumptions in this approach were related to the current research questions.

The third sub-chapter outlines the research methods that were utilised in collecting, analysing, and interpreting the data. Qualitative studies can allow the researcher to gain an insight into the phenomenon based on the interpretations of those who experience it every day, which in this instance, was from the primary school teachers responsible for the implementation of moral education (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2015; Gillham, 2000). A single-case study was used to further understand the phenomenon of moral education, as it allowed the researcher to gain in-depth descriptions from multiple perspectives within the natural setting. This method also enabled the researcher to use different data collection tools to gain evidence that could be triangulated to strengthen the findings (Denzin, 1978). The main characteristics of this method will be outlined in relation to the purpose of the current research aim and sub-questions within this section.

Next, this chapter discusses the selection of the case school as well as the participants. The present thesis focused on the perspectives of the primary school teachers who implement moral education in their everyday practice and the senior management team who are responsible for supporting this curricular area within their school. The selection of the case study primary school was dependent on the prior relationship built between the researcher and the headteacher, so the benefits and drawbacks of conducting 'backyard' research will be discussed (Snounu, 2021; Creswell, 2009). The relationships with educators and primary

school enabled the researcher to build a strong rapport that greatly benefited the current study in understanding the implementation of moral education from various perspectives.

Furthermore, the data collection tools will be explored: semi-structured interviews, researcher observations, and document analysis. The semi-structured interviews were conducted using a guide (Appendices 2 and 3), but the structure was more flexible to gain further information on certain aspects, when required (Cohen et al., 2018; Xerri, 2018). The researcher's observations were used to observe the explicit implementation of moral education in the lessons of the participants and the implicit implementation around the school. Classroom observations were used to support the findings from the semi-structured interviews and to highlight the explicit approaches to moral education. Document analysis came from the participants volunteering their moral education lesson plans, which were used to support the evidence from the interviews and classroom observations, alongside other documents that existed within the school relating to moral education practice.

Additionally, the reflexive thematic analysis used for the interpretation of the data collected is outlined. This approach allowed the researcher to analyse data both inductively to record emerging codes and then themes (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This section will also discuss the validity and reliability of thematic analysis. The following section will discuss the validity and trustworthiness in a more general sense in relation to the current thesis and the research methods being used, with discussion around the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1986).

In the final sub-chapter, the pilot study carried out to improve the quality of the semi-structured interviews and researcher observations in the current thesis will be discussed and how this impacted the main data collection. Furthermore, the ethical considerations of this thesis will be outlined as it uses an in-depth case study, which is highly dependent on human participants. The current thesis follows the ethical guidelines provided by the University of Glasgow (Appendix 1) as well as those from the British Educational Research Association (2024) and will outline how these have been addressed.

3.2 Research Aims and Sub-Questions

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), researchers within education often begin their study by "having an interest in knowing more about one's practice, and indeed *improving* one's practice, leading to researchable questions" (p.1). From this, the researcher can begin to develop the core issue that they wish to study further. It has been explained that the initial project question is often broad in an attempt to capture the overall goal of the study (Agee, 2009; Gillham, 2000). Therefore, in the current thesis, the two research aims are:

- How is Moral Education understood as a Curriculum for Excellence area?
- How well is Moral Education implemented in a primary school context?

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe the research purpose and aims as a "funnel shape" (p. 77) where the broad, overall aims are then narrowed to specific research questions. These highlight the significant aspects of the study and are a useful guide in the decisions made about research design and data collection methods (Agee, 2009). Within the current study, there are six research questions:

1. How do primary school leaders and teachers understand the aims and terminology of Moral Education in the Curriculum for Excellence?

2. How are the CfE Benchmarks and Es and Os used by primary school teachers in the planning and teaching of moral education?

3. What do primary school teachers formally assess in ME, and what strategies are adopted to assess these areas?

4. How is moral education taught through explicit teaching approaches?

5. How is ME implicitly implemented through the life of the school?

6. What professional development opportunities are undertaken by primary school teachers and leaders to develop their knowledge and understanding of moral education, and why?

3.3 Research Paradigm

The term ‘paradigm’ is often associated with Thomas Kuhn (1962), who suggested that there were shared understandings within the social community of scientists. Overall, research paradigms make assumptions about how the world operates, how we make sense of the world, and how it may be investigated, although definitions differ between authors (Omodan, 2024; Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017; Guba and Lincoln, 2005). These assumptions can be described through four components: ontology (nature of reality), epistemology (how we acquire knowledge), axiology (ethical implications), and methodology (approach to the research process). It is suggested that these are the ‘building blocks’ of any research and have a significant impact on the research design (Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021; Waring, 2012). Furthermore, in the academic literature, there is an understanding and recognition of several research paradigms, but there are two commonly discussed, which are positivism and interpretivism (Omodan, 2024; Junjie and Yingxin, 2022; Doyle et al., 2009; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The positivist paradigm is rooted in the belief that objectivity can be achieved in research through applying methods which are directly observed and measured (Omodan, 2024; Aliyu et al., 2014). Whereas interpretivism is focused on understanding the complexities of the phenomenon being studied through rich and descriptive data (Waring, 2012). Hence, an interpretivist approach was adopted in the current thesis, which had significant implications for the research design and methodology.

From an ontological perspective, interpretivism recognises that the nature of reality is complex and that there may be more than one ‘truth’ when it comes to researching a specific phenomenon (Junjie and Yingxin, 2022; Otoo, 2020; Saunders et al., 2012). It is noted that this interpretivist lens of viewing reality came from the critique of the positivist paradigm, which Scotland (2012) suggests is based on a belief that reality is similar for most individuals and that there is an objective truth that can be measured. However, Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) state that interpretivism recognises that individuals’ realities can be based upon how they interpret knowledge based on numerous influences. Arguably, this view of the nature of reality has been significant in the field of social science, as there is often more emphasis placed on how individuals interact with one another and understanding people’s lives (Pulla and Carter, 2018). Additionally, Pulla and Carter (2018) state that “no two stories will be the same because no two lives are

ever lived, and then internalised, in exactly the same way" (p. 9). This was a crucial understanding within the current thesis, as educators would be sharing their understanding and knowledge around moral education in the Scottish non-denominational context. But each educator has gone through different teacher training experiences, has varying degrees of teaching experience, and may have other influences that shape their understanding of moral development. The interpretivist paradigm, unlike positivism, recognises that there is no ultimate 'truth' when conducting social science research (Junjie and Yingxin, 2022; Otoo, 2020; Pulla and Carter, 2018), and this has been an underpinning belief in the current thesis.

Adopting an interpretivist approach also has epistemological implications around the acquisition and creation of knowledge (Omodan, 2024). If the ontological assumptions suggest that there are multiple realities, impacted by individuals' interpretations and interactions (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017; Scotland, 2012), then the researcher needs to be mindful of the data collection tools they use. It is noted that interpretivists often use qualitative tools to "capture the complexity and richness of human experiences" (Omodan, 2024: 9). In contrast, positivist researchers would often align with quantitative methods which are focused on generalising results and maintaining objectivity (Aliyu, et al, 2014; Doyle, et al, 2009; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Instead of being focused on testing specific theories or hypotheses, interpretivist research is more concerned with gathering rich and descriptive data to contextualise the findings (Junjie and Yingxin, 2022; Richards, 2021; Yin, 2003). It has been argued that the most common data collection tools used in the interpretative approach are interviews, observations, and document analysis, as they can provide information around the human complexities and social dimensions of the phenomenon being studied (Omodan, 2024; Pulla and Carter, 2018). Again, this approach is closely connected to the aims and purpose of the current research, which is interested in gaining a deep understanding of how moral education is implemented in non-denominational primary schools within a Scottish context. Ultimately, this thesis is concerned with describing the phenomenon being observed rather than creating generalised results.

One of the main areas that distinguishes the positivist and interpretivist paradigms is the views on axiology within these approaches. Axiology relates to the

researchers' own values, biases, and beliefs, and how these can be separated from the research process (Aliyu et al., 2014). Since the positivist approach is based on testing hypotheses, there is a significant focus placed on remaining neutral as a researcher to increase the integrity of the study (Omodan, 2024), whereas the interpretivist paradigm suggests that research cannot be value-free or completely neutral (Scheiner, 2019). Ravitch and Carl (2021) argue that one of the main challenges with the interpretivist approach is that it is heavily reliant upon the researcher as an instrument in the data collection. It is recognised that researchers bring their own values, ideas, beliefs, and biases to the phenomenon that they are studying (Omodan, 2024; Richards, 2021; Brown, 2020), but this can be minimised by their reflexivity and transparency through the research process (Frechette et al., 2020; Bourdieu, 2004; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Additionally, since the researcher is also a primary educator studying a very familiar area, another aspect of this reflexivity will be exploring the shared 'doxa' between participants and researcher (Bourdieu,1997). Therefore, in the current thesis, the researcher is a significant factor in the data collection, but reflexivity is a crucial part of ensuring the researchers' own biases and ideas are acknowledged in how they may influence the study at various stages throughout.

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Qualitative Single Case Study

In the academic literature, it is suggested that the term 'case study' is often used interchangeably with qualitative research since it is based on examining a case within its context and is researcher-driven (Priya, 2021; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2013). However, it also recognised that there are various qualitative methods such as ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry, so should not be reduced to just one methodology (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018; Merriam, 1998). Additionally, developments in the shift of paradigms have resulted in many case studies being mixed methods rather than relying entirely on qualitative methods (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). This section aims to provide a clear rationale for the qualitative single-case study approach adopted in the current thesis for understanding how moral education is implemented in Scottish non-denominational primary schools.

It has been stated that the case study method can be confusing for researchers as there is no agreed-upon process or strategy for implementing this approach (Merriam, 1998). It has been suggested that, due to the interpretivist nature of case studies, many researchers construct their own understanding around the definitions of what a case is and how to select these (Priya, 2021; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Despite this, there is one common feature discussed within the literature, and that is that a 'case' needs to be determined in some way by the researcher (Yin, 2018; Stake, 2013). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) refer to this as "a unit of analysis" (p. 39) and recognise that if "there is no end" (p. 39) to the number of interviews or observations, then it cannot be considered a case study. Similarly, it has been argued that a case can be bound to a specific building like a school, an educational programme or even a certain person (Yin, 2018; Stake, 2013). Understandably, it is recognised that a researcher cannot collect data on everything, so bounding the study to certain criteria enables rich and descriptive data to be collected (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Within the current thesis, there were two ways in which this case was bound. First, research was restricted to just one case study primary school, which focused the number of interviews to be conducted, and also meant that the researcher's observations and document analysis were bound to this context. Secondly, the central focus of the study was to understand the implementation of moral education, which narrowed the collection of data. Therefore, there was a clear 'unit of analysis' established before data collection began, which shows that there was a clear case study approach adopted within the current thesis.

One of the main areas of debate relating to the case study approach is in the research design process, which can range from logical to flexible. On one hand, Yin (2018) argues that "a research design is a *logical plan from getting from here to there*" (p. 28). From this perspective, Yin (2018) suggests that there is a logical sequence to the case study approach where the researcher's aims are clearly planned before data collection. Additionally, some literature highlights that the approach which Yin discusses is based on logic and sequence, where the researcher organises data rigorously with the view that the study could potentially be closely replicated (Priya, 2021; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). However, Yin (2009) has also been an advocate for mixed-method case studies where quantitative and qualitative data are triangulated, which can be used to test hypotheses. For this

reason, Yin's case study approach has been described as postpositivist since it emphasises the role of structure and logic.

On the other hand, Stake (1995) has proposed a more flexible approach to case studies where a researcher's plan does not need to be concrete before data collection. Instead, he proposes that the research design must be flexible as there can be major changes when fieldwork begins, but that two or three research questions should structure the study (Stake, 1995). There are benefits and drawbacks of both approaches suggested by Yin and Stake, but Merriam (1998) provides a blend of both. In Merriam's case study approach, there is a recognition of Yin's (2018) statement that "you cannot start as a true *tabula rasa*" (p. 36). So, it is important for the researcher to understand their research design, but this is moulded by the literature review and has flexibility during the data collection process (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, Merriam (1998) primarily discusses qualitative case studies rather than promoting mixed methods, which is similar to Stake's (1995) approach, which focuses on qualitative data collection tools such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. This case study research recognises the importance of having a research design outlined before data collection, but is not bound by this; instead, the process is flexible.

In a qualitative case study, there have been several common data collection tools identified, but one thing frequently discussed is how central the researcher is in this process (Omodan, 2024; Priya, 2021; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Wa-Mbaleka (2020) explains that the researcher is a tool since they use "his or her eyes and ears and filters to collect, analyse and interpret the data" (p. 34). Additionally, the researcher is responsible for designing the data collection tools in their study, which can have both negative and positive consequences (Wa-Mbaleka, 2020; Karagiozis, 2018). Omodan (2024) recognises that the central position of the researcher cannot be value-neutral as each individual brings their own biases, judgements, and knowledge to the research process. It can be argued that this high level of bias can be concerning for the trustworthiness and reliability of the case study (Wa-Mbaleka, 2020). However, there are also significant benefits of having a focus on the researcher as a tool, as they bring an emotional aspect (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). It has been discussed that qualitative researchers often have a specific interest in certain issues as they are closely linked to their own experiences, which creates a personal connection to the research (Omodan,

2024; Jones, 2023; Wa-Mbaleka, 2020). In the present study, there is a clear connection between the researcher's own experiences and interest in researching moral education implementation.

One aspect of the current thesis is that the researcher is also a primary school teacher, which Taylor (2011) explains can be advantageous as it can lead to deep levels of knowledge by understanding the language used by participants, having closer contact with the field, easier access to and selection of research participants, and quicker establishment of rapport. Despite this, the close connection between the field and the researcher in this scenario can also create challenges in becoming separate enough from the study to be critical and analytical (Brewis, 2014; Tillman-Healy, 2003). For example, Taylor (2011) explains that there can be "difficulties of extracting shared knowledges and implied knowing when interviewing a community of which you are a member" (p. 5). However, it has also been recognised that reflexivity can hugely improve the methods' reliability (Jones, 2023; Wa-Mbaleka, 2020). In being reflexive, the researcher re-examines their position within the research and becomes aware of how these biases impact the choices made throughout the process (Omodan, 2024; Priya, 2021; Creswell and Poth, 2018). In the current thesis, the researcher is in a unique situation of being a practising primary educator as well as conducting the study, so reflexivity in this context is even more crucial. The researcher will have knowledge and biases of moral education that have been impacted by their own education and experiences, which will have to be reflected upon in their influence on the decisions made in the research process.

Finally, case study research has often been divided into two areas: single- and multiple-case studies (Stake, 2013). With multiple case studies, it has been discussed that findings can be compared across the different cases, which can lead to the creation of theoretical assumptions (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995). Despite the benefits of having multiple cases, the purpose of the current thesis is not to create or test a theory, nor is it to generalise the findings. Instead, it has been discussed that a single case study can be useful when the researcher is aiming to investigate a common case (Sena, 2023; Yin, 2018). The common case aims to "capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation which could… provide new indications on the social processes" (Sena, 2023: 72). The objective of the current thesis was to understand how moral education is being implemented in the case

study primary school. This single case study was a common case since there was nothing extraordinary about the context, and it provided an opportunity to understand moral education through an in-depth and real-life exploration. This is similar to what Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe as an "inductive process" where "bits and pieces of information from interviews, observations or documents are combined and ordered into larger themes as the researcher works from the particular to the general" (p. 17). Therefore, the single case study approach was used to create a richer understanding of moral education implementation within a natural context, rather than to build or test existing hypotheses

3.4.2 Case Selection

In qualitative research, it has been recognised by Small (2009) that researchers can sometimes suggest that they are selecting 'random' or 'representative' cases. One argument is that researchers may select a case that they believe is a typical example of the community or context as an attempt to increase the study's generalisation (Small, 2009; Firestone, 1993). However, in the present case-study thesis, it was important to move away from language such as 'sampling' and acknowledge that the specific environment and interactions are important and distinctive within educators' moral education implementation. The purpose of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of this curricular area within the case study primary school, with a focus on rich data collection and researcher reflexivity. So, a convenience approach to the case selection was used, which will be discussed in the following section to outline the advantages and disadvantages this had on the research process.

Some literature around convenience case selection suggests that the main reasons a researcher would choose this approach are to save time and money (Shaheen et al., 2019; Etikan et al., 2016). Whilst these are viewed as advantages to the convenience approach, it can have connotations that this is simply an 'easy' method (Golzar et al., 2022). But, in the current study, finding a primary school willing to have a researcher interview their staff, observe their school, and analyse their documents was not a simple task, and relationships became a significant aspect in the case selection. It has been recognised by some scholars that a convenience approach is common in education as classroom teachers have quick and easy access to the school, students, and other colleagues within their context (Golzar et al., 2022). Although the current researcher was also a primary school

educator, they were not in full-time employment with any one particular institution, so access to a school was not as easy. The convenience strategy was based on the researcher's "personal connection to specific gatekeepers who control organisational or institutional access" (Cooksey and McDonald, 2019: 858). The primary school case study was chosen based on the relationships previously built between the researcher, the school's headteacher and the other educators in this context. One main advantage of this convenience approach, based on existing relationships, was that time could be saved by already having an established rapport with participants, which can deepen the interactions and observations carried out by the researcher (Brewis, 2014; Taylor, 2011). Therefore, through previous connections with the headteacher and school community, the researcher was able to gain permission to conduct the case study primary school to better understand their implicit and explicit implementation of moral education.

As discussed in section '*3.4.1. Qualitative Single Case Study'* the purpose of the current thesis was not to generalise findings to other contexts. Flyvbjerg (2011) suggests that generalising from single case studies is not always the main aim and that "a purely descriptive… case study without any attempt to generalise can certainly be of value" (p. 305). In addition to this, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the term 'transferability' when discussing qualitative research. It is stated that transferability "is only possible when a thick description provides a rich enough portrayal of circumstance for application to others' situations" (Stahl and King, 2020: 27). By providing a clear research process for the data collection and analysis, as well as thick and descriptive findings then the chances of transferability are greater (Guba and Lincoln, 1986). Hence, the purpose of the current thesis is not to generalise the findings, but to be as descriptive of the context and findings as possible to increase the study's transferability to other contexts.

3.4.3 Participants

In adopting a single case study approach, this study also aligns with the case study logic that is discussed by Small (2009). It is suggested that "case study logic is… more effective when asking how or why questions about processes unknown before the start of the study" (Small, 2009: 25). This approach to case study research differs from sampling logic in the sense that the number of units or participants

to be studied is not predetermined or representative (Small, 2009). Schratz (2020) highlights that a focus on a particular group of people or research phenomenon can also limit how big the number of participants can be. Since the current thesis was concerned with understanding '*how*' moral education was implemented within the case study primary school, the number of participants was not determined until data collection was complete. Overall, there were nine primary school educators who agreed to participate in the study, who ranged in their number of years of teaching experience, age, educational backgrounds, and gender.

The background and experiences of the participants were an important aspect to discuss in the current study, as it has been highlighted by Tierney and Dilley (2002) that participants within a study should bring different perspectives to the phenomenon. One way this was achieved was the inclusion of both classroom educators as well as members of the senior management team to understand moral education implementation from various viewpoints. It is believed that classroom educators provide the visible acts of learning through their instruction to students, as well as the planning process, but that these practices can evolve and develop throughout their careers (Bolitzer, 2020). It was important to capture how the nine participants' ideas around moral education were shaped by their own experiences as well as initial teacher training and continuing professional development opportunities. Furthermore, Tierney and Dilley (2002) suggest that gaining the perspectives of management within schools is crucial as they are often seen as "in the know" (p. 459) and can provide information around how educational policies are interpreted within the reality of their school's context. This was beneficial in the current thesis as the headteacher gave insights into how local authority and Scottish Government policies influence their decision-making in relation to moral education.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

In educational research, it is noted that interviews are one of the most common data collection tools used in qualitative studies (Ruslin et al., 2022; Naz et al., 2022; Karagiozis, 2018). It is suggested that interviews with participants in the case being studied can provide insights into experiences and perceptions of the

phenomenon (Patton, 2015; Fylan, 2005). Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, which relates to how the questions and probes are structured and asked (Naz et al., 2022). In semi-structured interviews, there is a flexibility with the structure of how the questions are asked, based on the flow of the conversation, but the questions are pre-planned (Cohen et al., 2018; Xerri, 2018). It is suggested that semi-structured questions are used as a guide for the researcher to collect information on the required topics (Naz et al., 2022), but another important aspect is the use of follow-up questions (Naz et al., 2022; Ruslin et al., 2022; Xerri, 2018). Follow-up questions are aimed at keeping the conversation continuing with the interviewee around a particular theme, and they can be improvised during the interview to delve deeper into certain topics that arise (Naz et al., 2022). Within the current study, semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from the six educators (Appendix 2) and three members of the senior management team (Appendix 3) on their implementation of moral education. Using a pre-planned yet flexible structure allowed the main research questions to be explored, but also allowed for being responsive to the conversation, as other issues that were unexpected arose during the conversations that are worth exploring.

One main drawback of semi-structured interviews is that they "provide information filtered through the views of interviewees" (Creswell, 2009: 167). When using interviews, it was crucial to be aware that each participant, as well as the researcher, will bring bias to the conversation (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2009). Ruslin et al. (2022) highlight that interviewee bias can be even more prevalent when the researcher uses closed questions, as they state that trying to encompass complex ideas and experiences "into one simple, ill-fitting category" (p. 28) may result in participants choosing the 'best fit' answer. Instead, it is noted that semi-structured interviews should use more open-ended questions to elicit interviewees' backgrounds, experiences and ideas around the subject being researched (Ruslin et al., 2022). Another issue surrounds the researchers' own biases when entering the interview with their participant. This relates to Bourdieu's (1997) idea of a 'shared doxa' where there are often social structures within a collective group that naturally exist and are "taken for granted" (p. 165-166). Bourdieu (2000; 1997; 1973) highlights that social groups share similar habits, practices, knowledge, and trajectories, which could lead to a 'learned ignorance' where someone in the setting may be accustomed to. Since the

researcher, in this study, was also a primary school educator, there was a shared doxa around ideas related to the education system within Scotland, and how moral education was implemented in this context.

Finally, it has been recognised that there is a balance when conducting interviews in qualitative research between gaining information for the study as well as establishing the relationships with participants (Brewis, 2014; Yuan, 2014; Yin, 2003). Within the interview, it has been recognised that a power dynamic exists that may influence what interviewees actually say, compared to what they do in practice (Mulhall, 2002; Gillham, 2000). But Kaaristo (2022) also suggests that these power dynamics can be more obscure if the researcher has multiple positionalities, which is the case in the current study. As mentioned in section '*3.4.2. Case Selection*' the primary school was chosen based on the researchers' pre-existing relationships with the headteacher and colleagues. One strong benefit of the relationship between the researcher and participants was that rapport could be built quickly, and it has been suggested that this leads to rich and deep data being collected (Yuan, 2014; Taylor, 2011). Despite the benefits of pre-existing relationships, some scholars are also critical of this approach. Manderson et al. (2006) have suggested that when a researcher has personal relationships with the participants, this can blur the lines between the boundaries. In their study, Yuan (2014) shares that during the interviews with friends, they found it difficult to balance the discussion between the aims of the research and personal issues. In ethical terms, this can present challenges for the research, to keep the interviews on track as well as creating some boundaries between the interviewee and interviewer (Brewis, 2014; Yuan, 2014; Taylor, 2011). Overall, the pre-existing relationships within the current thesis have been greatly beneficial in understanding how moral education was implemented in the case study school.

3.5.2 Researcher Observations

Researcher observations can provide in-depth detail about the phenomenon being studied in relation to the context in which it is being studied (Weston et al., 2021; Hopkins, 2017; Creswell, 2009). The observations carried out observed how moral education was explicitly implemented through the Curriculum for Excellence. For the present thesis, observations of Religious and Moral Education lessons were chosen to understand the implementation of this curricular area. However, there

is an acknowledgement that moral education may have been implemented through other curricular areas, not observed in this study. Additionally, observations were used to understand how moral education was implicitly implemented in ways that may have been less evident in the interviews with primary school teachers and leaders.

As discussed in the above section on semi-structured interviews, it was highlighted that sometimes interviewees might say they act in a specific way that they believe the researcher is looking for. This is highlighted by Gillham (2000), who suggests that, at times, individuals may say one thing in their interview but do something different in practice. So, Mulhall (2002) suggests that "often the primary reason for using observational methods is to check whether what people say they do is the same as what they actually do" (p. 307). It is important to note, however, that interviewees may not intentionally leave out information, as classrooms are busy places and educators may take for granted the planning, implementation, and assessment process that they do across the curriculum every day (Patton, 2015). Additionally, in educational research, there may be cultural or social factors that can only be identified by observing the phenomenon in its natural setting (Hatch, 2023; Patton, 2015). Again, educators may not be aware of these social and cultural impacts when they are implementing moral education, and so may not be discussed during the semi-structured interviews. Therefore, observing how participants plan and implement moral education lessons can provide further insight into what practitioners do in their everyday practice.

A second way that the researcher's observations will be utilised is to "see things that may routinely escape awareness among the people in the setting" (Patton, 2015: 333). Moral education might be easier to observe when it is taught explicitly; however, the literature review highlighted that this curricular area is often taught or caught through a 'hidden curriculum' which is implicit and less recognisable (Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). Within the non-denominational school, there may be daily routines and activities that are familiar to those in the setting and have become second nature, which could be developing students' moral values. Whole-school assemblies and extra-curricular activities are only two examples of these types of routine within the primary school that educators may take for granted in their practice. By conducting non-intrusive observations of these activities and context, the researcher can gather

data on the implicit moral development without manipulating or stimulating the environment (Weston et al., 2021; Hopkins, 2017). Hence, the observations provided in-depth descriptions of the activities and culture within the case study school, which contribute to the implicit moral education curriculum, aspects that may not have been readily apparent to practitioners in their daily lives.

Even though a clear strength of researcher observations is that in-depth data can be gathered within the context of the phenomenon being studied (Morgan et al., 2017; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Kawulich, 2012), it has also been noted that there is a significant drawback to this method. Many scholars argue that observations are inherently subjective and shaped researchers' interpretation (Weston et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2017; Creswell, 2009). Wragg (2012) highlights this issue by arguing that "we often observe what we want to see" (p. vii), which reflects the extent to which researchers shape observations through making decisions regarding what to observe and how data is interpreted. One methodological challenge in the current thesis was that of 'backyard' research, defined by Creswell (2009) as "studying the researchers' own organisation, or friends, or immediate work setting" (p. 165). Since the researcher was familiar with the primary school setting, certain assumptions and interpretive filters may have influenced the classroom and school observations. Snounu (2021) acknowledges that observations within their own 'backyard' research occasionally challenged their personal beliefs and values. A further dilemma existed between the multiple identities of the researcher, particularly their dual role as both researcher and primary educator. Chong and Fox (2024) discuss that there can be tension during classroom observations as the researcher may also pick up on 'teacher' observations, such as behavioural issues within the classroom or an educator's organisational skills. Although such observations may not have been relevant to the study, separating these professional identities during fieldwork may be challenging. Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge that "there is also an important reflective component of field notes" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016: 151). Similar to the interview method, the researcher must reflect critically on how personal values, beliefs and assumptions may influence both data collection and analysis.

3.5.3 Document Analysis

In relation to documents within case study research, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define it "as an umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study" (p. 162). Collecting documents can be beneficial within a qualitative study as they are created by someone with thought and purpose, and they are a non-obtrusive way of gaining data from the context itself (Bowden, 2009; Creswell, 2009). Yet it has also been suggested that "document analysis has been an underused approach to qualitative research" (Morgan, 2022: 64), with literature on this method less common than interviews or observations (Tight, 2019; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Within the current thesis, document analysis was used to inform the researcher's observations of moral education lessons, the communication of moral values within the school, as well as its hidden moral curriculum.

An important aspect of this study was observing the moral education lessons, and educators had the opportunity to voluntarily provide their lesson plans to the researcher. It has been suggested that lesson plans guide teachers by identifying what skills or knowledge will be taught through specific learning objectives as well as the learning activities that will be used to cover the content of the lesson (Cai et al., 2007). Although lesson plans are a part of practitioners' daily lives, the researcher provided a basic form for the participants to outline the Experiences and Outcomes, Learning Intention and Success Criteria, and the resources for each lesson. As stated earlier in '*1.3. The Origins and Nature of Moral Education in Scotland*', Es and Os were created to 'help plan learning and to assess progress' (Education Scotland, 2017b). Learning Intentions and Success Criteria are often linked to the Es and Os to provide students with the learning that will take place in the lesson, and how they will know if they have been successful in their learning. Providing a template was for consistency purposes, as some educators shared that they had no planning process for moral education during their semi-structured interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that these are researcher-generated documents since they are prepared by the participants for the researcher to learn more about moral education implementation. They are not pre-existing documents that are readily available to the researcher before their data collection. The lesson plans were provided before the researcher's observations, which is beneficial as it could "compliment" (Bowden, 2009: 30) the

other data collection tools within the study. Identifying the main learning activities and skills enabled the researcher to focus their observations on the content of the moral education lessons, rather than other aspects within the classroom, like behaviour. Therefore, the purpose of the collated lesson plans was to provide more detail on how moral education was explicitly planned and implemented within the case study primary school, as complementary data to the lesson observations.

Documents can also be collected as a way to triangulate the data within a qualitative study which has been defined as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (Denzin, 2017: 48). Researchers can collect pre-existing documents which may provide insights into the underlying beliefs and values of these socially-constructed forms of knowledge (Hatch, 2023; Morgan, 2022; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Within the current thesis, pre-existing documents were collected from the case study school to understand how moral education or moral values were explained and promoted within the school. Issues around how moral education was prioritised throughout the school were also explored during the semi-structured interviews, so documents provided further detail to corroborate or contrast findings. Despite this, analysis on pre-existing documents can be a challenge as some scholars highlight that data on the specific research question may not exist, or not enough data can be collected to create a holistic picture of the phenomenon (Morgan, 2022; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). This raised issues around the selection of documents within the case study school. It has been suggested that the number of documents that will be collected cannot be determined before the research begins (Morgan, 2022; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), but Flick (2018) also mentions the purposive sampling approach to document analysis. In the current study, documents were collected using a 'snowballing' method similar to that used in systematic literature reviews, where an initial set was collected and used to identify other relevant documents (Wohlin, 2014). Initially, the School Improvement Plan was identified as it provided information about the school's curricular priorities for the year. A school's improvement plan outlines the ideas for change from multiple stakeholders, involving parents, pupils, teachers, and the management team. In this document, areas for improvement and goals for achieving these are identified, which becomes a continuous process of monitoring throughout the school year (Huizenga, 2025; Education Scotland, 2015a). Additionally, the school website

gave insight into the communication of values, their ethos, and behaviour management policies. But interviews with the participants also informed the researchers' knowledge around what documents to collect that could be important in understanding moral education implementation in the case study school. Hence, document analysis was an important aspect of this study to understand the key policies and communication of moral education within the case study primary school.

3.6 Validity and Trustworthiness

As mentioned in section '*3.4.2. Case Selection'*, the present thesis aligns with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) terminology of 'transferability' in relation to how the findings could be used to inform and develop future practice and research. But this is one aspect of the wider discussion around the validity and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Ahmed, 2024; Stahl and King, 2020; Forero et al., 2018). In their paper, Lincoln and Guba (1986) outline four criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each will be discussed in the section below in relation to the methods adopted in the current research.

3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility is understood as the researcher's ability to provide credible findings of the subject being researched (Ahmed, 2024; Stahl and King, 2020; Forero et al., 2018). One way in which to improve the credibility of the research was to adopt methods that could be triangulated to validate findings (Ahmed, 2024; Stahl and King, 2020). Using different methods of data collection could support the findings, as the downfalls of one approach could be met by the strengths of another. In the current thesis, section '*3.5. Data Collection Methods'* has outlined the three methods being used: semi-structured interviews, researcher observations, and document analysis. Despite this, Stake (1995) suggests researchers may try to find data for the sake of triangulation, and that the evidence may not actually hold much value or that researchers could be finding additional evidence purely to support their initial findings. So, the research questions were crucial in ensuring the data being collected was purposeful to provide more credible findings with different methods that provided various perspectives on the implementation of moral education.

Furthermore, it has been identified that prolonged engagement within the field can increase the credibility of qualitative research as a deeper rapport can be built with participants and saliences can be identified through observations (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Lincoln and Guba, 1986; 1985). For the present thesis, data collection occurred from March to June 2023. In the Scottish primary school context, this is equivalent to a full academic term, which Stahl and King (2020) identify as being "desirable" time for prolonged engagement (p. 27). During this time, the researcher was in the primary school every day, either conducting interviews and observations or collating relevant documents for analysis. Prolonged engagement was also beneficial as it gave insights into how moral education implementation changed over certain times of the year in terms of the religious celebrations calendar within the primary school, which may have been missed through a short time period. Therefore, the credibility of the current thesis was increased by engaging with the field and participants over four months to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how moral education was implemented in the case study primary school.

3.6.2 Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is defined as "the findings of a particular inquiry hav[ing] applicability in other contexts or with other subjects/participants" (p. 290). It has been highlighted that the researcher cannot know which sites these findings may be transferred to, and the importance of thick and detailed descriptions has been made by several scholars (Forero et al., 2018; Nowell et al., 2017; Lincoln and Guba, 1986; 1985). A particular feature of the current thesis was the positionality of the research in relation to the field being studied. Being a primary educator allowed the researcher to have an 'intimate insider' (Taylor, 2011) perspective where deep rapport existed with participants as well as a familiarity with the context. According to literature around 'backyard' research, conducting interviews and observations in a setting with which the researcher is familiar can result in data richer in detail and volume (Snounu, 2021). From the semi-structured interviews and researcher observations, the researcher was able to provide detailed and in-depth descriptions of the explicit and implicit approaches to moral education within the case study school. Hence, these thick descriptions could be used to evaluate how applicable the

findings are to similar contexts that could be explored by future researchers and increase this study's transferability.

3.6.3 Dependability

In terms of dependability, this has been described as the clarity around the research process, which should be logical, clear, and documented by the researcher (Ahmed, 2024). Providing these clear research processes can increase the likelihood that the study can be replicated in similar contexts or with similar participants (Forero et al., 2018). In the literature, one way of increasing a study's dependability is to provide clear audit trails which "provide readers with evidence of the decisions and choices made by the researcher regarding theoretical and methodological issues through the study" (Nowell et al., 2017: 3). In the current chapter, these decisions have been discussed in detail from the research paradigm to the process of analysis with clear rationales provided for the choices that have been made. Additionally, it has been recognised that reflexivity has to be a crucial aspect of these audit trails as these can highlight how the researcher's own ideas and values impact the decisions throughout the research process (Stahl and King, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017). In the present thesis, the researcher's own background was a driver in making choices around the data collection tools for understanding moral education in a non-denominational primary school.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1986) identify confirmability as contributing to a study's rigour, which is related to reducing the researcher's bias through reflexivity as well as peer debriefing. One idea that was discussed in '*3.5.1. Semi-Structured Interviews*' were Bourdieu's (1997) 'shared doxa' where there can be existing social structures within a collective group that naturally exist and are "taken for granted" (p. 165-166). This shared doxa could mean that certain beliefs or values are less prominent in comparison to a researcher from 'outside' this particular group (Bourdieu, 2004). So, reflexivity was a crucial aspect of the present thesis to recognise what impact these shared understandings have on the communication of the findings. It has been suggested that this can be achieved by ensuring that the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the study are increased (Ahmed, 2024; Nowell et al., 2017) as these aspects require the researcher to be transparent, logical, and reflective in their description of the research process.

Another way to mitigate the researcher's bias is through peer debriefing, which has been defined as "soliciting input from colleagues or experts to authenticate interpretations" (Ahmed, 2024: 2). As part of the PhD process, the researcher was required to have regular meetings with their supervisors, during which time the interpretations of the data were discussed in detail. Ahmed (2024) suggests that peer debriefing enables the researcher to be open to alternative perspectives as a way to reduce bias. During the supervisory meetings, the researcher was encouraged to reflect on different ideas and to reflect on their choices made during the analysis and findings stages of the research process. Therefore, the nature of the PhD programme encourages reflexivity and peer debriefing regularly, which has shaped the present thesis.

3.7 Analysis and Interpretation

In the present thesis, a thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, researcher observations, and documents collated from the case study primary school. But in the domain of thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2021) distinguish between different variations: coding reliability, codebook, and reflexive. In their paper, coding reliability is "often deductive in orientation, in the sense that themes are developed early on in, or even before analysis" (Braun and Clarke, 2021: 6). Codebook thematic analysis uses a coding framework where, again, codes can be developed early but new codes can also develop through engagement with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Whereas reflexive thematic analysis "is open and organic, with no use of any coding framework" and "themes should be the final 'outcome' of data coding" (Braun and Clarke, 2021: 6). According to Braun and Clarke (2021; 2019), many scholars do not distinguish between these terms and often view thematic analysis as one approach. Therefore, this section will outline the reflexive thematic analysis and how this was an iterative and inductive process.

3.7.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

In reflexive thematic analysis, reflexivity is an essential aspect, and it has been understood that "knowledge is never free of researcher influence, that our assumptions and choice *inevitably* shape the knowledge we create" (Braun et al., 2022: 22). In qualitative research, the aim is often to understand or explore a

phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have lived experiences (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2015; Gillham, 2000). But it is also discussed that the positionality of the researcher in qualitative studies is also important, as they are often the main research tool and are responsible for being the 'storyteller' of the data, which is shaped by their experiences and values (Braun et al., 2022; Richards, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis enables the researcher to reflect on how these values and beliefs influence their interpretations of the data and impact the development of themes (Karagiozis, 2018). Byrne (2022) goes further to suggest that no two researchers would produce the same codes or themes, based on their differences in beliefs and backgrounds. This means that there is no 'correct' or 'single' answer produced through reflexive thematic analysis; rather, it is believed that themes develop organically and evolve throughout the analysis process (Byrne, 2022). Therefore, the researcher continues to be a crucial tool in the analysis of the data collected, where it is recognised that their own background impacts the creation of knowledge with qualitative research.

In the present thesis, reflexive thematic analysis is a crucial aspect as the researcher, a present primary teacher, had an understanding and knowledge of the context which was being studied. One way of achieving this reflexivity is through the use of researcher notes or a journal during the data collection and analysis process (Pearson et al., 2025; Braun and Clarke, 2022). In the following section, the reflexive thematic analysis steps will be discussed, with acknowledgement of the researcher's positionality, expectations, and assumptions on the construction of codes and themes.

In conducting reflexive thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2022; 2021) explain that there are six stages of the process. These are familiarisation, coding, initial theme generation, reviewing and developing themes, refining, defining, and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). Familiarisation relates to the reading and re-reading of the data collected, where ideas begin to surface as the researcher gets into a state of immersion. In this process, the researcher participated in active listening, where they listened to the recording of the interview prior to transcription. There was immersion (Braun and Clarke, 2022), as this then moved to writing the transcripts, re-reading these, and continuously taking notes of the researcher's thoughts and feelings at this stage. At this stage, familiarisation then developed to what Braun and Clarke

(2022) describe as critical engagement, where the researcher asks deeper questions around the data. This was crucial across all the data strands, as it was important to reflect on what 'common sense' was being shared and the assumptions that were being made. One example of this relates to Bourdieu's (1997) shared doxa, as the researcher and interviewees shared similar language when discussing moral education, as all were educated through Scottish universities. So, a consistent note made on the interviewee transcripts was '*would this be similar in different contexts or with interviewees who had initial teacher training in different countries?*' Additionally, familiarisation with the researcher's observations and document analysis centred around what assumptions and knowledge were impacting the narrative being told. Since the data was gathered after the researcher engaged with the literature, through writing the literature review, notes were taken during this familiarisation stage that reflected on '*would I have understood this differently without having read [relevant literature]?*'. Therefore, the initial stages of thematic analysis are not value-neutral (Braun and Clarke, 2022), and it was essential to recognise the impact of the researcher's thoughts and feelings during the familiarisation with the data.

Coding is the process by which the researcher begins to note the areas of interest in their data with code labels (Pearson et al., 2025). These are then clustered into patterns with shared meaning to form initial themes to outline the core concepts in the data. At the beginning of this process, the researcher's confidence in coding the data was varied; they were more confident in coding the interview transcripts, as these were rich and detailed, whilst coding the observation and school documents was a new experience. In one excerpt of their journal, the researcher noted that '*coding is a daunting next step in the thematic analysis. Make sure to tell the story of the data, and not stray from this*'. This led to a semantic level of coding to begin with, where the researcher remained at the language used in the data strands, and typically stayed at the overt meanings of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). However, as the researcher gained more confidence in the coding stage, this analysis transitioned to latent codes, which are more implicit and conceptual in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). One technique useful in the creation of the initial codes was colour coding on paper copies of the data, as it helped the researcher visualise codes across the data strands and made the iterative process of revisiting the codes easier in later stages. Additionally, advice from Braun and Clarke (2022) highlights the

importance of revisiting the codes in different orders to disrupt the flow of the dataset and to avoid having an unevenly coded dataset. This was something the researcher noted in their journal, stating that '*looking at the data in reverse has allowed me to experience it with fresh eyes, and previously overlooked codes have been highlighted*'. This shows the researcher's progression in coding through an increase in their confidence to move from semantic to latent and finding approaches from the relevant literature that have aided in this development.

Creating, reviewing, and developing the themes requires the researcher to reflect on what story is being told by each and capture the meaningful patterns of the data. In this process, Byrne (2022) states that "the researcher must actively construe the relationship amongst the different codes and examine how this relationship may inform the narrative of a given theme" (p. 1403). To support the creation of the initial themes, the researcher had the research aims and questions physically in front of them for reference. At this stage, the researcher printed out the existing codes, in different colours of text, and started to group these into initial themes. During this process, the researcher noted in their journal that '*there are currently too many themes, some with shared ideas that could be combined*' and that '*some of the codes from the previous stage are not included in the initial themes but are important points*'. These were concerns discussed during supervisory meetings throughout the analysis process, as the researcher grappled with refining and defining the themes. It was helpful, at this point, to use visual mapping to capture the relationship between themes and the potential sub-themes within each (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This iterative process resulted in some of the initial themes being omitted or reworded, but it shows the researcher's development in understanding the codes and themes of the dataset.

Next, the researcher begins to name the themes based on the story which it tells, and a short description of each can be written up. At this stage, Braun and Clarke (2022) warn that using long names for themes can suggest that the researcher has created a topic summary instead. Byrne (2022) states that theme names should be memorable and engaging for the reader. Creating the theme names was challenging as the researcher noted that '*my theme names seem to narrow to capture the contradicting data, e.g., Time for Moral Education does not reflect the complexities of the theme. At the same time, it has to be clear and concise*.' Braun and Clarke (2022) advise using a short extract for themes as a naming

technique, which, on reflection, the researcher could have used to make the names more memorable. Additionally, writing short summaries of each theme was helpful for the researcher in creating the theme names and solidifying an understanding of the relationship of the codes within and between each theme. It was also important for the researcher to understand the influence of the existing literature on the naming and definition of their themes. In one journal entry, they stated that '*it is important that the themes also relate to the main ideas discussed in the literature review to allow flow for the reader*'. This highlights the impact of the researcher's existing knowledge and expectations at this stage of the data analysis, as there was an understanding of what had been previously written that the researcher could not detach themselves from.

The sixth stage relates to the writing up of the themes, where analysis is used to tell the story of each theme with connections to existing knowledge. In this final stage, changes were made in how the themes were presented in the present thesis. For example, although both the interviews and researcher observations explored the 'Explicit Planning and Implementation of Moral Education' and 'Implicit Implementation of Moral Education', they had done so in unique ways that had to be discussed separately. Initially, the researcher had written up the themes with the same names in one chapter and combined the codes from each data strand. But in their reflexive journal, it was noted that '*the flow of the analysis does not seem right. The writing is too heavy, and the codes from each data strand are so different that it feels as though the chapter is jumping from one idea to another*'. Following several supervisor meetings where the discussion centred around this issue, the researcher chose to divide the data sets into two different chapters. Furthermore, it was also decided that the findings and analysis would be presented as separate chapters in the present thesis, as this allowed for a descriptive narrative of each theme to be provided before analysing against the existing literature and policies (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Overall, the six steps of the reflexive thematic analysis of the present data set shows that the researcher has understood how their expectations, assumptions, and positionality have influenced the decisions made in coding, theming, and writing up the analysis.

3.7.2 Inductive and Iterative Process

Within this study, data were inductively analysed from semi-structured interviews, researcher observations, and documents collated from the school

relating to moral education. Within the literature, it has been discussed that there are broad types of analysis: inductive, deductive and the inductive-deductive hybrid (Proudfoot, 2023; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Deductive analysis is described as 'top-down', meaning that codes are developed based on a pre-determined theoretical framework or codebook (Byrne, 2022). Whereas inductive analysis, more often aligned with constructivism, is described as 'bottom-up' where codes are developed solely on the content of the data (Proudfoot, 2023; Byrne, 2022). In one paper, Proudfoot (2023) suggests that a completely inductive analysis within research would not be possible, as the researcher brings with them their preconceptions and knowledge around the data. Braun and Clarke (2022) address this concern by explaining that one approach tends to dominate over the other, which then drives the analysis process. Within the present thesis, an inductive thematic analysis was employed as the development of codes and themes was based on the content of the data itself rather than predetermining any frameworks to apply to the data.

It has been recognised that the six-stage process almost seems linear as it is often presented in a list form with steps one through six discussed in detail one after another (Byrne, 2022). However, Byrne (2022) states that "the analysis is not a linear process… the analysis is recursive and iterative, requiring the research to move back and forth through the phases as necessary" (p. 1398). During the data collection process, there was a simultaneous collection over the four-month period rather than conducting each method in separate stages. This meant that the researcher was collecting, transcribing, and familiarising with the data at one time. The iterative process of thematic analysis was present throughout the six-stage approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). The researcher created Figure 1 (below) to illustrate the iterative process of thematic analysis of the data, based on the steps described by Braun and Clarke (2021).

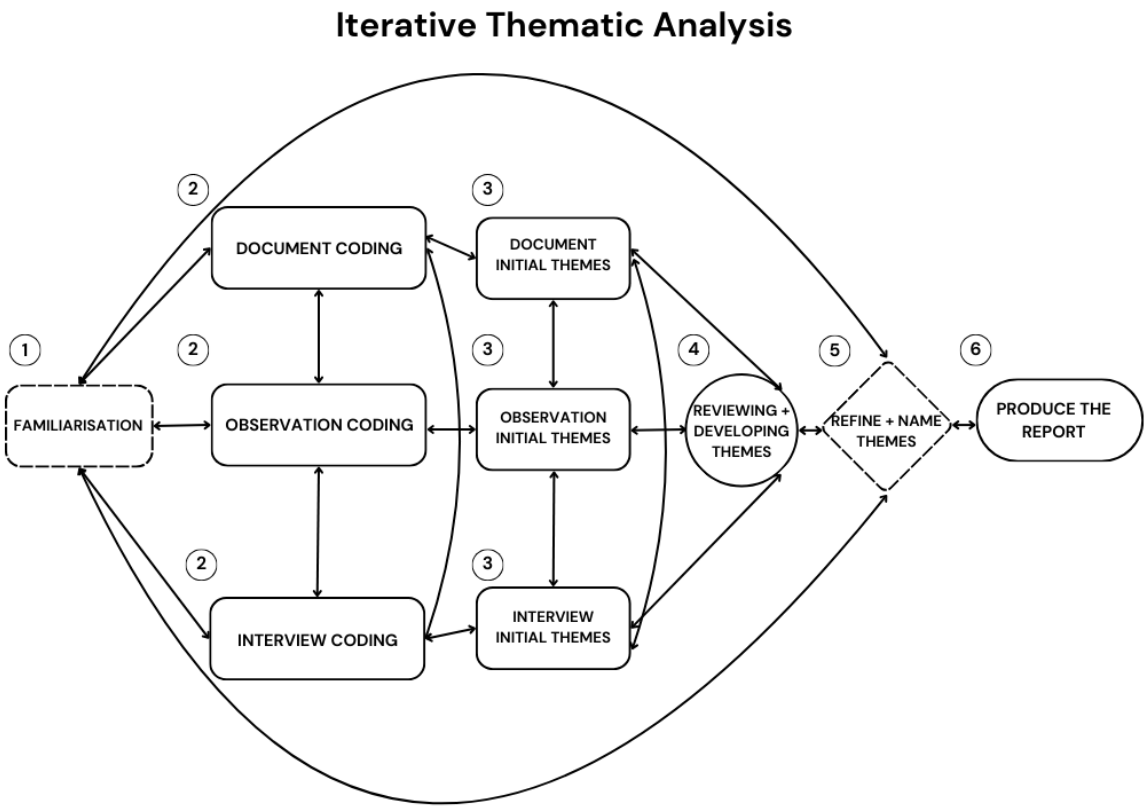

Figure 1 Iterative Process

The iterative coding process is when "coding is not only done once for each document/transcript but is refined on the basis of comparisons between documents/transcripts and then repeated" (Vears and Gillam, 2022: 113). The coding of each data strand was iterative in itself, as the further the researcher got into the interview transcripts or observational notes, the more areas of interest were identified that may have been less apparent in the first round of coding (Vears and Gillam, 2022; Morgan and Nica, 2020). Additionally, the iterative process was also across the data strands as the researcher then started to compare the interview transcripts, observational notes, and collected documents. After this, initial themes could be developed for each of the three data strands, and then related across these. At this point, the initial themes were quite messy with lots of codes as well as conflicting and complementary themes across the data strands, which is normal at this stage (Byrne, 2022; Vears and Gillam, 2022; Morgan and Nica, 2020). So, the refinement of these themes meant that the researcher had to go back to the coding and initial theme stages to ensure that the 'story' being told had not departed from the data, that it was clear and that the interpretations were meaningful (Braun et al., 2022; Vears and Gillam,

2022). Defining and naming the themes required the researcher to return to the familiarisation and coding stages, as this meant that more specific quotations could be used to illustrate the themes, and to create small descriptions of each theme (Braun et al., 2022; Campbell et al., 2021). In the final stage, producing the report, the researcher needed to return to these short descriptions and mind maps to ensure the full story of each theme was captured in the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Vears and Gillam, 2022). Even in the final stages, it was important to reflect on the raw data, to ensure that the voices of the participants involved in the present thesis were being heard (Proudfoot, 2023; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Overall, the full thematic analysis process was iterative as it involved numerous moments where the researcher re-familiarised themselves with the data, and constantly refined the codes and themes to produce the final report of these findings.

3.8 Pilot Study

3.8.1 Purpose

Scholars have suggested that pilot studies are a crucial component of qualitative studies as they allow the researcher to practice and refine the methods adopted, which improves the rigour of the research (Shakir and Rahman, 2022; Malmqvist et al., 2019; Thabane et al., 2010). But it has also been discussed that guidelines on how to conduct pilot studies have been underrepresented in the academic literature (Aziz and Khan, 2020). In their paper, Malmqvist et al. (2019) highlight that pilot studies are often used for two reasons: to assess the feasibility of the study or to try particular research instruments. The current thesis has outlined in section '*3.4.2. Case Selection*' that the case study primary school was selected through the existing connections between the researcher and the headteacher, so feasibility was not a factor. Therefore, the main purpose of conducting the pilot study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the semi-structured interview schedule and the researcher observation proforma.

In the academic literature, scholars discuss how pilot studies can be useful in practising and refining the data collection tools that will be implemented in the main study (Aziz and Khan, 2020; Malmqvist et al., 2019; Thabane et al., 2010). Before the data collection, the researcher had formulated questions for the semi-structured interviews as well as observation proformas for the moral education

lessons and school environment. To conduct the pilot study, one participant was selected to practice the interview schedule and one educator from the middle stage of the school was selected to evaluate the lesson observation proforma. From this, several areas were addressed in the pilot study:

- Ensure the interview questions are clear enough for the participants.
- The sequence of the questions allows the conversation to flow.
- The timing of the interview and lesson observation is appropriate.
- The lesson observation proforma captures the relevant data.
- Assess the researcher's skills in the interviews and observations

The reflections on each of these points will be discussed in further detail in the following section, and how this impacted the main data collection process.

3.8.2 Reflections and Implications

From the pilot study phase, there were some key reflections and refinements made before data collection. Similar to other scholars, conducting a pilot phase was beneficial for the present thesis as it provided a space to reflect on research tools and how these are implemented by the researcher (Malmqvist et al., 2019; Thabane et al., 2010). The first area being addressed related to the clarity of the researcher's questions for the participants, which could include the terms or phrases being used (Shakir and Rahman, 2022; Aziz and Khan, 2020). Very few modifications were made here, as the researcher's background in primary education and moral education gave prior knowledge of the particular terminology the educators would be familiar with. Secondly, the sequence of the questions allowed the conversation to flow from one area to the other. The way the researcher had sectioned the questions into certain categories meant that one area discussing moral education implementation led into the next. In these areas, the pilot study gave the researcher confidence in their interview schedule as few refinements were needed.

Despite this, there were areas that did require improvements or modifications, which became clear through the pilot phase. For example, there was an aspect around the timing of the interview and lesson observation, and there were some changes made here. One challenge highlighted by Shakir and Rahman (2022) was

around the duration of interviews, where they highlighted that by going off topic or repeating certain topics, they felt there was too much time wasted. However, the pilot interview in the present thesis revealed that the timing was too short, only lasting around half an hour. This enabled the researcher to reflect on why the interview did not last as long as expected, and how this could be improved through their questioning techniques. Additionally, a further area to be explored was around the effectiveness of the lesson observation proforma. Again, this is discussed by Shakir and Rahman (2022), who stated that their pilot phase refined their ability to take field notes. This was the case in the current study, as the researcher has been used to observing lessons from an educator's perspective, noting aspects like behavioural techniques. The pilot study allowed the refinement of the field notes that were taken, as the focus was on moral education implementation, and other details that are not relevant did not have to be noted.

During the semi-structured interview, the researcher reflected on their ability to use the follow-up questions to keep the conversation flowing with the interviewee and to be flexible when other unexpected topics were brought up that may be worth exploring through the interview. Additionally, during the lesson observation, the researcher felt "overwhelmed by both extremes: what to note down and everything to note down" (Shakir and Rahman, 2022: 1623). But conducting the pilot lesson observation, this could be refined to focus the future observations on certain elements of the lesson, rather than noting everything that was happening in the classroom. Therefore, reflection was crucial during the pilot phase as there were certain areas where the researcher's skills could be improved to increase the effectiveness of the data collection tools.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

To further understand the implementation of moral education in a non-denominational, primary school in Scotland, this thesis adopted an in-depth case study based on qualitative methods. This method of research is highly dependent on human participants, where there are ethical concerns that must be considered before, during, and after data collection and analysis. Before conducting the research, the researcher applied for ethical approval from the University of Glasgow (Appendix 1) and used the British Educational Research Association (2024) guidelines.

3.9.1 Participant Consent and Right to Withdraw

One of the first steps in the data collection was to ensure that "all potential participants understand, as well as they can, what is involved in a study" (BERA, 2024: 19). It was essential that the participants were informed on why the research is important, what they would be asked to do, what information would be collected and how it would be reported (Arifin, 2018). In the present thesis, participants were informed by being provided with information sheets which outlined these different aspects of the research. Information sheets were given to all members of the teaching staff within the school, even those who chose not to volunteer, as they were part of the community that was being researched, and the findings may be of interest to them. An information sheet was made available to members of staff through the staff room, where the information was easily accessible.

Another crucial aspect was to gain written consent from the participants who were volunteering, and since the participants in this study were over eighteen years of age, they provided written consent for themselves. However, it was important that those who wished to volunteer to participate in the study were approached by the researcher individually. An individual meeting between the participant and researcher allowed the participant to discuss the research, ask questions, and address any concerns before data collection began (Arifin, 2018). A consent form was provided for participants, who gave their written signature to indicate that they would like to take part in the research activities. The individuals in this study could choose to participate in the semi-structured interview, lesson observation, and/or provide their lesson plans for moral education, but they did not need to take part in all activities; each required consent to take part.

Before data collection began, and throughout the research, participants were reminded of the right to withdraw from the study at any time, even after providing consent (BERA, 2024; Arifin, 2018). All participants had the right to withdraw at any stage of the study without a reason. It was crucial that throughout the study, the researcher informed participants of this right, and at the start of each interview or observation, the participant was asked if they would like to continue with consent. It was also important that all participants could contact the researcher if they wished to withdraw at any stage, and each had the researcher's contact details.

3.9.2 Participant Confidentiality

In the BERA ethical guidelines (2024), it states that "researchers should recognise the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy" (p. 22). Since this case study was focused on one primary school, it was important to ensure the school remained anonymous so that it could not be identified by readers. The school was not named in the notes of the final report of the study, and any distinguishing features of the school are not mentioned. Additionally, conducting a case study on a small scale means "it may be impossible to prevent some members of that community becoming aware… of some details about the research" (BERA, 2024: 22). Within the case study, all members of the community knew each other well, which made it difficult to ensure that participants remained anonymous within this context. This was made clear to participants in the Plain Language Statement as well as on the Consent Form. Despite this, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured in the data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings by the researcher. When writing field notes, the researcher used pseudonyms to keep participants' identities concealed. The pseudonyms were generated randomly so that they could not be traced back to the participants in any way, but the researcher remained aware of these identifications.

When handling the data for participants, any documents that contained information related to their identification were kept locked in a safe place. This included the consent forms that stated their names and signatures. Other than these documents, all other notes and transcriptions used the pseudonyms that were given to the participants at the beginning of the study. All electronic data was kept on the University of Glasgow's OneDrive system that was only accessed by the researcher and supervisors; all written notes were kept locked in the researcher's home office.

3.9.3 Dissemination of Findings

A final ethical consideration related to the BERA (2024) guidelines around responsibilities for publication and dissemination. In this section, it states that: 8

> "researchers must not bring research into disrepute by in any way falsifying, distorting, suppressing, selectively reporting or sensationalising their research evidence or findings" (BERA, 2024: 31).

Within the current thesis, the researcher had drawn upon existing relationships with colleagues in the primary school being studied. It has been discussed by Taylor (2011) that collecting data from participants who are "friends" can create a "grey area" ethically (p. 14). In their study, they state that "friends are more likely to divulge more to you, forgetting that you are recording and may potentially publish what they are saying" (Taylor, 2011: 14). This point is further explored by Brewis (2014) who expresses that whilst these deeper relationships provide excellent data, there can be dilemmas between privacy and research. These papers highlight the role of the researcher in these situations and the ethical considerations when conducting research in a familiar setting with familiar participants. Within the present thesis, no personal confidential information was shared between the interviewees and the interviewer, so this sense of conflict in sharing private data was not present. However, the educators were asked about the implementation of moral education and gave very honest insights into the particular weaknesses around this curricular area from their own school, local authority, and national levels. A crucial aspect was being transparent and clear with the interviewees, by explaining how the data shared is going to be used and communicated by the researcher (Brewis, 2014; Taylor, 2011). Therefore, the information sheet and gaining written consent from the interviewees were essential, as well as ensuring that, during the interviews, the participants were comfortable with what information they were sharing.

3.10 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has outlined the methodological considerations for the current study and the data collection tools that were used. The first section outlined the main research question and sub-questions that will aim to be answered through an in-depth, single case study. The research paradigm adopted within the current thesis was interpretivism, which emphasised the role of experiences in the shaping of knowledge, the role of language and interactions with others in our understandings, as well as highlighting the importance of naturalistic inquiry (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017; Scotland, 2012). This was essential when studying the implementation of moral education in primary schools, as each

individual brought their knowledge, experiences, and beliefs to the curricular area, which is also impacted by the Curriculum for Excellence documents. Additionally, the role of language, interactions and interpretation was key for developing a better understanding of this phenomenon being studied. Therefore, the interpretative approach was an appropriate way to answer the research questions, which aim to study the implicit and explicit implementation of moral education.

The following sections then discussed the research design of the study with reference to the case study and data collection tools. This single-case study was context-dependent, used multiple data collection tools for triangulation, and recognised that generalisability is a challenge for this method (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2003). The next section of this chapter also provides a discussion around the three data collection tools that were used in this study: semi-structured interviews, researcher observations, and document analysis. These three tools were used to make the findings stronger and more reliable as they identified areas where the information corroborated with one another (Denzin, 1978). The purpose of this in-depth case study was to provide the reader with in-depth and detailed information about the implementation of moral education from different perspectives, instead of attempting to make generalisations.

Validity and trustworthiness in the present thesis can be increased through four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Forero et al., 2018; Lincoln and Guba, 1986). Credibility refers to the researcher's ability to provide accurate and true findings of the reality being researched, which can be increased through triangulation of data within a study (Ahmed, 2024; Stahl and King, 2020). Three data collection tools were used in the current study, and the results of these will be compared to strengthen the credibility of the findings. In terms of transferability, this is the ability to provide in-depth descriptions so that the study can be replicated in similar contexts or settings (Lincoln and Guba, 1986). Rather than aiming to generalise the results, the findings can be used in other non-denominational primary schools by future researchers to further understand moral education implementation in Scotland. To improve the dependability, the study should be logical, clear, and documented by the researcher (Nowell et al., 2017; Lincoln and Guba, 1986), and this study has outlined in detail the steps of the research process. Finally, the confirmability of

a study aims to reduce the researcher's bias through reflexivity (Ahmed, 2024), which has been a crucial aspect of the present thesis since there was a 'shared doxa' (Bourdieu, 2004) between the researcher and the participants.

The data was inductively analysed through reflexive thematic analysis where the process "is open and organic, with no use of any coding framework" and "themes should be the final 'outcome' of data coding" (Braun and Clarke, 2021: 6). The three data strands were analysed using the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021) which were discussed in section '*3.7. Analysis and Interpretation*'. Despite this approach often seeming like a linear process (Byrne, 2022), the thematic analysis in the present thesis was iterative as the researcher moved between the stages at various points of the data analysis (Vears and Gillam, 2022). Through an inductive and iterative approach, the researcher developed themes from the data itself rather than from pre-existing codebooks to provide a voice to the participants in their own experiences of moral education implementation.

Furthermore, conducting a pilot study can increase the main study's reliability and validity as this allows the researcher to trial the data collection methods, reflect on their ability to answer the research question, and to refine these methods for effectiveness and accuracy (Shakir and Rahman, 2022; Aziz and Khan, 2020; Malmqvist et al., 2019; Thabane et al., 2010). From the pilot phase, the researcher was able to modify their own skills during the interviews and observations to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of these methods. Therefore, conducting a pilot study before the main data collection was a significantly beneficial process.

In the final section, the ethical considerations for the current thesis were outlined, as this study is highly dependent on human participants and involves collecting information based on their experiences. The three main issues discussed were the participant's right to withdraw, participant confidentiality, and the dissemination of the findings. The guidelines provided by the University of Glasgow and BERA (2024) were followed in relation to these ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 : Semi-Structured Interview Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the main purpose is to present the research themes from the semi-structured interviewees. Each of the participants presents their own ideas around the implicit and explicit implementation of moral education. Their discussions are based on their own experiences and knowledge of moral education, and their responses provide a rich description of how this subject is implemented in the case study school.

In line with the interpretivist paradigm in this thesis, the semi-structured interviews provide an insight into the implementation of moral education from multiple perspectives. From the discussions, it became clear that the participants have gained various levels of knowledge around this area because of their different backgrounds, experiences, and professional development opportunities. Additionally, although there were very individual perspectives discussed by the interviewees, there were also experiences that the participants shared, which are important to outline in this section.

4.2 Main Themes

The first main theme identified has been named as 'Educators' Definitions and Understanding of Moral Education' to capture how practitioners use the terminology outlined in Curriculum for Excellence, as well as the Continuing Professional Development opportunities which might enhance their understanding of what moral education is. 'The School's Moral Values' explores how the case study primary school created and communicates its shared values both implicitly and explicitly. Ideas relating to the planning process educators have for moral education are discussed in the third theme, 'Explicit Planning and Implementation of Moral Education'. The final theme, 'Implicit Implementation of Moral Education' discusses the school's extra-curricular activities, classroom environment, and school policies.

4.3 Educators' Definitions and Understanding of Moral Education

The overarching title of this theme, 'Educators' Definition and Understanding of Moral Education', aims to give a further discussion into how the participants

understand the terminology being used in the Curriculum for Excellence. Figure 2 shows that there are four sub-themes that will be explored to recognise the complex ideas around the definitions of moral education and its development within primary schools. It is also important to highlight that no two definitions given by the interviewees were the same, so it is crucial to identify the different aspects that were discussed.

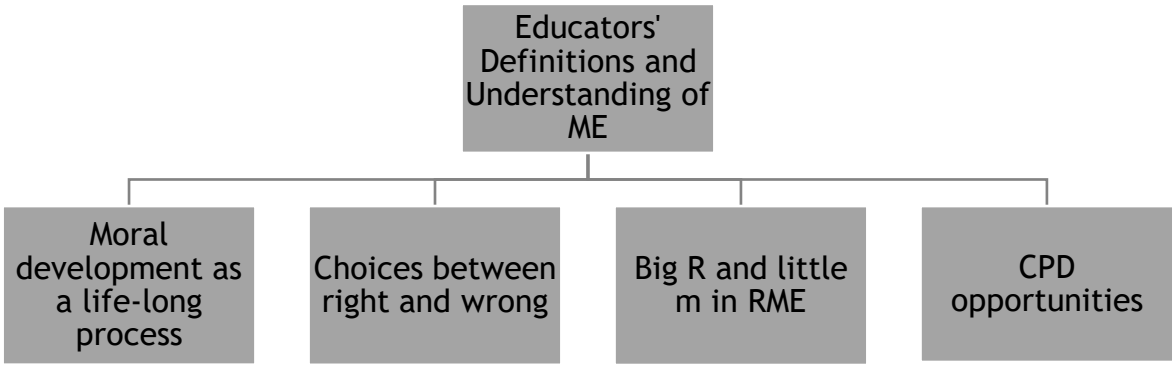

Figure 2 Educators' Definitions of ME

4.3.1 Moral Development as a Life-Long Process

One thing that was consistent across most of the participants' discussions was that moral development begins at birth and is a process that continues throughout life, never really ending. One interviewee highlighted that moral development is a life-long process where your values are continuously being challenged and refined:

> *'It starts from birth and doesn't really finish because, I suppose, everything you do really links into your values'* (Interviewee A).

It was also discussed that there is never really a time when your moral values are set and unchangeable. One interviewee shared their own personal view on their moral development:

> *'I've got to the ripe old age of [age removed] and I am still learning and trying to be a better person. You are always learning, always adapting… I think the minute you stop trying to be a better person, then there's no point. It underpins the human race'* (Interviewee C).

These perspectives from educators are important, in the educational sense, as it means that students are continuously developing their morality, so the primary school is significant in this process. Additionally, it also suggests that the educators in the school are not set in their own moral values; they are also still developing and learning and defining their own morality.

Another aspect that came from the interviews was how important the role of the family and the home was in the initial development of moral values. Some of the participants recognised that moral education does not begin formally in education systems; there is an influence from the home and from the main caregivers of pupils.

> *'Children pick up so much just from being in the household; it can be their parents' views; it can be a view of a friend's parent. So, we really need to be… and obviously, kids can't, they're not just born with those moral values, so they have to be taught'* (Interviewee G).

Interestingly, this interviewee states that not only can parents have an impact on a student's moral development, but so can those who are usually around them, like family friends, grandparents, and other children. By saying '*children pick up so much'* also suggests that moral values are not always taught but can be 'caught' by being around certain people who hold particular views. Usually, the participants discussed that the home could develop positive values such as kindness and respect; however, some highlighted that not all students are receiving positive messages from the adults around them.

> *'Yep, like racist beliefs or, at the moment, sexism is rising. Misogyny. Andrew Tate… she was telling me that a boy in her class thinks he's a hero, but his dad thinks he's a hero'* (Interviewee F).

The above quote emphasises that children are influenced by their parents' beliefs and values, but when these are based on negative behaviours such as racism and misogyny, then this creates a tension between the values developed at home and in school. Of those who highlighted this point, they also discussed that school should be a place where those kinds of values could be challenged in a respectful and nurturing way. This suggests that education can be significant in the moral development of students.

4.3.2 Morality and the Choice Between Right and Wrong

Another way of understanding moral education, which came from the participants, was the idea that morality is about the choice between right and wrong. Some of the interviewees spoke about helping students choose between right and wrong when given moral decisions, or to develop the skills of making the 'right' choices. This is highlighted by the following interaction:

> *'Interviewer: Yeah, definitely. In terms then of moral education as the curricular area, how would you describe it in your own words?*
>
> *Interviewee F: Erm, I think moral education is examining kind of scenarios, if you like, and these can be scenarios that come up in the classroom day and daily with doing the right thing: what's the right thing in that scenario?'* (Interviewee F).

This idea of choosing between right and wrong was discussed by most of the interviewees, who thought moral education was about allowing students to choose what would be the 'right' thing to do in different scenarios. However, it was interesting that some interviewees also recognised that 'right' and 'wrong' decisions are not always clear. They highlighted that these choices are complex and that students should be able to explore a range of different perspectives and opinions:

> '*But it is about, I suppose, trying to teach kids right from wrong and all the grey areas in between; how wrong can sometimes be a bit right or right can be a bit… you know'* (Interviewee D).

This quote highlights the idea that there are '*grey areas*' between what is right and wrong, where decisions in moral situations are not always clear. There is a recognition that these '*grey areas*' mean that a decision may be right to one person or in one scenario, but that there are various versions of right and wrong for individuals and situations. It was highlighted that it is important for students to explore different moral perspectives in primary school classrooms, to give learners the opportunities to discuss these ideas with their peers and teacher.

4.3.3 Big R and little m in Religious and Moral Education

One of the most important sub-themes from the semi-structured interviews was this idea that there was a Big R and little m when it comes to the curricular area RME. The creation of this sub-theme was influenced by the researcher's existing knowledge of the literature, specifically in the Scottish context, which has suggested a focus on Religious Education over Moral Education. What is meant by this is that the majority of the interviewees discussed or explicitly referred to moral education as religious education. The following quote encompasses this theme well:

> '*I think it's because it's called RE, religious education, in primary schools. But I don't actually think it is called that anymore. I'm not even sure'* (Interviewee B).

This interviewee expresses that they believe the curricular area is known as religious education in primary schools, even though its official name in the Curriculum for Excellence documents is religious and moral education (Scottish Education, 2011). This was common across the discussion, as most of the participants would use the language 'RE' or 'religious education' even though the questions were specifically about moral education. It was clear that there is a real lack of distinction between the religious and moral aspects of RME for the participants interviewed.

> *'I think maybe there's too much pressure on everything else that we've got to do, and teaching about a religion that doesn't relate to us day-to-day is probably not high in people's priority list'* (Interviewee D).

Another issue, highlighted by the above quote, is that the incorrect terminology impacts how educators view the relevance and priority of the curricular area in their own explicit implementation of the subject. Interestingly, this interviewee uses language like '*teaching about a religion that doesn't relate to us day-to-day*', which is significant as it shows that they believe that students are taught about religions, giving an insight into the pedagogies implemented in this area. But they also believe that these religious views are not relevant to students' day-to-day lives. Other participants pick up on this idea that they only teach 'RE' when

it comes to specific times of the year or for the class they have, but this theme will be discussed further in section '*4.5.3 A Focus on Festivals'*.

Yet, this was a contrast when participants were asked about how important moral education is for students in today's society, with one educator stating that:

> '*I think it should be the foundation of everything that we teach*' (Interviewee B).

A further classroom educator shares a similar perspective when explaining how important they believed moral education to be:

> *'Interviewee C: Extremely important. Crucial.*
>
> *Interviewer: Why?*
>
> *Interviewee C: Because it underpins. Without it, we can't succeed'* (Interviewee C)

These quotations differ from the beliefs shared about how relevant the participants felt Religious Education is to students' lives, and society in general. It highlights that moral education is not 'little' in the minds of some educators, with their comments about it being '*crucial*' and a '*foundation*. Yet, the discussions primarily focused on educators' implementation of RE during the interviews, highlighting the impact of the overlaps in terminology within this curricular area.

4.3.4 Continuing Professional Development in Moral Education

Continuing Professional Development opportunities are important in educators' understanding and definitions of moral education, as educators may learn something new, build on existing knowledge or be updated on new theories. Within the Scottish education system, continuing professional development for educators has been recognised as having an impact on the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence; it increases the sharing of ideas amongst practitioners and can lead to more varied pedagogies across the curriculum (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2009). But, as a primary teacher, the researcher was aware that training in RME was not discussed in staff rooms or commonly shared amongst colleagues, which influenced the analysis of the data around this sub-theme.

During the interviews, all participants stated that they had not undertaken explicit training for moral education. The extent of the lack of training was highlighted by one interviewee:

> '*We're not offered any training on it. So, I have had no training in my twenty-seven years of teaching on RE and moral education*' (Interviewee B).

The above quote highlights that there is a huge gap in the training of moral education. The fact that this participant states that they have not had training in twenty-seven years also shows that this challenge is not new: it has existed over decades. The lack of training can have an impact on teachers' knowledge, understanding, and even confidence in implementing moral education. Contrastingly, all participants stated that the training for Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing was well communicated to them and that they regularly undertake this type of development. This relates to the previous section, which highlights that moral education is not prioritised in the training aspect either and emphasises how this impacts the implementation of moral education.

A further point made by several interviewees related to their initial teacher education courses and the moral education input that was provided. One participant discussed the moral education input they received at their university during the pandemic:

> '*Interviewer: Did you get much input?*
>
> *Interviewee E: Well, that was actually cancelled. Sort of uni was very turbulent because, I mean, it was still online. I think our… it was scheduled and then it was eventually just never followed up, which is a shame… some things you are only doing, you know, one lesson on how to teach this which, it is not enough.*
>
> *Interviewer: So, you didn't have any input in the curricular area RME?*
>
> *Interviewee E: No'* (Interviewee E).

The above discussion highlights that this educator did not receive any input on the implementation of moral education due to the one class on the curricular area being cancelled and not being rescheduled. As the interviewee also highlights,

having only one input in this curricular area is 'not enough' to implement moral education in an effective way. Some interviewees discussed that they could not remember their initial teacher education input for moral education either because they completed their formal education a long time ago or because there was a limited number of inputs for RME in their course. Again, this shows that there is a gap in the training at the initial phase for moral education and with the lack of continuing professional development opportunities in this area for educators, it could lead to challenges in the explicit implementation of the curricular area.

Despite this, one area that came from the discussions around development opportunities with all of the interviewees is that there may be implicit moral education training through other curricular areas. This is highlighted by one participant who states that:

> '*There's no real... there's no training that says RME, but I think, yeah, implicitly, if you were to make something of it. I think it's fair to say, though, that's there whether it's portrayed or not, I think it is still there*' (Interviewee E).

This quote discusses that there is '*no real*' moral education training for primary school educators, where opportunities are explicitly linked to the curricular name of Religious and Moral Education. But they do highlight that there may be implicit moral issues being explored implicitly through other training areas, even if it is not being portrayed clearly. Additionally, one member of the Senior Management Team explained that moral issues may be implicit through third sector opportunities:

> *'There is a lot of work that comes from third sector charities; how they look at refugees and how we support them within our curriculum, how they are supported in the pedagogical approaches that we have and how we approach them in the culture of the school'* (Interviewee A).

This suggests that implicit moral education training may be explored through other curricular areas and is provided by other sources, rather than just the Glasgow City Council. Issues such as refugee education and racial equality are significant in primary education in the current context; training on these areas could, very likely, discuss moral values like inclusiveness, kindness, and respect. Therefore,

although there may be little training that is explicitly related to the implementation and planning of moral education, the implicit development of values could be found in training opportunities within other educational areas.

4.4 The School's Moral Values

This next theme provides a fuller understanding of the moral values that underpin the school's ethos and culture. According to the *How Good Is Our School?* an inspection document, creating a shared set of values in the school community, is evidence of "effective leadership" (Education Scotland, 2015a: 24). The school's values are also a potential aspect in creating a shared culture across the school community that includes students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Figure 3 below outlines that the main theme is split into three sub-themes. This section will discuss participants' views on the school's values, the process of how they were created, and how they are communicated within the school community.

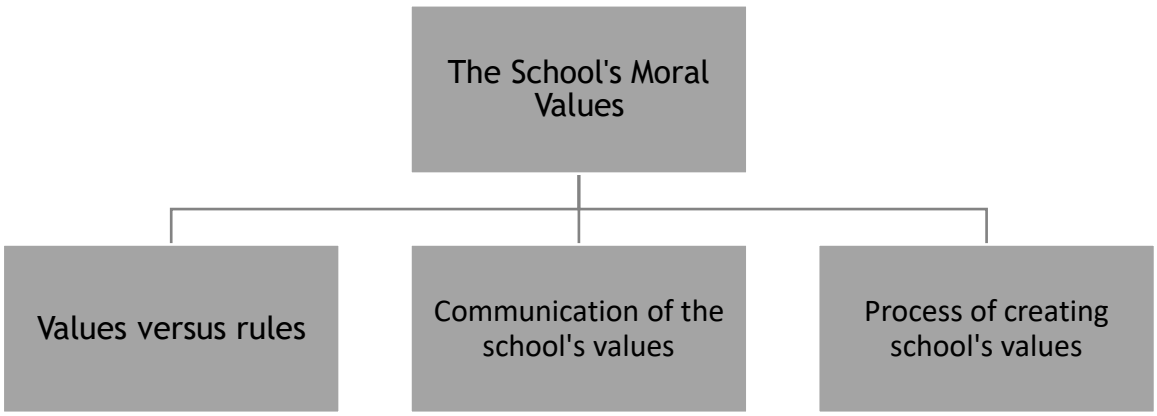

Figure 3 The School's Moral Values

4.4.1 School Values Versus School Rules

Across almost all semi-structured interviews, the participants described confusion between the school's values and rules. In this case study school, there were five moral values that underpinned the learning and ethos. However, there were also three school rules taken from Pivotal Education, which have become popular in

Glasgow City Council schools: 'ready, respectful, safe'. One interviewee highlighted the confusion between these different aspects:

> '*Me and [another teacher] were talking about that at the very beginning of the year because we were trying to put the values on the wall, but we were unsure if it was ready, respectful, safe or the other five'* (Interviewee E).

This quote emphasises that the staff are unclear about the difference between the school's values and rules, and this is causing challenges when it comes to classroom displays and charters. The fact that one of the school rules is being 'respectful', which is also one of the school's values, could be adding to this confusion. Furthermore, another interviewee explains that the school values are less spoken about, which may be leading to this mix-up in the understanding:

> *'Interviewee G: I think safe gets mentioned a lot, but it's not really a school value, is it? It's more the sort of… you've got safety…*
>
> *Interviewer: Erm, ready, respectful, safe: the behaviour one?*
>
> *Interviewee G: Yeah, the ready, respectful, safe thing. The behaviour one is more mentioned, I'd say, which maybe speaks in and of itself'* (Interviewee G).

The behaviour policy seems to be discussed more often than the school values, according to almost all the participants. Interviewee G, above, states that the emphasis on the school rules '*speaks in and of itself*' which suggests that focusing on the behaviour aspect rather than the moral values shows what is being prioritised in the school. Unfortunately, most of the participants relayed similar messages of confusion around values versus rules and, by default, would discuss the three school rules rather than the five moral values.

4.4.2 Communication of the School Values

This sub-theme relates to the above section, as the participants described that the communication of the school's values could be improved, which would result in a clearer distinction between the values and rules. Significantly, only one of the participants interviewed could recall all five of the school's values when asked, yet every individual easily remembered the three rules. What is crucial

about this is that the school's values are not being promoted as frequently as the school rules to teachers or students:

> *'Throughout the whole school, I'm sure they [the students] would be able to tell you ready, respectful, safe. But I'm not sure they'd be able to tell you the school values'* (Interviewee B).

Importantly, the above interviewee highlights that the students themselves wouldn't be able to recall the school's values, but that they would know the rules of the school. This is significant to highlight, as it became clear during the interviews that the values underpinning the school are not promoted clearly to the school community. One participant suggested that the language used in the school's values is acting as a barrier to its accessibility for students:

> *'Inclusiveness, what does that mean? What does that mean to a child? So, I think we have got to get much deeper down before we come up with words like that. We have got to make it child-friendly, and it's got to be real for them'* (Interviewee C).

In terms of the wider school community, some of the interviewees expressed that the values are provided through the school's written communication with parents; however, there were concerns around how meaningful this communication is:

> *'It's on the bottom of newsletters and it's on the bottom of all our correspondence, but that's just words'* (Interviewee D).

Significantly, this interviewee makes the point that the values are written on report cards, letters to parents, and the school's documentation. So, the values are being shared with other stakeholders in the school's community; however, it is also important that they state these are '*just words*'. As it has been discussed above, the school values may be written on all of the correspondence, but in the school community, the values are not being explicitly discussed or explored, which is causing challenges in the promotion of these values to staff and students.

4.4.3 The Process of Creating the School Values

The process of creating the school's values was only discussed by some of the participants, as most of the staff had changed since the last renewal of the values.

However, a member of the Senior Management Team explained how often these values should be reviewed:

> *'I believe the values should be revisited every seven years, at least. Right, because that gives a full school cycle a chance to have had a say in their values'* (Interviewee F).

Reviewing the values every seven years is believed to give the students a '*chance to have had a say in their values*'. This is crucial as it is the students who are expected to develop and show the school's values in the school and wider community, so they should be part of the process which decides these. Despite this recognition of a seven-year cycle, it became clear that the school had not revisited their school values within this time. One interviewee explains the last time they were revisited was beyond this seven-year stage:

> *'If you think that was nine years ago then these kids, all of these kids have had no part. A lot of the staff have left as well'* (Interviewee D).

The above quote states the school's values have not been revisited for nine years, which is two years over what the previous interviewee believed to be the maximum time. Understandably, there have been unpredictable times with the impact of Covid-19 on schools and the wider world, which may have impacted the priority given to renewing school values. However, this interview makes a crucial statement that '*all of these kids have had no part*' in the discussion or creation of the school values that they are expected to show in their everyday lives. Additionally, the participant also draws attention to the fact that many of the members of staff who were involved in that process are no longer at the school. This means that the current school values may be outdated in relation to the values that are important to the students, parents, staff, and community now; society and the school may have been very different nine years ago. The same interviewee goes on to use a nice metaphor which describes the impact that changing the school values could have:

> *'If you move stuff about on the mantlepiece, you actually see it again. If it sits there for three years and you go, 'oh, I never actually noticed those anymore.' But, if you just move one thing there and a couple of things about, then it's like, 'wow'. It's fresh'* (Interviewee D).

From this quote, the interviewee has shared that they feel like the school's values have become stagnant in a sense, and that they are becoming less recognised within the school. They use language like the values needing to be '*fresh*' for both students and staff, for these to have a renewed place within the school.

During the process of creating the school's values, the participants who were a part of this described that it was a democratic process that involved staff, parents, and students.

> *'We start in the school, and we start with the children and the staff, we go to the parents, we do it all at the same time more or less, then we go to the parents and the wider community, stakeholders, anybody that would have an interest in our school and ask them about what they think our values… to give us some words'* (Interviewee F).

According to a member of the Senior Management Team, words that encompassed the values important to all these members of the school's community were collected. Words that fell into similar themes were grouped, which left the school with key values that were important to those in the school. It was then the responsibility of staff and students to work together to get to a final five, which would become the official school values. They described it as a democratic process, but other participants shared a different perspective:

> *'Yeah, yeah, we were part of it. Can I say that I would've picked those? Absolutely not. I remember thinking at the time, 'I don't remember really those values being agreed on''* (Interviewee C).

Staff, students, and parents were involved in the creation of the school's values. However, other factors influence what values are important to schools, like societal factors, policies, and even research. One interviewee highlights in their description of how the school values may change during the next renewal:

> *'Like now equity is a big thing, but when we were doing our values, inclusion was a big thing'* (Interviewee F).

One significant aspect of the above quote is that it highlights that sometimes what is 'trending' in education during a certain time can impact the values implemented within primary schools. Rather than focusing on what staff, parents

and pupils are saying is important to them in terms of values, sometimes values can be chosen because they 'fit' with what is being pushed by councils, governments, and other stakeholders. Although '*equity is a big thing*' now, the school must reflect on whether this value is truly one that is important to them, in their specific context, as well as its value in the wider society.

4.5 Explicit Planning and Implementation of Moral Education

This next main theme aims to discuss how moral education is being explicitly planned and implemented in this non-denominational primary school. This relates to the specific teaching of moral education through the curricular area RME. Again, this overarching theme is split into five sub-themes to provide a deeper understanding of the explicit implementation of moral education (Figure 4). First, educators explained their process for planning this specific curricular area. They also went on to describe the types of resources that are available to them as well as the pedagogies they implement in their own moral education lessons. One important sub-theme that emerged was that there is currently a significant focus on using festivals in RME. Finally, the participants discussed what they look for to determine if students are progressing in moral development.

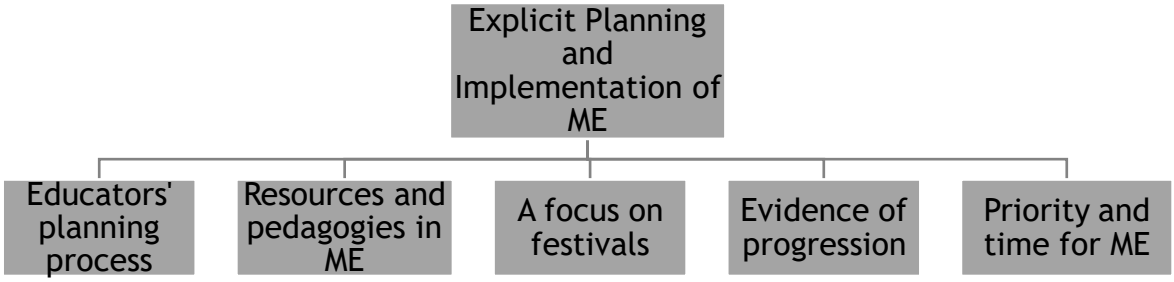

Figure 4 Explicit Planning and Implementation of ME

4.5.1 Educators' Planning Process for Moral Education

One thing that was consistent across the class teachers who were interviewed was that no one had a clear process in planning for moral education. In relation to the planning stage of moral education, all of the interviewees were asked about their knowledge and use of the Experiences and Outcomes outlined in the Curriculum for Excellence documents for this curricular area.

> *'Interviewer: Do you know the Es and Os for Moral Education well?*
>
> *Interviewee A: Eh, no.*
>
> *Interviewer: Do you know what age they roughly start talking about moral education, what stage?*
>
> *Interviewee A: See if you'd asked me about Literacy, Numeracy, Social Subjects, I would be fine here. Erm, no'* (Interviewee A).

The above quote highlights the familiarity this interviewee has with the Es and Os in moral education compared to other curricular areas. The reason this is crucial to highlight is that the same interviewee earlier stated that the Es and Os are the '*driving force*' (Interviewee A) of the curriculum and learning within the school. The above participants state that if they had been asked about curricular areas like Literacy and Numeracy, then they '*would be fine*', yet when questioned about moral education, this same confidence and knowledge is not evident. Some of the interviewees discussed this same issue relating to their planning of moral education and the Curriculum for Excellence documents:

> *'Interviewer: Do you know anything really about the Es and Os or when moral education is introduced into the Es and Os?*
>
> *Interviewee B: Nothing about the Es and Os of moral education. Not a thing.*
>
> *Interviewer: Why do you think that might be?*
>
> *Interviewee B: Because I have boxed it off as someone else's job'* (Interviewee B).

Again, this participant highlights that their knowledge around the Experiences and Outcomes for moral education is not strong. Interestingly, however, they also make the point that they view moral education '*as someone else's job*' which means that if they are not planning for this curricular area, then their familiarity with the Es and Os will not be as strong as it is for other subjects.

Unfortunately, several of the interviewees admitted that they did not teach moral education in their own classrooms, and that it is often a subject that they allow other members of staff to explicitly implement. One participant admits:

> '*Right, honestly, I have no process for planning RME because I haven't explicitly taught RME in class for years*' (Interviewee B).

When asked further about this, the interviewee explained that moral education is a curricular area that they ask the non-class contact teachers to implement. Consequently, the participant discusses that they have not explicitly planned for or implemented moral education in their classroom '*for years*'. This topic around the responsibility of implementing moral education was brought up by some interviewees who highlighted that this subject is regularly explicitly taught by non-class contact teachers:

> '*I feel that teachers might not be doing their hour because they are leaving it up to, like, a non-class contact teacher to come in and do that… which I think needs to be looked at*' (Interviewee G).

This idea that moral education is something being 'left up to' other members of staff was a surprising theme that emerged from the discussions. It highlighted that most of the participants interviewed had no official planning process for moral education because they were not the ones explicitly implementing it in their classrooms. This was an interesting part of the analysis, as the researcher had been the NCCT teacher who would implement RME in the school, which highlights the positionality of the researcher in this analysis process. Leaving moral education to be explicitly implemented by an NCCT was a concern raised by several interviewees who noticed that, consequently, they were not exploring the Es and Os related to this curricular area in their own planning.

4.5.2 Resources and Pedagogies Used in Moral Education

When all of the interviewees were asked about the resources that they use in their explicit implementation of moral education, a range of resources was given. The most common source mentioned was Twinkl. When asked further about the resources found on this platform and what they implemented, one interviewee stated:

> *'PowerPoint, clip, colour in sheet'* (Interviewee B).

This was echoed by other participants who explained that they would use clips to explore RME topics, which was usually followed by a PowerPoint presentation. When all of the interviewees described the resources that they used in moral education, they were mainly based on rote learning techniques or lower-order thinking skills. Other participants described that there were resources such as 'topic boxes':

> *'I know we used to have like topic boxes, and we used to have a thing with a Prayer Mat with the compass on it and an old Quran and a Torah and stuff like that… But, nah, I haven't seen them used in years'* (Interviewee D).

Topic boxes would often be used to explore the religious aspect of RME, and as previously discussed, when interviewees were asked about resources for moral education, they would often discuss the curricular RME as a whole. Additionally, some participants also suggested that they would revert to old resources that were part of the citizenship education:

> *'There is a citizenship programme, I'm sure it came with 5-14 and some of the lessons were really good. It was about citizenship and your place in society and law, the police, and things like that. Citizenship… I think it was just called citizenship education. I think it's about 15years old, but it's still about'* (Interviewee B).

Although the citizenship programme does deal with some moral issues, it is not based on developing values like the moral education of the Curriculum for Excellence. Additionally, this interviewee admits that these resources are '*about 15-years-old*', which raises questions about their relevance and accuracy for use in moral education now.

In the interviews, participants also discussed the type of pedagogies that they would expect to be used in the explicit implementation of moral education. All interviewees were asked about what pedagogies they believed to be the most effective in moral development at the primary school level. The main ways that the participants believe morality could be developed are through discussion, understanding, and talking. All of the interviewees thought that these methods would engage students in moral education and give them the opportunities to develop, challenge, and refine their own values.

4.5.3 Moral Education and a Focus on Festivals

A significant sub-theme around the explicit implementation of moral education highlighted that there is an emphasis on the 'teaching about festivals' in the primary school. All classroom educators admitted that, in their current practice, they use festivals to do most of the teaching in the curricular area of RME. During the interviews, participants were asked why they thought this way of implementing the subject existed, and one interviewee made the following point:

> *'Interviewer: Do you think there is mostly a focus on festivals at the moment?*
>
> *Interviewee D: Yeah, probably.*
>
> *Interviewer: Why do you think that might be?*
>
> *Interviewee D: Erm, one) that people are not particularly interested or aware, and it's not a main part of our curriculum'* (Interviewee D).

The above interaction highlights this idea, again, around the priority of moral education in the school and curriculum. The interviewee states that moral education is '*not a main part of our curriculum*', which raises questions around what they believe is the 'main curriculum'. Moral education is part of Curriculum for Excellence; however, this quote suggests that different curricular areas may have different weighting within the explicit implementation of the curriculum. Additionally, this participant also believes that the focus on festivals within moral education is because '*people are not particularly interested or aware*', and this raises an important point, as other interviewees suggested that finding content for teaching festivals is '*the easiest thing to do*' (Interviewee B). From the

interviews, it became clear that there is a strong focus on teaching about festivals, and that is mostly because it is an easier way to find teaching resources and inspiration from online sources.

However, during the interviews, many of the participants started to express the negative implications of focusing on festivals as the main way of explicitly implementing moral education. There became a recognition that predominantly relying upon festivals makes the lessons a tokenistic task, which is outlined by the following quote:

> *'Sometimes I feel, even myself, it's a bit of a patronising nod: it's Chinese New Year so we roll out the prawn crackers; it's St Andrew's Day, we roll out the shortbread. I think it's a bit patronising'* (Interviewee B).

The interviewee was significantly reflecting of their own practice during this discussion and recognised that they would mainly focus on festivals when they were happening. Some interviewees expressed that, at the beginning of the year, staff would go through the calendar and identify key religious festivals, so that teaching could focus on this at certain times of the year. However, as Interviewee B states, this can sometimes feel like '*a patronising nod*' where you are only discussing the festivals because you feel you need to address them. This suggests that focusing on teaching festivals may not always reflect authentic and meaningful learning in the explicit implementation of moral education.

Additionally, many of the participants highlighted that the representation of different festivals and cultures is not equal within the school. Some of the interviewees also expressed that this was a particular challenge when there were multiple festivals happening at similar times in the calendar.

> *'Next week I'll be putting stuff out for Easter. So, it's funny how you put stuff out for Easter, but I'm not putting anything out to do with Ramadan or Eid coming up'* (Interviewee H).

This interviewee highlights that, in their classroom, there is a bigger focus placed on Easter rather than Ramadan and Eid, even though both festivals occur at similar times. However, many participants explained that they would be more inclusive of different festivals if they represented their classes, so the pupil population can impact the type of learning being implemented in moral education. Despite this,

many recognised that there is still a predominant focus on Christian festivals like Easter and Christmas, with less focus on other celebrations, as one participant discussed:

> *'I don't think we make enough of the celebration of our other children in here. I don't think we have the same, eh, input for like Chinese New Year because we have a pretty high percentage and are we celebrating that at assemblies? I don't think we are, and what's that telling our children?'* (Interviewee C).

In this quote, the interviewee states that there is a high population of students who may celebrate Chinese New Year, yet these festivals are not discussed and explored through the school community in the same way that Christian celebrations are. In this discussion, the participant poses the question, '*what's that telling our children?*' and this was a significant point as the interviewee is reflecting on what impact this has on the students. The student population in the school is diverse, with many different cultures and beliefs, and some of the interviewees were beginning to recognise that the teaching of festivals may not be the most inclusive way of explicitly implementing moral education.

4.5.4 Evidence of Progression in Moral Education

When the participants were asked about how they would evidence progression in the explicit teaching of moral education with their students, many stated that they relied on observational methods. None of the interviewees expressed that they had any physical evidence of progression for learners; it was all based on their professional judgement.

> *'Yeah, well obviously from a strategic perspective we have our pathways of learning which are devised from the Es and Os, so there's a progression sort of set-in-stone that teachers plan from'* (Interviewee A).

The only participant to discuss the use of Experiences and Outcomes in the explicit progression of moral education was the above interviewee, who claims that there is a '*progression sort of set-in-stone*'. They suggest that these Es and Os can be used by teachers to show the progression of moral development from Early through to Second level in the primary school. However, no other participant referenced the use of the Es and Os in their evidence of progression of moral development.

Instead, some of the interviewees stated that they would observe students' behaviours, their discussions, and their ability to conflict-resolve:

> *'How they respond to situations or how they interact with people or like their tolerance of others, their respect. You know, how they deal with others, how they deal with maybe like how they deal with failure, their resilience'* (Interviewee H).

The quote from Interviewee H sums up what many other participants agreed would be evidence of development in the explicit moral education in their classrooms. There was a lot of discussion around the fact that educators would use observational evidence to see development in students' behaviours, opinions and interactions within moral contexts and situations.

One point that was made around the evidence of progression in moral education related to how this is then communicated with parents and carers of the pupils. Some of the participants discussed how moral development might be discussed at parent evenings or through report cards. Interestingly, one participant commented what parents and the government may look for when it comes to evidence of progression across the curriculum compared to moral education:

> *'I think maybe, this focus to drive attainment: you want to see real results whether that's the government or the parents. They want to come in and see, you know, writing in jotters. Maths, they want to see what they can do and if you say to them, 'oh so and so had a really great thought about what they think in this particular moral situation' they might not be as excited to hear that as they would to see stunning sums in jotters'* (Interviewee E).

Significantly, this participant highlights that there is a '*focus to drive attainment*' within the Scottish education system, which predominantly focuses on Literacy and Numeracy. So, the interviewee makes a valid point that most of the evidence of progression is usually discussed in terms of these curricular areas, which becomes important to both parents and the government. Additionally, the interviewee used interesting language like people want to '*see real results*' which implies that, in other curricular areas, development is not seen with the same importance as it is within Literacy and Numeracy. Specifically in moral education,

the participant states that the government and parents '*might not be as excited to hear*' about the moral development of students because it's not related to attainment.

4.5.5 Priority and Time for Explicit Moral Education

One of the most frequently discussed challenges by the participants is that moral education is not prioritised within the school, and this influences how the curricular area is viewed across the school. This is highlighted in the following interaction:

> *'Interviewer: What do you believe to be the biggest challenge when implementing moral education specifically?*
>
> *Interviewee B: I think it would just be priority. I don't think they prioritise it at all'* (Interviewee B).

This quote explains that moral education not being made a priority is a significant challenge for some of the participants. Interestingly, this participant states that '*I don't think they prioritise it at all*', which indicates that this is a bigger challenge than moral education not being a priority in individual classrooms. From discussions with participants, it is clear that moral education is not in the School Improvement Plan, which means that staff are not focused on developing this area as other curricular areas take priority. A member of the Senior Management Team discussed the School's Improvement Plan in relation to moral education:

> '*It's not something that's highlighted in most people's school improvement plan because we're still trying to recover from Covid, and we're looking at emotions, and we're looking at Literacy and Numeracy recovery'* (Interviewee F).

The identification of Literacy, Numeracy, and Health and Wellbeing as the core focus highlights that moral education is not viewed as a priority by the Senior Management Team, and this same view is being expressed by classroom educators too. Additionally, this quote highlights that the priority of the three 'core' curricular areas has been heightened since the Covid-19 pandemic which shows that societal factors have impacted what is prioritised within the school.

All of the interviewees believed that the biggest challenge in their explicit implementation of moral education is not enough time within the curriculum. Many of the teachers recognised that there is pressure to teach all curricular areas within the week, as well as additional activities such as assemblies or school visitors, which take up significant time. This feeling is discussed by one participant in particular:

> '*I think we are under a huge pressure to tick boxes; we are having to teach a huge curriculum, and I think teachers and children are overwhelmed'* (Interviewee C).

One part of this quote that stands out is that the interviewee highlights that they '*are under a huge pressure to tick boxes*.' The interviewee does not explicitly state who the pressure is coming from, whether it is from the local, council, or governmental level, but it is clear that the language being used in the above quote highlights the emotional impact the time pressures are having on students and educators. Interestingly, another interviewee uses similar language when discussing their implementation of RME:

> *'Not many resources, it's a tick box and there's not much time'* (Interviewee B).

The use of 'ticking boxes' in both of the above quotes is important to highlight as it shows the language being used to describe educators' approach to meeting the needs of the Curriculum for Excellence. To teach all curricular areas, practitioners are seeing it as a checklist of learning to get through. However, when time begins to run out, then certain areas get pushed out, and one of those is moral education. There is a real sense that moral education is made to 'fit in' with educators' timetables, but that the time pressures in school mean that it is not often explicitly explored.

Despite this, one interviewee recognised that although time in the curriculum is a challenge to the explicit implementation of moral education, there must be a solution to this, as it is part of educators' jobs to teach all areas of the curriculum:

> '*Time, right. But that's such a cliché answer, and I'm trying to avoid it… time is always an issue in every profession… however, we do have an obligation to ensure, we have a legal obligation and a moral obligation and*

an ethical obligation, to ensure things are supported and harnessed' (Interviewee A).

Crucially, this quote states that explicitly implementing moral education is a 'legal obligation', which is interesting as they were the only participant who mentioned this in their interview. In fact, two participants discussed that they did not know RME was a legal requirement in non-denominational primary schools (Scottish Government, 2011b). This, again, relates to moral education in initial teacher training and continuing professional development opportunities, where there is a lack of knowledge around this curricular area. The above quote sums up nicely that although there are significant time pressures, moral education is part of the curriculum, with the added legal aspect, and there needs to be a way for practitioners to overcome this challenge in the explicit implementation of this curricular area. Yet there have been suggestions by educators that the lack of priority and time provided to moral education in the primary school is consequently 'squeezing' this curricular area out of their time-tables.

4.6 The Implicit Implementation of Moral Education

This next theme for discussion relates to the implicit implementation of moral education that was brought up by a few of the participants. To further understand how moral education can be implicitly implemented in the primary school, this section will be split into five sub-themes (Figure 5). The first of these emphasises how important the classroom environment is, as well as having clear expectations for students in developing their morality. Secondly, a significant way the school's moral values are discussed and promoted is through whole-school assemblies. This sub-theme will outline how effective the interviewees believed the assemblies are in implicit moral education. Thirdly, there will be a discussion around the other curricular areas that the participants thought could implicitly develop moral values, and the subjects that they believed would be more difficult to relate to moral education. Finally, some of the interviewees highlighted that the moral values are implicit in the school's policies, which are used and shared within the school community.

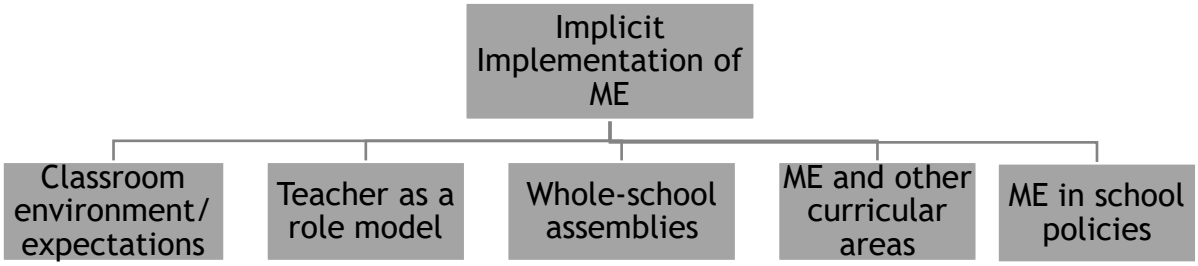

Figure 5 Implicit Implementation of ME

4.6.1 The Classroom Environment and Expectations of Pupils

One aspect that was brought up by some of the interviewees is that the classroom environment is a crucial part in the implicit moral development through setting up their classroom, the discussion around class charters, and setting out clear routines for the students. These activities are usually completed during the start of the school year, where educators outline what moral values are expected of them in the classroom and wider school community.

> *'It's always something that comes up in our class charters, something that you do at the start of the year all the time, your first kind of term is like kind of moral education based, I suppose. By doing like your routines, by looking after your classroom, doing your class charter, even like making your classroom I suppose' (Interviewee H).*

The above participant outlines that to implicitly develop morality in students, they believe that the class charters and setting behavioural expectations are part of moral education. These activities would not be considered as explicit moral education as they are not learning activities that have been planned to develop morality; they are things that exist in the classroom across the full year and are referenced either during moral education lessons or as part of the everyday school life. Additionally, it is important to note that the interviewee states that these activities are '*something that you do at the start of the year*' which suggests that

the class charters and routines are then consistent across the full year, that they are not really addressed at any other points of the year. Some interviewees were cautious that the class charters are only referenced at the beginning of the year:

> *'Just sit there in people's classrooms next to like their class charter and stuff. And you know what kids are like, if you're not referencing stuff they will just 'aww ok, fairness: what does that mean then?''* (Interviewee G).

Additionally, creating classroom routines for students that build on their moral values within and around the school was highlighted by one classroom teacher who stated that:

> *'I don't think you'd struggle to find a connection with moral values: it underpins your whole living… Even just something as simple as painting, let's think about clearing up and thinking of our cleaners and just being respectful'* (Interviewee C).

This quote perfectly describes that moral education can be implicitly implemented across the whole curriculum and all curricular areas. Even if not related to the content of the subjects, moral values can be implicitly developed in the actions and behaviours of students during any lesson. As the teacher explains, students can be reminded about the school's values in '*clearing up*' activities to remind them about '*being respectful*'.

From the senior management team, there was more discussion around setting expectations for students through the Nurture Principles perspective. One member of the senior management team also placed a lot of emphasis on the nurturing environment as a direct impact of the teachers in the school:

> '*I think that, yeah, a nurturing heart toward things is probably at our core. Our teachers really do care. I mean, you look at [another colleague] and the amount of work that [they] put in, [they] do care about those children'* (Interviewee D).

However, there was a difference between classroom educators who tended to discuss their personal influence on creating and communicating expectations in their classroom, and the focus of the senior management team on policies that underpin the school's creation of an environment. Classroom practitioners

mentioned UNCRC Rights of the Child, whilst a member of the Senior Management Team referred to the GTCS standards and CfE documents in relation to expectations for pupils.

4.6.2 Teachers as Role Models in Moral Education

When participants were asked about the strengths in the implementation of moral education in their school, all of the interviewees believed the teaching staff themselves were an asset.

> '*It's a good staff, a strong staff that are really capable, that have so many good ideas, that are genuinely nice people… like putting the children first is something that we do do well… it's maybe not the actual proper teaching of it, it is something that falls by the wayside a wee bit'* (Interviewee H).

The idea that all the staff care about each student in the school was something echoed by all participants. There was a clear theme during the interviews that the school culture is a positive one for students, where they are nurtured, and the school values are shown to learners every day, which relates to the implicit moral education curriculum (Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008). This was furthered by another interviewee who expressed that the individual teachers play a significant role in the moral development of students:

> '*The strengths are the person you are, I suppose. You cannot stand in front of children day in, and day out and not care for them, not show emotion for them, empathy for them'* (Interviewee C).

Teachers suggested that they are moral role models as they attempt to show fairness, kindness, respect, honesty, and empathy to their students. Again, being a role model is an implicit approach to moral education as it is not explicitly implemented in their classrooms. However, students are experiencing the real-life implications of moral-decision making and the school's values through their teachers. Whether or not all staff are aware of this is less evident, as most participants referred to the teaching staff as a strength rather than the impact of the values of individual teachers.

Another aspect that came up in the discussions was that teachers can also have an impact on the explicit implementation of moral education. Some of the

interviewees reflected on their own education in this curricular area, either in higher or tertiary education, and many recalled that they really enjoyed the subject based on the pedagogies used.

> '*I remember at college, being really fired up by one particular tutor, he was just brilliant…he did a great lecture about what truth is and he, so there was one hundred and eighty-odd students all sitting in the lecture hall.. and he was talking about, erm, urban myths*' (Interviewee D, page 7).

This quote emphasises the impact that educators can have on their students. Here, the interviewee remembered the content explored as well as the teaching methods used in their moral education classes at university. So, in the explicit implementation of this curricular area, the teacher can have a significant impact on how students engage with moral issues in their classrooms: it can be made engaging and memorable just as it was for the participants.

4.6.3 Whole School Assemblies

Another aspect that relates to the implicit implementation of moral education is school assemblies. These are one of the only opportunities that the whole-school community comes together and talks about the school values and upcoming celebrations. However, many of the participants expressed that they felt the school assemblies were a missed opportunity to explore moral education more meaningfully:

> *'No, not in the lightest and that frustrates me because I feel assemblies could be far more focused on… the cultural part… when the whole school comes together, there are so many cultural celebrations that we should be acknowledging as a whole school and we're not'* (Interviewee B).

In this quote, the interviewee recognises that there are cultural celebrations that are relevant to the lives of the students in their class and the whole school community. But this aspect of implicit moral education is currently being missed in situations when the entire teacher and pupil population are together, such as school assemblies. One interesting aspect in this discussion is that the interviewee expresses that they are '*frustrated*' at the situation. This suggests that they would like to see more of this cultural learning, but that the priority given to moral

education is acting as a barrier to the school's ability to achieve this. Some interviewees did highlight that assemblies are becoming better at discussing the school's values:

> *'I think like maybe if they're talking about thirty-day challenge or something'* (Interviewee G).

Several of the participants explained that during school assemblies, there has been an effort to create 'thirty-day challenges' where students are presented with a challenge like 'keep our school tidy', and this is in place for thirty days. The senior management team then comment on how well pupils are doing with this challenge. Although some participants felt that these assemblies were missed opportunities for exploring cultural and religious beliefs on a whole-school scale, it does highlight that there is a potential for these opportunities to harness their focus on the five values rather than the thirty-day challenges.

Additionally, one participant explained that faith leaders were once a feature of whole-school assemblies within the primary school. They explained that:

> *'I know we used to have the local Minister in, and to be honest, I was quite uncomfortable with that'* (Interviewee D).

The same interviewee explained that alongside the local Minister, there was also a visitor who used multiple techniques when implementing whole-school assemblies:

> *'He was incredible because you were just like, 'wow' and he was doing like ventriloquy, and it was the suspension of disbelief and drama'* (Interviewee G).

When asked further about the visitors in the primary school for Religious and Moral Education, the interview explained that this no longer exists. It was explained that the teachers in the school shared the '*uncomfortable*' feeling that was described by this participant, and ultimately, the headteacher decided to end faith visitors leading whole-school assemblies. No other interviewees mentioned visitors in the school as part of RME, either as part of a whole-school approach or in their individual classrooms.

4.6.4 Relating Moral Education to Other Curricular Areas

An important aspect of the implicit implementation of moral education, discussed by all of the interviewees, was that they often had aspects of moral values or moral discussions through other curricular areas. During this phase of the analysis, the researcher's positionality as a primary teacher was influential as was a shared language around CfE and Glasgow City Council terminology, as well as an understanding of how planning and interdisciplinary learning were approached by the case study school. During the interviews, there was a recognition that moral education can be explored in different areas of the curriculum outside of RME.

> *'I suppose you might be doing stuff just through your normal lessons throughout the, without sort of feeling as if you're referencing'* (Interviewee G).

The above quote helps to understand why relating moral education to other curricular areas can be implicit implementation rather than explicit in this case study. Again, the researcher's knowledge around this sub-theme had been influenced by reading the existing literature around moral education and other curricular areas. Even though all the participants discussed that moral education could be explored in other curricular areas, no one had identified that they currently do this through explicit planning of moral education with the use of Es and Os or Benchmarks. Instead, some of the interviewees reflected upon previous lessons and could explain that there were implicit moral aspects to some of these, but this was recognised during the interviews.

When the participants were asked more about what curricular areas they believed could be combined most effectively with moral education, there were a range of answers given. But most of the interviewees stated that moral education could be closely linked with three main areas: Literacy, Social Studies and Health and Wellbeing.

> *'Nursery rhymes and reading, a lot of reading books to them and looking for good characters. Obviously when you're writing stories it all comes in that you're looking the good person and what attributes they have and just bringing that into every day'* (Interviewee C).

One of the most common curricular areas that participants identified as linking well with moral education was Literacy. The above quote discusses how this interviewee would implicitly implement moral education in the Early Years of education. They discussed that moral values could be explored through nursery rhymes and stories where there are often 'good' and 'bad' characters that can be analysed with students to highlight what attributes we can have in individuals, and how they can influence our behaviours. The interviewee also describes that these same skills can be developed throughout school, where students at the Second Level could explore, discuss, and debate the moral values of characters within stories in class.

Another curricular area that many of the interviewees believed could implicitly implement moral education was Social Studies:

> *'I think for sure social studies. Looking at history, relating morality to history is, you know, very important. What's the point of looking back at history if you don't look at it through a moral lens? Even sometimes if that's not just saying that was right or wrong but understanding that morals were perhaps different in the past'* (Interviewee E).

This quote highlights, specifically, that history could be a good vehicle to explore moral values and issues, at least implicitly. The interviewee explains that often we talk about historical events through a '*moral lens*' as we assess previous individuals' behaviours and actions, what drives these and the moral motivations. Crucially, the interviewee states that '*morals were perhaps different in the past*', which gives an insight into their views of morality. From this, it could be interpreted that the participant believes moral values can be impacted by culture, context, and time period. Students can, through Social Studies, examine how morals may have been different in the past, what they look like in the present, and how they may change in the future.

When discussing moral education, many of the participants referred to Health and Wellbeing as a curricular area that has implicit moral education aspects. For example, some interviewees suggested that Health and Wellbeing is about relationships with others, emotional literacy, and our values, which are all closely related to the main components of moral education. One thing that was

interesting during the discussions, however, is the relationship the participants created between moral education and Health and Wellbeing.

> *'Our values kind of sit with that bedrock with the Health and Wellbeing, and then pushing that kind of up'* (Interviewee A).

Some of the interviewees expressed that moral education should be encompassed in the curricular area of Health and Wellbeing, which would give it more of a priority in the curriculum. For example, the above interviewee states that moral education should be 'pushed up' from Health and Wellbeing, rather than viewing it as its own curricular area. The majority of participants believed that moral education can be implicitly linked to Health and Wellbeing easily as there are many potentially overlapping areas.

On the other hand, some of the interviewees also discussed what curricular areas they believed would be more challenging to link to moral education in their practice. Commonly, the participants highlighted that they would find it more difficult to link moral education to both Numeracy and Science:

> *'Well, when you're thinking about maths you would be thinking about maybe, possibly bringing it in artificially. You know, so that might be when it's much more artificial'* (Interviewee F).

This quote highlights that linking moral education to Numeracy and Science may be '*artificial*' in practice. Further in this discussion, the interviewee explained that there are often 'right' and 'wrong' answers in these subjects, whereas moral scenarios can be debated with no one 'right' answer. However, this disconnect between moral education and Numeracy and Science was discussed by several participants. There was a clear lack of confidence in their own ability to make these connections in learning:

> *'You can certainly make links there. Yeah, and I'm sure you could, maybe I'm not smart enough, but fit it into maths or science somehow as well'* (Interviewee E).

This interviewee states that they do not feel '*smart enough*' to link moral education to either science or maths, which relates to a previous point around the lack of professional development opportunities in this curricular area. So, it is

important to recognise that not all staff believe that moral education can be linked, even implicitly, to every curricular area.

4.6.5 Moral Education within the School Policies

In relation to the implicit moral education through the school policies, only a few of the participants discussed this area. Some stated that there are policies which implicitly implement moral education through Nurture Principles and behaviour policies. However, a member of the Senior Management Team admitted that moral education is not prominent in the school policies as much as they would like:

> *'We've got no specific like moral education policies, or even things we could even recognise that's woven through our policies'* (Interviewee F).

This quote highlights that moral education might be very difficult to recognise within the school policies, even implicitly. The educators interviewed admitted that they have not read any school policies on the implementation of moral education, and if they do exist, then they are not made accessible to the staff within the school. Despite this, some policies and documents implicitly encourage moral development, such as the GTCS standards for teachers that promote values (General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2021) and the Nurture Principles from the council (Education Services, 2016). Therefore, the semi-structured interviews highlighted that although there are policies that implicitly discuss moral education, these are not promoted to the staff, and the documents are coming from the council level, rather than from the school.

4.7 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has outlined the main research themes from the inductive thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews. All of the interviewees shared their experiences of implementing moral education both implicitly and explicitly. Their discussions provided an in-depth understanding of their own experiences in implementing moral education within the case-study school, exploring what has impacted their understanding of the subject and reflecting on their current practice.

The first main theme, 'Educators' Definition and Understanding of Moral Education' aimed to provide further understanding of the interviewees' own understanding of the terminology used around moral education in Curriculum for Excellence. From this, it became clear that there were various interpretations of moral education and how this can be developed through primary education. Therefore, there was no one defined understanding of moral education, yet there were shared ideas around the belief that it is a life-long process, based on the ideas of 'right and wrong', and that there is a focus on the Religious rather than Moral aspect of RME. However, the lack of continuing professional development opportunities was identified by participants as being a barrier to their understanding of the terminology within RME.

Secondly, there was the exploration around the creation of the school's moral values and how these are communicated through the school community. There were shared ideas amongst the participants that the school values could be better communicated to students and parents; however, the process of making them was inclusive of perspectives from different stakeholders.

The third theme focused on the explicit implementation of moral education. All participants described the process they have for the teaching of moral education currently, and how they interact with the Experiences and Outcomes in the planning for this subject. Additionally, all of the interviewees discussed the evidence that they would look for to determine if moral development is being made by students. However, there was a shared feeling that the process of planning in moral education was often left to the non-class contact teachers and that evidence of moral development was difficult to define or look for. Additionally, challenges such as the priority of moral education and the time dedicated to this subject were highlighted as the main challenges to educators' explicit implementation.

In the fourth theme, there was more of a focus on the implicit implementation of moral education, which included the activities that take place in the school, relating moral education to other curricular areas, and its appearance in school policies. Again, there was a shared response that moral education can implicitly relate to areas like Literacy, Health and Wellbeing, and Social Studies. However, it could easily be implicit across the whole curriculum. Despite this, some interviewees expressed that whole-school activities could be more effective in

moral development, and there are very few policies that relate to moral education in the school. One thing that was echoed by most of the participants was that the teaching staff were an implicit strength in the implementation of moral education.

Chapter 5 : Researcher Observations and Document Analysis Findings

5.1 Introduction

The first section of this chapter aims to outline the main findings from the researcher's observations collected in the case study primary school, and the analysis of specific documents that discuss moral education within this context. The observations were carried out over a four-month span from March to June 2023. Altogether, there were sixteen observations conducted: eleven classroom, three whole-school assemblies, one of the whole school environment, and one of the 'International Fayre' event held in the school. The classroom observations were conducted to gain further understanding into how moral education is implemented explicitly across the stages of the primary school and the process educators have for planning for this subject. It is important to note that the classrooms observations were conducted in Religious and Moral Education lessons, and that the other seven curricular areas were omitted from the present study.

Additionally, the observations of the assemblies, activities, and environment in the school were used to gain more knowledge around the implicit implementation of moral values through the life of the school. The collection of the observations aligns with the interpretivist paradigm as they were used to gain naturalistic descriptions of the school's implementation of moral education (Scotland, 2012).

Furthermore, the last section of the current chapter will discuss the findings from the document analysis conducted on four main policies and frameworks from the case study primary school. Initially, documents were identified through the semi-structured interviews with the senior management team. Then another stage of document collection occurred through a 'snowballing' method, which was discussed in '*5.5. Document Analysis'*. The collection and analysis of these documents can provide more understanding of the construction, consumption, and function of these policies within the social context (Owen, 2017).

5.2 Researcher Observation Findings

The first section of this chapter will explore the findings from the researcher's notes from the eleven classroom observations conducted from Primary One to Primary Seven in the case study school. As well as the researcher notes, the educators who participated in these observations also voluntarily provided the

lesson plans that they created and implemented during these lessons. These lesson plans are combined with the researcher's notes in the analysis to further understand the explicit implementation of moral education.

In the second section, the main findings discussed will be based on the researcher's observations during the whole-school assemblies, the school's layout and environment, and extra-curricular activities in the school. These observations provide more information on how moral education is being implicitly implemented in the primary school through its ecology, milieu, social systems, and culture.

5.3 Explicit Planning and Implementation of Moral Education

Following the analysis, four main sub-themes are used to explore the 'Explicit Planning and Implementation of Moral Education' (Figure 6). The first of these is 'Moral Education Experiences and Outcomes: Breadth of Learning', which outlines the main learning outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence that are guiding the learning in these lessons. This theme highlights the range and variety of learning outcomes being explored from Early to Third Level in the curricular areas of Religious and Moral Education. The second sub-theme, 'Focus of 'Moral Education' Lessons', describes the content of the learning during these lessons and how they were linked to other areas of the curriculum. The eleven classroom observations were intended to be focused on the implementation of moral education; however, the notes from the observations highlight that moral education was not always the focus. The 'Learning Activities and Pedagogies used in 'Moral Education' Lessons' theme discusses the types of resources and teaching methods used in the explicit implementation of this curricular area. It highlights the hierarchical nature of knowledge and guidance within these lessons. Finally, the fourth theme outlines the 'Evidence of Progression in Moral Development' across the stages of learning. This theme explores the Success Criteria provided by educators in their lesson planning documents, used to document students' learning in the lesson, as well as research notes on what evidence was gathered by the classroom teachers to demonstrate that moral development had occurred.

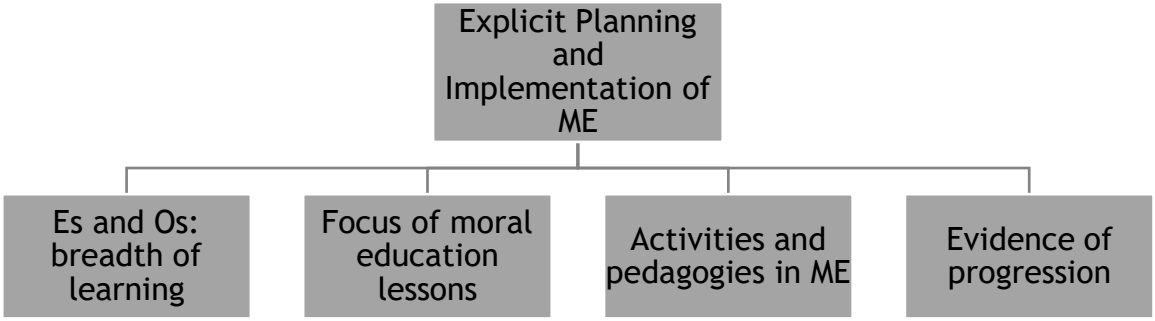

Figure 6 Explicit Planning and Implementation of ME

5.3.1 Moral Education Experiences and Outcomes: Breadth of Learning

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence documents include Experiences and Outcomes (E and Os) which are "a set of clear and concise statements about children's learning and progression in each curriculum areas… used to help plan learning" (Education Scotland, 2017b: 3). There are specific Es and Os for each curricular area which outline the progression of learning from Early Level to Third Level learning at the primary school level. Observing these provided further information on the range and breadth of activities being explored through the curricular area of moral education. From the eleven classroom observations, the stages of learning were categorised in relation to the CfE Levels: one class was working at Early Level, three at First Level, one class was working at Second Level, and a final class were at Third Level.

Since there were three classes all working at the same level, this allowed for some comparisons to be made relating to the Experiences and Outcomes being implemented. One interesting observation made from the analysis of the lesson plans at the First Level highlighted that all three educators used the following Experience and Outcome: ***'I am developing an awareness of ways followers of different religions celebrate different times and can relate to my own life and community – RME 1-06b'***. Within Curriculum for Excellence documents for Religious and Moral Education, there are nineteen Experiences and Outcomes for

First Level learning alone, which highlights that there are a variety of outcomes for educators to use in their planning. Yet, all educators at this level implemented the same outcome to explore RME. This was further evidenced at the same stage of learning when two educators implemented the E and O ***'I am discovering how followers of world religions demonstrate their beliefs through prayer/meditation, worship and special ceremonies… – RME 1-0'***.

This raises concerns around the breadth of learning in this curricular area, which Education Scotland (2012) defines as "the number and range of experiences and outcomes encountered by learners" (p. 2). From these observations, it is shown that a range of Experiences and Outcomes are not being implemented in the case study primary school. Instead, learners in consecutive lessons are exploring the same outcomes at very close stages in their learning. In addition, there could be discussions around the progression in this learning, as students stated that they had already done some of the same tasks with another teacher, either earlier in the year or in the class before. Therefore, using the same Es and Os across classes in the same Level of learning can have an impact on the breadth of learning and progression within this curricular area. It also highlights that educators may also be using the Es and Os in a mechanically performative way.

Furthermore, the two Es and Os that were implemented in several classes across this stage of learning also highlight that there is an imbalance between the two components of 'Religious and Moral' Education in the lower stages of the school. As mentioned previously, the classroom observations were specifically communicated to the educators, and it was stated that the researcher would observe their moral education implementation. However, the repetition of the above Es and Os show that there is more emphasis placed on the 'religious' aspect rather than the 'moral', resulting in an RmE curriculum.

5.3.2 Focus of 'Moral Education' Lessons

When conducting the researcher observations, it was clearly communicated to the classroom educators that the focus of the lessons would be on their explicit implementation of moral education. But, through the semi-structured interviews, it emerged that many of the teachers would be more likely to explore moral issues through other curricular areas rather than being explicitly through the subject of RME. So, when conducting the classroom observations, some educators decided to

relate moral education to other subjects, but it was communicated that the focus would still be on the moral aspect of these lessons.

One finding from the lesson observations, combined with the lesson plans, highlighted that there was almost a clear divide between the lower and upper school in relating moral education to either Health and Wellbeing or Social Subjects. The Early and lower First Level classes were more likely to relate moral development to Health and Wellbeing, specifically linked to friendship. Whereas the upper First, Second and Third Level lessons were focused on exploring moral issues through Social Subjects, with more weighting towards the historical aspect of people's lives in the past. Yet across all levels of learning, literacy skills were a significant focus across the school, which was observed during the 'moral education' lessons.

In the Early and First Level lessons, the focus was on friendship with ***'being a good friend'*** a common theme explored in three of these observed lessons. During the lessons, learners were beginning to think about the values that different people hold. They discussed what positive values they think a 'good' friend has and what values they individually hold that make them a good friend. Initially, these lessons started with a moral aspect by looking at values and how people have different values or value different things in people. There was values language used in the lesson introductions, with the students mainly identifying that the most important value in a friend is someone who is '*kind*'. Additionally, the topic of friendship makes the moral ideas around values accessible and relatable to younger learners who are beginning to discuss and develop these ideas within the school context. Despite this, like the Es and Os, the focus on being a good friend was implemented in three classes, and the same ideas and language were explored from Primary One to Three, which showed little progression in the learning through this topic. Furthermore, the discussion around friendship lends itself well to the school's five values: kindness, respect, honesty, inclusiveness, and fairness. Yet the notes from the Classroom Observation (12.05.23) reveal that while the friendship lesson ***'is based on the school's shared values…no link is made'***. This highlights that there is a potential for the Health and Wellbeing lessons to connect moral education to the wider school context, but these opportunities are being missed across all Levels of learning in the current practice. Hence, the links between Moral Education and Health and Wellbeing in the lower stages of the primary school are

more likely to be described as implicit, as the links to moral development are not made explicit to students either through the Learning Intentions or content of the lessons.

The unclear focus of moral education lessons is further evidenced in the upper stages of the primary school case study, where links to moral issues are often made to the Social Subjects. In these lessons, it was observed that the beginning of the learning often did have a moral element. For example, one lesson started by exploring the upbringing of Adolf Hitler and discussed the life events that may have impacted his values. From this, the ***teacher gets students to discuss who shapes their values, beliefs, and behaviours*** **(Classroom Observation, 22.05.23)**, which is explicit moral education where the learners are aware that they are discussing and reflecting on their own and others' moral values. However, during the main section of this, and all of the other lessons in the upper primary school, the focus moved away from moral education completely towards a focus on literacy skills such as summarising. A common pattern across the lessons was that the main activities became literacy-focused, and the moral component was missed. Continuing with the above example, the observational notes from the lesson stated that ***the activity was really literacy-focussed as pupils became concerned with summarising the key events in the text*** **(Classroom Observation, 22.05.23)**. The text selected for this lesson was from a Literacy textbook on Hitler, which was focused on summarising as the key skill, not a specific moral education resource. This shift in focus away from moral education was evidenced in all of the observed lessons, but the upper school became mainly focused upon developing Literacy skills, and the moral concepts were only discussed at the beginning of the lessons. Therefore, none of the observed lessons had a focus on moral issues or development from the beginning to the end of the learning experience, which means there were no 'moral education' lessons explicitly implemented or observed during these four months.

Finally, it is important to highlight that when RME was explicitly implemented as a subject not related to other curricular areas, the focus was mainly on religious festivals. Specifically in the lower stages of the primary school, the learning in this area focused on the topics of Easter and Ramadan, given the time of year the observations were conducted. In the lower primary school, the lessons were mainly focused on learning '*about*' the religious festivals through the retelling or

sequencing of stories. Again, the main section of the lessons related to creating a piece of art or literacy skills rather than the religious or moral aspects of the celebrations. Furthermore, in the upper stages of the primary school, one educator implemented an activity focussed on the Viking Gods, claiming it was ***an obvious RME lesson*** **(Classroom Observation, 04.05.23).** However, there was not a religious aspect to the lesson nor a moral component; students were tasked to research Viking Gods and fill in a 'fact file' on their chosen God/Goddess. During the lesson it was noted that ***pupils ended up confused over the Viking Gods and were asking if they were part of a religion*** **(Classroom Observation, 04.05.23).** Again, the lessons merge into literacy or crafts activities and the moral aspects and issues are either never discussed or lost halfway through the lesson. These examples highlight that even when RME lessons are explicitly implemented, the main focus is often confusing for the students or focused on learning *about* rather than learning *from* religion/festivals/celebrations.

5.3.3 Learning Activities and Pedagogies Used in 'Moral Education' Lessons

One of the themes from the lesson observations across the levels of learning highlighted that the relationship between educators and students was often hierarchical, and the activities were predominantly teacher-led. All eleven of the moral education lessons started similarly, were either a PowerPoint, a video or a story that was used to introduce the learning. As a primary teacher, the researcher understood that this was common practice in the school and highlights a shared doxa. But notes from the lesson observations state that during these initial activities, ***students [were] responding to questions posed by the teacher*** **(Classroom Observation, 10.05.23)**, which was common from the Early to Third Level classes. In one particular lesson, there was a missed opportunity to utilise students' own experiences in relation to the exploration of Ramadan. During this observation, the teacher used a video that explained some of the practices of the Islamic religion, but some pupils in the class related to this in their own daily lives, who began to share these experiences with the class. It was noted that ***this part of the lesson really highlighted that there was free discourse created by the video the teacher chose*** and that ***students…show[ed] genuine interest in what their peers were sharing from their own experiences*** **(Classroom Observation, 31.03.23).** Despite this, the teacher moved the conversation along and brought the class's attention back to a PowerPoint presentation, which highlights that

there was a missed opportunity to gain real understanding from the students in their class who practice these in their religion. This is one example of the lessons which were teacher-led from the outset with information being transmitted and there were minimal opportunities for learners to discuss their own ideas around the various moral issues that were being explore; but also, that students showed genuine interest when real experiences were being shared by their peers.

Furthermore, in the observed lessons where there was an exploration around the development of values, the teacher was viewed as a '*master*' during these discussions, as they had all of the knowledge that was being transmitted to students. In many of the lessons, it was noted that there was an explicit transmission of what values that were 'right' and 'wrong' with little room for students to reflect or debate these comments. For example, in one lesson around friendship, it was noted that ***explicit values like kindness and inclusiveness were being taught by the teacher*** **(Classroom Observation, 10.05.23),** but when the teacher asked for contributions from pupils, only certain words were chosen to be written on the board, which were ***encouraged by the teacher*** **(Classroom Observation, 10.05.23**). From this, it can be determined that there were pre-determined values that the teacher wished to explore during this lesson and that other values brought up by students wouldn't be discussed in-depth during this time. This idea around 'right' and 'wrong' was observed across all lesson observations, where the teacher would often tell students what behaviours or values would fall into these categories. However, one lesson highlighted that students are willing to question and challenge educators' ideas of what is right and wrong. In one lesson on slavery, the teacher had stated that it was not acceptable to own someone in society now, but a student responded that ***it's ok to own someone from adoption*** **(Classroom Observation, 16.05.23),** which the teacher had not expected as an answer, but opened up the opportunity to explore what 'owning' someone really meant. Overall, the eleven observations highlighted that values were often pre-determined by the educators for the lesson, and these were the main focus, regardless of others brought up by students, and that there were often clear definitions for 'right' and 'wrong' behaviours outlined by the teachers.

In some lessons, the main activity during the lesson was not focused on literacy but also did not include any moral development for students. In one First Level

lesson, the stimulus used was a book called 'The Rainbow Fish', which started conversations around what values 'good' friends show to one another. At first, these discussions were child-led and related to how certain values could be shown within the school and playground. However, the main learning activity required students ***to create a rainbow fish of their own using a template and tissue paper*** **(Classroom Observation, 04.05.23).** Not only did this activity not relate to moral education, values or being a good friend, but it was also not stimulating for students cognitively nor emotionally, and it was difficult to understand what skills, in moral education, this task was developing in students.

Finally, some of the tasks could be described as 'closed' where there were no opportunities for different answers to be explored; instead, there were right and wrong responses that students had to find. One lesson is a clear example of this, where students in the Second Level were exploring gender stereotypes in society now and in the past. Again, the main learning activity became literacy-focused, where students were asked to ***separate statements related to gender stereotypes into 'Equal' and 'Unequal'*** **(Classroom Observation, 27.04.23),** which required a lot of reading and sorting. But the main challenge with this activity was that the statements were either right or wrong; there were no statements that led to a discussion or debate amongst students. Having these closed questions, particularly in a moral education lesson, suggests again that there are correct and incorrect ways of acting and thinking that are being promoted by the educators rather than allowing students to explore and develop these ideas themselves. Therefore, the main learning activities that were observed during the moral education lessons had no moral component and often closed opportunities for discussions around the moral issues that were being explored.

5.3.4 Evidence of Progression in Moral Education

The lesson observations were also used to gain a further understanding of the evidence of progression that educators looked for or collated to demonstrate that moral development was part of their classroom activities. The plans, provided by class teachers, outlined what evidence they would be looking for in the 'moral education' lessons. It is important to note that of the eleven plans submitted, three did not state which evidence would be noted during the lesson. The teachers did not explain why they had not completed this aspect of the plan. Of the eight

remaining plans, there were twenty-four statements written about the types of evidence that would be collected during these lessons. However, over half of these comments stated that the evidence would be through forms of verbal discussion, explanation, or answers from students. Whilst this is a valid form of evidence, especially in relation to the exploration of moral issues, it does raise some challenges when making it a specific outcome of the lesson. For example, in one of the observed lessons, it was noted that ***not all pupils shared their facts, so questionable if all students met the first Learning Intention*** **(Classroom Observation, 22.03.23**). This was a common comment made across all of the lessons, which relates to the fact that during class discussions, the teacher cannot listen to every student's answer to the issues raised. One method that was used to try and tackle this issue was to implement '*Think, Pair, Share*' where students think individually, discuss their answer with a partner and then have the opportunity to explain their answer to the class. Even though students were able to verbalise their ideas and thoughts with someone else, there was still not evidence from the observations that the class teacher ensured progression in moral education was being made by each student.

In addition to the evidence section of the lesson plans, the educators also provided the Learning Intentions and Success Criteria for these observations, which are shared with pupils usually at the beginning of the class. For this section, all eleven observations included both the intentions and criteria. An interesting finding from this analysis showed that the most commonly used word in the teachers' success criteria for learning in moral education lessons was **'*explain*'**, which was stated five times, closely followed by **'*discuss*'** and **'*talk about*'**. This makes sense as teachers had also stated that the evidence mainly collected to show moral progression would be verbal, as discussed above. But it was also noted that the success criteria mentioned words such as **'*list*'**, **'*learn*'** and **'*sort*'** which are often associated with lower-order thinking. Despite this, two of the lessons included success criteria that stated students would **'*create*'** something, which could be argued to develop higher-order thinking skills. But in one of these lessons, the 'creation' required students to cut and stick pre-designed lanterns for Ramadan, which took around ten minutes to complete, and the rest of the lesson was colouring these in. So, although it seemed like higher-order thinking skills could be developed during the lesson, the observation of the task being carried out

highlighted that the activity itself did not use ideas from the moral education lesson nor challenge pupils to develop their thinking or values in any way.

In relation to progression in these observed lessons, the plenary was important as this is when the teacher ties the learning back to the Learning Intentions, Success Criteria and potentially identifies the next steps of learning. However, of the eleven lessons, only six plenaries were observed, as many classes ran out of time to carry out this part of the lesson. One of the challenges this presents is that it was not observed how the teachers brought the activities and learning back to the main learning outcomes. As previously mentioned, many of the lessons started with a moral aspect, but that was then lost during the main learning activities. In five of these lessons, it could not be determined if the attention was brought back to the moral components of the lesson. Additionally, it meant there was no record, in these classes, of the students and teacher identifying the next steps of their learning in moral education or determining if they had met the success criteria of the lesson. This provided an area of reflection around the formulaic process of lesson planning, which can include Learning Intentions, Success Criteria, and plenaries, as these elements may not always be a good thing in terms of the content of the lesson. In the six observed lessons that did include a plenary, one of the main conclusions that can be drawn from the notes was that these mainly acted as a recap of the answers from the main learning activities. For example, a Second Level lesson included a plenary where ***there was no 'assessment' of learning, it was a discussion around some of the statements*** **(Classroom Observation, 27.04.23),** where the discussion was mainly dominated by the teacher, who was going over the main learning activity. During this particular lesson, it was noted that ***no next steps were identified for the learning*** **(Classroom Observation, 27.04.23),** and this was the case for the other observed lessons. None of the plenaries that were observed related the learning to the moral aspect of the lesson or provided an opportunity for the students to reflect on what moral development they may have experienced from the activities. Although lesson plenaries are not the only time progression can be identified, they do provide an opportunity to round off the learning, bring back the main focus, and identify the next steps in the learning journey.

5.4 Implicit Implementation of Moral Education

In the current thesis, the researcher's observations were also used to collect data on the implicit implementation of moral education throughout the case study primary school. This aspect aimed to explore what and how moral values were being implemented through the life of the school by observing whole-school assemblies, the school and classroom environments, and extra-curricular activities. Altogether three assemblies were observed to understand the implicit implementation of moral education during the only moments each week where the whole-school community are gathered together. Researcher observations gathered data around the displays and layout of the school, which provided information on how the values are communicated in the school. Furthermore, there were notes collected on the extra-curricular activities taking place within the school that could be implementing moral values, such as the Eco-Committee and the International Fayre Day held at the school.

This section will discuss three sub-themes that outline how moral education was implicitly implemented in the primary school through the ethos and extra-curricular activities (Figure 7). The first of these will discuss the emphasis placed on the 'School Rules and Values' within the community through displays and verbal communication from staff. Secondly, 'Pupil Voice in Moral Education Activities' will be explored, which relates to the level of participation students have in the content of school assemblies, or input in the extra-curricular activities. Finally, there will be a discussion around the 'Extra-Curricular Activities and Moral Development', which relates to the school's display of their Eco-Committee and Family Grouping activities that include all students within the school to aid their moral progression.

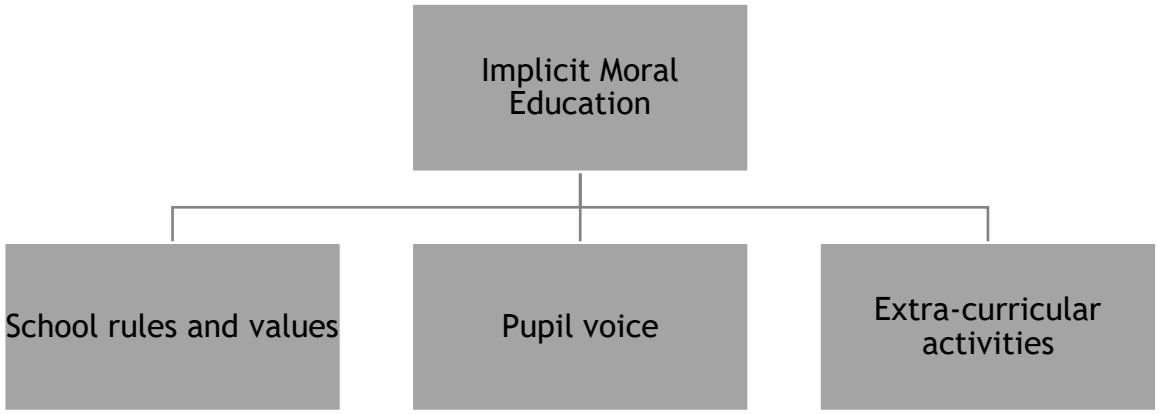

Figure 7 Implicit ME

5.4.1 School Values and Rules

A recurring theme across the observations from the school and classroom environments, as well as the assemblies, was that there was far more focus placed on the school's rules rather than the values that underpin their community. During the school environment observations, one of the most important areas that was focused on by the researcher was the entrance of the school, as this is the area that all visitors, staff, and pupils first come into contact with when they enter the school. Having worked in other primary schools, the researcher assumed that this section of the school is often what the school would like their community to embody, including their values. It was expected that the school's values would be present in this space as it is supposed to underpin the learning and teaching, and that this would be communicated to all who entered the school. However, the researcher's observations highlight that ***no school values are visible anywhere in the school entrance where visitors, staff and parents see regularly*** **(School Observation, 06.06.23).** Yet, it is also recorded that ***there are two posters, made by students, which display the school rules: ready, respectful, and safe***. Reference to the school's rules is made several times in the researcher's notes in describing the entrance of the school. This emphasises that the immediate impression from the entrance is that the school rules are the most important, as the values are not even visible to members of the community. Despite this, the school's rules do include one value (respect), so it can also be understood that

this is the only value that is important to the school and for pupils to develop, which raises questions around the importance or relevance of the other four values that are stated by the school (honesty, kindness, inclusiveness, and fairness). Therefore, it is clear from the entrance of the school that the school's values are not prioritised within the community, as they are not even visible to those who enter the school, yet the rules have been referenced more than once within this space.

Within the classrooms, the researcher's observations also included notes about the displays that included moral education and values and highlighted that there was more weighting given to the school rules. For example, only two of the classrooms had some form of class charter in their displays, whilst all six had posters relating to the rules. One of the class charters in the lower primary school displayed various statements relating to expected behaviour in the classroom, including ***share with others***, ***walk in class***, ***take care of property*** **(School Observations, 06.06.23)**, which does contain the promotion of certain values and behaviours. But the observational notes also stated that this class charter was located ***at the back of the class***, ***behind a door*** **(School Observation, 06.06.23)** and was difficult for the researcher to see. This highlights that although there is a class charter, it is almost viewed as a 'tick box' exercise to be able to say that there is one in the class. Its accessibility to students is questionable, as it is located in an area that is not often viewed by the students or where the teacher can regularly reference the statements in the charter. Additionally, the class charter was taken from a popular online teaching resource website, which had been printed and displayed by the teacher. The challenge with this is that it does not show the school's values that are relevant within this specific context; they are more generalised statements that could be applied to any school. This was similar in another class charter within the upper primary school, including posters made by the students stating, **'*be kind*'** and **'*no swearing*' (School Observation, 06.06.23**). Again, these statements are around behaviours that are acceptable or unacceptable to that particular classroom, but no posts are stating the five school values. These, being the only two class charters, highlight that there is arguably no consistency across the school relating to the communication of the values; teachers are creating their own expectations of behaviours rather than using the five values of the school.

From the six classroom environment observations, two classrooms had some displays that mentioned the school's values that could be viewed by students in their class. This is positive on one hand as it shows that some educators are trying to incorporate the school's values into their class's ethos and environment. On the other hand, the displays did not show the values that the school have chosen to be shared in their community. For example, one classroom did have a display which was titled '***Our School Values***' and was presented at the very front of the class, where students would easily be able to view the display daily and could be used as a reference by the teacher. Unfortunately, the observational notes from this display also stated that it had ***three words: ready, respectful, safe (School Observation, 06.06.23)***. Under the 'Values' display, the teacher had actually inadvertently stated the school's rules. This suggests that the communication to staff about the school's values is lacking, as educators are displaying the rules instead, which suggests there is confusion between rules and values amongst the staff. Also, this leads to confusion for the students as they are being told the school values are one thing, and then information around the rules is being displayed in their classroom under this heading. One classroom did have the school's five values displayed in their classroom correctly, but this was around the size of an A4 sheet of paper, which may have been difficult for students to view. This example shows that there is an attempt to communicate the school's values, but the size of the display subliminally suggests the importance given to this area when compared to the big wall displays dedicated to Literacy and Numeracy within the class. This highlights that the confusion around the definition of the school rules and values, as well as the priority given to their displays, can be problematic for educators and students; there is clear miscommunication of what the school's values are within the community, yet the rules are very well established in the school environment.

Finally, the verbal communication of the school values was not observed through the whole-school assemblies. This weekly activity provides an opportunity for all students and teachers in the school to explore ideas and topics as a school community. It was expected that the assemblies would include discussions around the school's values from the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Despite this, the researcher's observations from the three assemblies suggested that the content of these was predominantly focused on discussions around the behaviour policy, where the headteacher would remind students about being safe and

respectful within their school. For example, one assembly discussed the issue that some pupils had been stating that boys were better than girls at sports, and so the Senior Management Team made the assembly focus on equality. But observational notes from the researcher stated that ***equality is not one of the school's values – it could have related to inclusiveness or fairness*** **(Assembly Observation, 26.05.23),** which shows that the topics being explored in the assemblies could relate to the values underpinning the school, but that they were missed opportunities to communicate these to students. One of the most important observations in relation to the assemblies relates to the displays within this space. As mentioned, this is a time where the whole school comes together once a week, but nowhere in this space are the school's values displayed, yet the rules are clearly shown on the wall. Again, this shows what is important within the school where rules are communicated verbally and through displays, which are more frequent and clearer than the values. Nowhere are the values made evident within the community, which has a significant impact on the implicit implementation of moral education, as it has not been observed through the school's environment or whole-school assemblies.

5.4.2 Pupil Voice in Whole School Moral Education Activities

When it comes to the creation of the school's values and the communication of these within the school, it has been argued in the past that pupil voice has often been forgotten (Halstead and Taylor, 1996); but more recent research has stated that "children need to be regarded as active, competent and vocal members of society" (Maitles and Deucahr, 2006: 251). This suggests that pupil voices should be heard when it comes to the creation of the values as well as their implementation, which has been an interesting theme within the current thesis. In relation to the whole-school assemblies, there were areas where pupil voice was either supported or missed. The first of these is the observations made on the displays within this space. There was a clear display of work that was student-led by students in the upper school, which showed a development of their values within the community. Their project involved the students recognising that the school playgrounds were not accommodating for all pupils in the school, especially those who have additional support needs, where overstimulation can be a result of these environments. To tackle this, the pupils were made aware of a funding opportunity to develop a safe space in their school garden and that they would

have to present this work in front of a panel, with other schools competing for the funding. The group of students were successful, and their project was displayed in the school assembly hall. This project is a great example of students using their voices to make decisions within their school, but it also shows the implicit moral development. These students recognised that the playgrounds were not fair or inclusive to all members of the school's community, and they used their voice to make a change within their school that would impact not only their class, but classes who would follow them in the future. This relation to the school's values and the project was implicitly displayed within the assembly space, but no explicit links were made to these specific values.

Despite this implicit display of pupil voice and moral development projects, there were other missed opportunities to highlight similar activities or work throughout the school. In the assembly hall, across all three observations, there was a display board entitled ***'Pupil Voice',*** which could be assumed to mean that work that evidenced pupil voice and decision-making within the school would be displayed here. However, each of the observations stated that this display board was blank, no information or images were added to the 'Pupil Voice' display, and it was left empty for the whole-school community to see. Unfortunately, this suggests that either there was no evidence of pupil voice to be displayed on this board or that the work was not a priority to display. This is relevant in relation to the implicit implementation of moral development as it suggests that pupil voice is not important within the school, and that decisions around the values are made with a top-down approach, with little or no pupil voice included.

5.4.3 Extra-Curricular Activities and Moral Education

During the school observations, there were two main extra-curricular activities that were identified as potentially implementing moral education implicitly within the primary school. These were selected as the researcher had previously worked in the school as a primary teacher and knew of the extracurricular activities within the case study school. The first of these was that the school had an Eco-Committee, and a display of their work was presented in the main foyer where other students, teachers and visitors could see. In this committee, there are pupils from all stages of the school who are involved in the reduce, reuse, recycle message being promoted. There was information on the board that shows the Eco-Committee were involved in starting an initiative to reduce the amount of food

wastage at lunch times as well as carrying out litter-picking duties during lunchtimes to evidence the level of waste being left on the ground, and the impact of this behaviour. Through these activities, students were showing their school's values of kindness and respect in their own school context, but with a recognition of how this impacts wider global values. This also links back to the statement around pupils being regarded as "active, competent and vocal members of society" (Maitles and Deuchar, 2006: 251), as the students in this group have been shown to exercise their collective voice to make changes within the school. Furthermore, the development of an Eco-Committee supports students' moral development as it raises awareness around issues like looking after the well-being of animals, ideas around the destruction and preservation of the environment, and the impact of our actions on future generations (Wagner, 2018). This activity is also potentially beneficial as it includes students from across the school stages, meaning that pupils are hearing varying degrees of perspectives when discussing these issues, which could lead to more effective moral reasoning and development based on co-operative rather than hierarchical relationships.

The second display, also presented in the main foyer, provided information on the school's Family Grouping activity. This approach is built upon the Australian model of Family Grouping based on "organising children of different age levels into the one class group" (Education Department Tasmania, n.d.). In the case study school, pupils from each primary would be included in one group with a 'captain' from Primary Seven and a 'team captain' from Primary Six. The idea behind this was to explore different issues based on the school's values each week, which was planned and led by the captains. This is to acknowledge that 'language and social and moral development are not best served when pupils spend almost all their school lives in contact with those of their own age' (Education Department Tasmania, n.d.). The Family Groups are based around students learning from and supporting other students who are at different ages and stages of learning. Like the Eco-Committee, this supports the development of morality with a focus on peer-led learning and means that a range of moral perspectives can be discussed within the group, with more developed reasoning from the older students. Family Grouping provides an opportunity to explore the school's specific values and ensure pupil voice in this learning.

Even though both of these extra-curricular areas provide the spaces and opportunities for students to implicitly develop their moral values as well as exercise their pupil voice, there was a significant challenge identified during the researcher's observations. The information on both of these displays was outdated by two years. Some of the pupils who had been shown in the photographs had left the school community to go to high school, and the activities carried out in both groups were carried out at least two years before the observation. After seeing this, the researcher discovered that the teacher who set up the Eco-Committee was no longer a member of staff at the school, and no one else had carried on the activities. Interestingly, it was noted that both of these extra-curricular activities were displayed in the main foyer for all visitors to see, which would imply that these are areas of importance to the school and that they are proud to show to the community. However, the significantly outdated information suggests a different perspective. It shows that these activities are not made a priority in the school, or at least it is not a priority to update the information. Yet, these displays remain to perhaps give the impression that they are carried out within the school or highlight that the staff have not had time because of other pressures. Therefore, both the Eco-Committee and Family Grouping have implicitly implemented moral education across the school, but there is no evidence to support that this has occurred in the year of case study observation.

5.5 Document Analysis

The final data collection tool used in the current thesis was document analysis to further understand the implicit or explicit moral education being implemented through the case study school's policies. Relevant documents were initially collected based on conversations with the Senior Management Team during the semi-structured interviews, as they were asked what documents they believed to be relevant to moral education implementation. From this, another stage of document collection occurred through a 'snowballing' method discussed in '*5.5. Document Analysis'*. The main documents, stated by some of the interviewees, were analysed, and any other documents that were mentioned here that were relevant were then collected and analysed. Altogether, four main documents have been included in the analysis section, which mention the school's values: the School Improvement Plan, Curriculum Design policy, Relationships Policy, and the school's values section found on their website.

5.6 Moral Education in the School's Policies

The documents were analysed in the same way as the semi-structured interviews and researcher observations, following the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). The thematic approach of analysis meant that initial codes could be identified across the four documents, and broader themes could be used to explore how moral education is implicitly or explicitly communicated through these policies and frameworks (Figure 8). The first sub-theme from this analysis relates to the case study's 'School's Vision, Values, and Rules', and how these are communicated to the school community. It highlights that the rules in the school are more clearly expressed and emphasised through these documents than the school's values. Secondly, the 'Implicit Moral and Explicit Religious Education' will discuss how educators within the primary school should be exploring moral issues implicitly in their classrooms. Additionally, there is still a focus on the religious rather than moral aspect of this curricular area evidenced in this document analysis, which has implications for the implementation of the subject. The final sub-theme highlights that there is a 'Top-Down Approach to Values and Rules' within the school documents. In particular, the specific language used across all four of the documents suggests that there is a hierarchical approach to the implementation of the school's values and rules, which comes from the educators and is seen as a transmission to the students. This also emphasises the views around and the importance of pupil voice in the creation of these values, which underpin the school's community.

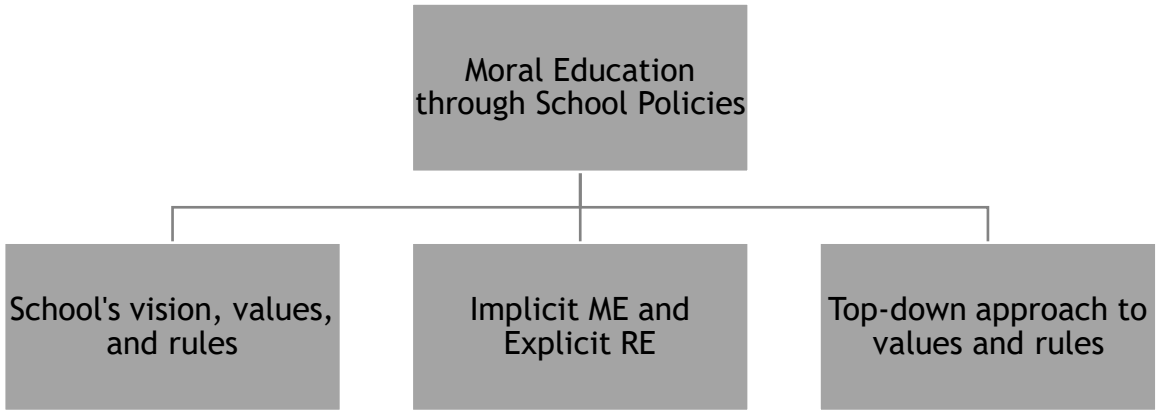

Figure 8 Moral Education Through School Policies

5.6.1 School's Vision, Values, and Rules

In most primary schools across Scotland, there are usually underpinning values and visions that guide actions, shape behaviours, and ultimately create a school's ethos. These aims are less focused on the academic side of development and more concerned with creating an overall ethos within the school community. One author states that the school's vision "should help inform and guide moral development of students" and that "it is values which sustain vision" (Ungoed-Thomas, 1996: 146-148). Having well-defined visions and values school can be perceived as essential for underpinning the moral development that occurs implicitly within the school's community. But this process of creating school values can also be viewed as a performative task, as it is also suggested that schools should create a positive ethos.

The main document that discussed the case study school's visions and values was their School Improvement Plan, which outlined areas of success and development for the current academic year. Having in worked in primary schools, the researcher had previous knowledge that the School Improvement Plan could be informative. This document had a clearly defined section where the school's vision and values could be outlined and described to all members of staff. Yet the only reference made to the values stated: '***we value honesty, fairness, kindness, respect and inclusiveness***'. This sentence does not provide enough information

about the school's values for any member of staff; it simply states the values, which are not useful in a practical sense. It highlights the amount of information missing from this section to inform members of staff about the importance of the values in the school's community. Additionally, it evidently lacks professional reflection on how the values were created or how they have been implemented throughout the school year; there is no indication of what has gone well in relation to moral development through the values or what their next steps for development are in the next year. The school had not identified any activities or events that particularly addressed their five values, even though the students' garden project did show inclusion and kindness. Nor had they shown any indication of what values may be important to students in the next academic year that they could work on through explicit or implicit opportunities. Another point relates to the school's vision, and again, this emphasises information missing as there is no vision stated in the document. Instead, the school provides an aim to ***'raise attainment'*** which is clearly based on an academic focus rather than promoting moral development. The lack of providing a vision or clear information around the values within the school can have a significant impact on how they are implemented both implicitly and explicitly. It is, therefore, completely up to individual educators how they interpret these values rather than having a shared understanding, which could lead to confusion and inconsistencies around the school's values and implementation.

Another finding from the document analysis emphasised the fact that the school's rules were more frequently communicated compared to the values. This was shown through both the layout and content of the documents. For example, the school's website has a page dedicated to their values, which would suggest that the main focus of this public page would be to describe and outline the values that underpin their community. However, the layout of the webpage directs the reader's eye specifically to the rules of the school as it is written in a much larger font and centralised on the page. The three rules are then expanded on with a little more information provided on what these mean in practice. In contrast, the school's values are simply stated at the very top of the page, with no other information around what these look like within their school or community. Yet, the page also states that ***'everything we do is based on our values'***. This highlights the difference between what is being said to the public versus what is being carried out within the school itself, as there has been a continuous theme

showing that the rules seem to be what everything is based on, rather than the values. To emphasise this point more, one document that provides a full overview of the curriculum, goals, and background of the school was analysed to understand how the school's values are communicated to the staff. In this document, the school's values are stated near the top of the document, but significantly, one of the values is missing. This document is missing the school value of ***'fairness',*** which highlights the lack of importance in communicating these within the community, as whoever reads this particular document is not being informed of all the school's values.

One of the documents collected for analysis was the school's Relationship Policy, as it was stated on their website, under the values page, that a main priority was to ***'build positive relationships, every day'***. Before analysis, it was assumed by the researcher that the values would be referenced in this policy based on the information from the school's website. However, on the first page of this document, it clearly states that ***'at the core of our relationship policy are our three school rules: we are ready, we are respectful, we are safe'***. Again, this solidifies the evidence that the values do not underpin everything that is done within the case study primary school; it is the rules. These three rules are promoted clearly and frequently through the documents that are read by various stakeholders and members of the school community. Again, this confuses the terms as the website suggests that the values underpin the development of relationships within the school, yet the policy clearly states a different message. Within the Relationships Policy, there is no reference to the values anywhere in the document, which is surprising since relationships between students and all members of staff will have a moral aspect, even if this is implicit. In each interaction, individuals show moral behaviour such as being kind, fair, honest, inclusive, and respectful, so it is notable that none of these terms are linked to the development of ***'positive relationships'*** within this document. Across all four documents that were analysed in the current thesis, it is clear that there is an emphasis placed on the promotion of the rules rather than values. The undefined vision and interchangeable language between rules and values confuse the documents, and therefore, the message being sent to the school's community.

5.6.2 Implicit Moral and Explicit Religious Education

The implementation of moral education within the primary school is implicitly mentioned through the School Improvement Plan (SIP) under the heading of **'*ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion*'**. In this section of the document, there are statements that are meant to outline the areas for improvement during the academic year, and there is a reference to moral issues. For example, the SIP states that there should be **'*opportunities for staff to plan for anti-racist lessons and opportunities to promote the Black Lives Matter Campaign*',** which highlights that there is a recognition for this type of education to be incorporated more effectively in the school. Additional topics are outlined, like **'*gender*'** and **'*LGBTQ issues*',** which are potentially areas that could be used to develop moral reasoning and discussion. Even though these are topics that could be used as vehicles to implement moral education, this is not made clear in the document and no further guidance is provided to support educators with incorporating these issues in their classrooms of different ages and stages. Furthermore, stating that the school will approach topics like Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ, whilst very important, it could be argued that these are very topical in the media and society, so it would have to be determined if these were 'just words' to seem like the school is covering moral issues. But, from the researcher's observations of classroom moral education lessons, none of the educators decided to explore any of the topics stated in the School Improvement Plan, so it cannot be determined from this whether these areas were actually being explored in the case study school. Despite this, there is an implicit discussion in this document that these issues should be explored in the school, and that this is a current area for development that the school staff are working towards.

Another aspect of the School Improvement Plan also highlighted that there is still a focus on the religious side of this curricular area, leading to RmE rather than RME in its implementation. In this document, one of the goals for the school staff was to ***develop an agreed annual calendar for festivals and*** **celebrations,** which directly relates to the religious part of RME. This is important to discuss for two reasons. The first is that having this shared calendar of festivals and celebrations provides a schedule for educators to follow, which could lead to RME only being implemented during these periods of the year. This could be one explanation as to why the lesson observations included four lessons that related

to religious celebrations, since all educators in the school are basing their knowledge on the same information. It also continues to highlight that RE is being emphasised in the school's curriculum over moral education. Secondly, this statement strongly suggests that those who are creating this calendar are members of staff, and particularly the teachers. This relates to an earlier point made around pupil voice, where research has shown that including students in these types of decisions can have a positive impact on moral development (Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008; Maitles and Deuchar, 2006; Taylor, 1996). Including the pupils in the creation of this shared calendar would empower students, build on their own experiences, and incorporate their beliefs and cultures within the school. As previously mentioned, the pupil and teacher populations are contrasting as the student demographic has much more diversity in terms of beliefs and cultures; this is a resource available to the teachers that could be utilised in RME but is currently being overlooked. Furthermore, the students without religious beliefs are also being missed as RME is currently being used to explore festivals and celebrations related to this aspect of the curricular area. Whereas the moral part could be used to explore issues that have no connections to religion to support moral development for all pupils, irrespective of beliefs. However, current practice follows a shared calendar, created by educators, which has a clear focus on teaching about religious festivals and celebrations at certain times of the academic year.

5.6.3 Top-Down Approach to Values and Rules

When analysing the four documents in relation to the implementation of moral education, one sub-theme that emerged was that there was often a top-down approach implied through the language that was consistently used across these policies and frameworks. One thing to note is that, in the documents, there was very little information provided on how the school values are implemented throughout the life of the school, which has been previously discussed. This section will mainly focus on the information provided on how the school rules are communicated, promoted, and transmitted to students. However, Schimmel (2003) discusses that the school's rules are part of the hidden curriculum, which has an impact on students' moral and behavioural development, where the inclusion of students in this process can have a positive impact, whilst a lack of pupil voice can undermine the goals of moral education. Therefore, although not

explicitly related to the school's values, understanding how the rules are implemented can give an insight into how the implicit moral goals of the school are communicated to students.

As it has been previously discussed in the document analysis section of this sub-chapter, there is an assumption being made that the documents have been created by the members of staff within the school, and the specific language gives that impression. For example, the school's website states that ***'we have three simple rules… that pupils follow in order to make our school the best place it can be'***. In this statement, it can be interpreted that the '***we***' is in reference to the school staff who have clear expectations of what they expect in the school in terms of behaviour and that '***pupils follow'*** these rules. This sentence on its own seems to separate the idea of the pupil population from this '***we***', which could be the school or specifically the staff. It highlights the same theme that students have no voice in this aspect of the school life; rules have been chosen by someone else, and they are just transmitted to the pupils. However, Thornberg (2006) emphasises that this approach to the implementation of the school rules "can hardly promote and empower pupils to develop democratic skills and more complex moral reasoning" (p. 91). Already, this begins to highlight the top-down approach of the expectations of how students should be in the school from the staff, and how this is being communicated through the life of the school. Although this does also highlight the pragmatic side of rules, as schools may be viewed as a place where students are expected to follow certain expectations set by educators.

Furthermore, the Relationships Policy also gives a strong sense that there are rules and expectations around how students behave that are transmitted through a very top-down approach, where the staff are seen as those who create and implement the rules. Again, the specific language used within this policy highlights this point: ***'we highlight desired behaviour to the class… we celebrate in public and reprimand in private'***. Similar to the school's website, this document uses the term '***we***', which seems to separate those who create the rules from those who are expected to follow them. This policy explicitly states that there is ***'desired behaviour'*** which is communicated to students, this is clearly a top-down approach as students are not described as being part of any of this process other than those receiving the information. In addition, it also becomes evident that

there is no democratic aspect to this; if students do not follow the rules put into place by teachers, then there will be consequences. However, there could be an argument for more behaviour and values setting in the lower years of the primary school, to set appropriate expectations within the school setting. But having this approach to the implementation of school rules or values can be ineffective as "adults are less interested in discovering *how* children are thinking than in telling them *what* to think" (Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977: 57). Overall, this Relationships Policy only highlights that the relationships relating to behaviour and expectations in the school are, on paper, authoritative with vertical transmissions of the school rules with no room for pupil voice or critical thinking.

5.7 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter was split into two main sections: findings from the researcher's observations and from the document analysis. Both of these were used to gain a further understanding of how moral education is implicitly and explicitly implemented in the case study primary school.

The lesson observations provided information as to how moral education was taught by educators in the current practice, either as a stand-alone subject or through other curricular areas. It also observed the planning process of using the Experiences and Outcomes, implementing the lesson, and gathering evidence of pupil progression in moral education. The theme 'Explicit Planning and Implementation of Moral Education' highlighted that educators' use of the CfE Es and Os was limited, impacting the breadth of learning in this curricular area. Additionally, the 'moral education' lessons that were observed rarely had a moral focus and frequently became based around the development of literacy skills like summarising or re-telling stories. Some of the lessons even lacked a focus in general, with students encouraged to create craft activities where the progression of development in moral education was not clear to the researcher. Overall, evidence of progression in the moral education lessons was poor; for example, the observed lessons did not have a plenary, and when there was one, it did not relate the learning to values or moral issues in the lesson.

Researcher observations also aimed to understand the 'Implicit Implementation of Moral Education' through the school's environment, how the values were communicated within the community, either with displays or during whole-school

assemblies, and how extra-curricular activities support moral development. These observations found that there was a large emphasis on the school's rules rather than values; these were frequently displayed around the school and in classrooms, yet no value displays were found. During whole-school assemblies, the rules were communicated by the Senior Management Team, with connections to the school's values lacking. Furthermore, pupil participation was observed, which found that more opportunities were available to students in the upper school to have their voices heard through community work. However, there were very limited opportunities observed with a lack of Pupil Council noted within this school. The extra-curricular activities in the school were observed through displays only, as the activities were not being implemented at the time of data collection. There were two main activities identified: an Eco-Committee and Family Grouping. Limited information was collected around these, as the displays were outdated and only showed what had been done in previous years.

Finally, the second sub-chapter focused on the findings from the document analysis, where the documents were collected from the semi-structured interviews with the senior management team. Again, the school's policies showed a dominance of the school rules and little mention was given to the values. In one document, one of the five values was missing, which highlights that the values are often overlooked within the school. It was also found that the documents included a whole-school calendar for religious celebrations and festivals. This suggests that the school places a greater focus on the 'religious' aspect of RME, with moral education gaining less importance in the curriculum. Document analysis also showed that there is a tendency, within the school, to focus on behavioural rules and expectations based on consequences and praise. This top-down approach suggests that there is a level of obedience in the school, rather than a collaborative discussion around why students follow these expectations and values.

Chapter 6 : Synthesis and Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The current chapter provides a discussion of the findings through the exploration of the main synthesis groupings. Each will have a 'Synthesis' section bringing together the three data strands and triangulating the findings to highlight where some areas may be corroborated or contrasted (Yin, 2003). The more open-ended nature of the semi-structured interviews provided an in-depth insight into how educators understand and implement moral education in their current practice (Cohen et al., 2018). It was also important to reflect on the fact that sometimes what individuals said may be different to what they did in practice (Mulhall, 2002). Researcher observations were conducted in moral education lessons to understand how this curricular area was planned, implemented, and progressed across the stages of the primary school. Additional observations of the school's environment provided more data around the 'hidden' moral education curriculum where "activities, interactions, and expectations may escape awareness among the people in the setting" (Patton, 2015: 333). Finally, document analysis was a third data strand used to understand how the school communicates their values to stakeholders, as well as how moral education may underpin some of the policies in this context. Overall, these three data strands will provide a clearer understanding of how moral education is implicitly and explicitly implemented in a case study, non-denominational primary school in Scotland.

The second section of each main synthesis grouping will be a 'Discussion' of the main findings from the data strands. These sections will aim to share the "interpretations of [the] data analysis" (Felix and Smith, 2019: 161). Each of the discussions will be split into sub-groupings to explore, in more detail, how these findings contribute or relate to the existing academic literature. Furthermore, it will also recognise some of the areas which are not present in other studies and outline the unique findings from the current thesis.

6.2 Main Groupings

The first main synthesis grouping, 'Moral Education: Educators' Definitions', will discuss the collective findings from the three data strands, which suggest that many educators believe moral development is defined by making decisions

between right and wrong. Additionally, it was suggested that morality can be linked to citizenship education, based on educators' previous teaching experience. Furthermore, in terms of practice, the data strands found that Continuing Professional Development opportunities in moral education were not provided or undertaken by the participating educators, which significantly impacts their explicit implementation of this subject.

The second titled 'Big R, little m' outlines the lack of priority given to the moral aspect of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in the case-study primary school. These findings showed that the balance between the R and M in RME is unequal, with far more emphasis placed on teaching about religions. The data strands highlighted that there was a focus on teaching about religious festivals and celebrations. However, it was also discussed that this approach is having a negative impact within the school. Educators explained that it is, at times, exclusive of other religions and tokenistic, as well as having no opportunities for students to develop their moral values without reference to religious beliefs.

In the third grouping, 'The 'Core' Curriculum', there will be discussion around the performative Curriculum for Excellence and its impact on moral education implementation. The three data collection methods showed that there was a consistent focus placed on Literacy, Numeracy, and Health and Wellbeing. This has been in response to the educational policies put into place in Scotland. It was highlighted that the focus placed on these three curricular areas has led to moral education being squeezed out of timetables and disrupted the Curriculum for Excellence.

Next, the 'Explicit Implementation of Cross-Curricular Moral Education' will be explored to understand how moral education was linked to other curricular areas within the case study primary school. The observations showed that the main areas teachers would link with moral education were Health and Wellbeing and Social Studies. But across all, there was also a clear link made to Literacy, which overshadowed the moral aspect of the lessons. The pedagogical approaches were also observed during these lessons, which relied upon teacher-led lessons which developed lower-order-thinking skills.

Finally, 'Moral Education Through the Implicit Curriculum' outlines the ways moral education was implicit through certain aspects of the school's life and ethos. The

three data strands found that educators were unaware of the implicit moral education curriculum. In the creation of the school's values, it was clear that they were outdated and based on 'trending' educational terms rather than on what related to the context of the students. Additionally, there was evidence that more priority was placed on the promotion and communication of the rules rather than values, which has implications for the hidden moral education.

6.3 Synthesis – Moral Education: Educators' Definitions

One of the most common understandings of moral education, discussed by all of the interviewees, was that it is about making choices between right and wrong. Some interviewees stated that students face moral decisions in school and in their everyday lives, so it is important to explore these moral issues to equip students with critical thinking and reasoning skills. Yet it was also expressed that moral decision-making is not always 'black and white' as there can be some issues which have 'grey areas' with no clear answer. Educators suggested that these should be discussed and debated in classrooms to gain different perspectives and respect alternative ways of thinking. Additionally, there was an understanding that moral values can change or be impacted by context, culture, and historical timing. Therefore, the educators' discussion around the development of values was that they are flexible and context-dependent.

Another finding, from particularly more experienced teachers, was that moral education can be linked to citizenship. Some interviewees expressed that moral values were key to developing amongst students as they are active citizens within Scotland, so it is important to teach about respect, tolerance, and acceptance. With interviewees being less experienced and having not implemented the 5-14 curriculum, these views were not expressed. These findings show that teachers' understanding of the definition of moral education can also be influenced by their own experiences and education, which is important to consider in relation to Curriculum for Excellence.

A significant finding here relates to the Continuing Professional Development opportunities available to and undertaken by the educators. Through the semi-structured interviews, it was found that educators significantly lacked formal moral education training, which impacts their ability to define and understand this curricular area. During the interviews, participants expressed a certain level

of content knowledge, which suggested that moral education is about the development of values, understanding different moral perspectives, and doing this through debates or discussions. However, this content knowledge was being limited by their curricular knowledge; unfortunately, in practice, the educators did not show a deep understanding of what resources or topics to explore in moral education, so they fell back to a curriculum where they felt clear guidelines were provided on at least some aspects. Yet, the participants explained that terms like 'values' and 'moral education' feature in Curriculum for Excellence, but that no one has ever explained what is meant by these, and they have been expected to implement this subject with no clearly defined knowledge of what these terms mean. Additionally, practitioners explained that they lacked knowledge around the Experiences and Outcomes related to moral education. This became clear in the observed lessons, where lesson plans were provided by educators, as there were times RME Es and Os were not even provided. During the semi-structured interviews, the teachers explained that they had not undertaken explicit Religious and Moral training in their recent practice, with an extreme example stating that they had not had training in over twenty years. Interestingly, some interviewees discussed that implicit moral education training could take place through other areas or topics. This was evidenced in some of the collected documents, which stated that staff should have training in Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ+ issues, but not one interviewee mentioned that they had done this. Therefore, the current thesis found a significant gap which exists in moral education training for primary school educators and their understanding of what 'moral education' means.

6.4 Discussion – Moral Education: Educators' Definitions

6.4.1 Educators' Views on Moral Development

Commonly it was understood by educators that moral education is based around the idea of making choices between right and wrong when faced with moral dilemmas. The perspective is similar to that of the cognitive-developmentalist theory around moral development which is based on reasoning (Kohlberg, 1969). According to this theory, reasoning is students' ability to justify their choices when faced with a moral situation through opportunities to reflect on their choices as well as experience other perspectives (Walker and Thoma, 2017; Kohlberg, 1975). However, some interviewees also discussed that there are 'grey areas' when there are no clear right or wrong answers. In these situations, the one interviewee

explained that sometimes values can 'trump' one another depending on the situation. They gave the example of inclusion, where it could be a priority in one situation, but honesty may be prioritised in another. According to the literature, this would relate to moral relativism where "the truth of moral claims is relative to… context at which the claim is made" (Pérez-Navarro, 2022: 50). The time, culture, historical period, environment, and context of when we face a moral dilemma can impact which values are prioritised by individuals. The literature also recognises that students should be aware of how values in society can change (Schwartz, 2012; Halstead and Pike, 2006) which was shown in some of the observed lessons. Some educators did discuss that slavery and corporal punishment were once features in societies that are no longer accepted within our current ways of living. Therefore, educators' understanding that moral values are about making decisions when faced with a dilemma has been explored within the current literature, and it can have an impact on their own explicit practice.

Additionally, the terminology relating to moral education in the academic literature and educational policies has been described as a 'semantic minefield' by Berkowitz (2012b). This was found in the current research as educators mentioned citizenship when discussing their implementation of moral education, stating that it is about how students learn to live in Scottish society. Biesta (2008) highlights that 'citizenship' is directly mentioned in Curriculum for Excellence through the four capacities. But there are debates around what is meant by 'responsible citizen' as McIntosh and McLauchlan (2022) question whether the purpose is "to make society more fair, to bring conformity and obedience or to ask hard questions of politicians and society" (p. 19). Furthermore, Biesta (2008) also explains that there were many citizenship documents created and implemented around the period of 2002. This is significant as the only interviewees who mentioned citizenship in relation to moral education were those who had implemented the 5-14 curriculum. Therefore, educators' previous experiences of different curricula and policies have shaped their current understanding of moral education which is important to recognise as their implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence may be impacted by this, compared to colleagues who have only experienced and implemented the current curriculum.

6.4.2 Curricular and Content Knowledge of Moral Education

One finding consistent across the data strands was the lack of curricular knowledge educators' had around moral education, and how this impacted their practice. A study carried out by Clanachan and Matemba (2015) discussed the role of content knowledge in practitioners' confidence in teaching RME within Scotland, stating that teachers felt less confident in their abilities when they lacked sufficient knowledge around the religions they were exploring. This idea has been explored by other scholars who have also suggested that when educators have poor subject knowledge, it directly impacts the effectiveness of the lessons within RME (Conroy et al., 2013; McCreery et al., 2008). It has found that there are areas of strength in some cases where teachers have a personal connection to certain religious beliefs or have a stronger knowledge of some religions compared to others (Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Conroy et al., 2013). But this body of literature focuses on teachers' confidence and subject knowledge in relation to their teaching about religions. During these interviews, all of the participants shared an understanding that this curricular area is based on the development of values and could identify that discussion and debate would be effective approaches (Mammen et al., 2019), but were unsure how these 'values' were defined. The lack of knowledge could be described as educators' curricular knowledge which, discussed in section '*2.4.1. Direct Moral Education Teaching*', has been suggested by Shulman (1987; 1986) as an understanding of the formal topics, resources and syllabus in school subjects. In the present thesis, participants expressed that there was a lack of knowledge around using the tools within moral education such as the CfE supporting documents and which resources to support moral development. The existing literature around RME has not yet explored what curricular knowledge Scottish educators have in relation to moral development, and how this impacts their implementation of moral education in primary schools. Therefore, the current thesis contributes to the literature by articulating this.

Often, Continuing Professional Development can be understood as the formal opportunities planned and organised by the school or council which are explicitly related to the curricular areas to teach the current and future classrooms (Kennedy et al., 2023; Fraser et al., 2007; McKinney, et al., 2005). But Livingston (2012) explained how formal training opportunities in Scotland have become

reliant upon school-based training as there have been budget cuts in this areas since the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence. Despite this, one of the benefits of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that educators moved online for CPD which has arguably expanded networks to international colleagues as well as bridging the gap between practitioners and policy makers (Kennedy, 2022). However, the idea that moral education training has not been undertaken by educators existed long before the global pandemic as Education Scotland's (2014) RME impact report stated that teachers had "not got round to Religious and Moral Education" training (p. 34). This is a significant concern as one interviewee expressed that since the introduction of CfE, no formal training was provided in relation to RME and has left them with confusion around what this subject is. As a way to combat this, the educators explained that they would rely upon outdated resources such as the citizenship programme introduced over fifteen years ago (Biesta, 2008) or revert back to the 5-14 guidelines which provided, in their opinion, clearer expectations for this subject. Another interviewee explained that their RME input was cancelled during the pandemic and never rescheduled, meaning they have had no formal training in this area at all. This therefore highlights that there are significant gaps in the formal CPD opportunities for primary educators in the curricular area of moral education from those in their initial teacher education and throughout the teaching career.

There are also forms of CPD training which can be described as informal, that are unplanned and unpredictable, often taking place in educators' day-to-day practice (Evans, 2019; McKinney, et al., 2005). But educators in the current research expressed that there were never any informal conversations around what they were teaching in RME nor what resources they were using. Grant and Matemba (2013) discussed a similar finding in their research conducted in RE implementation, where educators stated that there were no conversations around levels of progression within this curricular area. But during the semi-structured interviews, it was suggested that implicit training around moral issues could be evident through the exploration of other CPD opportunities. Kennedy, et al. (2023), explain that during ITE programmes in Scotland, educators explore areas like discrimination, promoting LGBTQI+ equity, and inclusive teaching approaches. These topics were evident in the document analysis where it was suggested that educators should have training in Black Lives Matter and LGBTQI+ issues. However, one of the main issues with implicit training is highlighted by Eraut (2004) who

states it can "either be taken for granted or not recognised as learning: thus, respondents lack awareness of their own learning" (p. 249). This was evident within the case study primary school since none of the educators recognised that they had undertaken moral education training through these other areas. Hence, implicit moral education training can occur through other areas, but this needs to be made clear to educators otherwise the benefits of this in their explicit implementation will be missed.

During the semi-structured interviews, educators discussed a lack of curricular knowledge around the RME Experiences and Outcomes which is important as the *Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment* document states that "the experiences and outcomes… describe the expectations for learning and progression" (Scottish Government, 2011a: 6). So, a lack of knowledge around the Es and Os can significantly impact educators' understanding and planning of progression within RME. Within the lesson observations, educators voluntarily submitted their lesson plans which outlined their Learning Intentions and Success Criteria. It is suggested that the "Success Criteria are linked to the Learning Intentions and tell the learners how they will recognise if they have been successful" (Crichton and McDaid, 2016: 193) which can be created using the Es and Os (Hardley et al., 2021). Despite this, a study by Grant and Matemba (2013) found that teachers do not make links between the Experiences and Outcomes, and their Learning Intentions or Success Criteria within RME. The current findings showed that some of the lesson plans provided did not even include Es and Os for RME, even though educators were told this would be the focus of the observation. Unfortunately, the Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes have come under much criticism for being too broad, unspecific, and leaving educators to make significant levels of interpretation (Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Priestley and Humes, 2010). Clanachan and Matemba (2015) have specifically highlighted that when practitioners lack content knowledge within RME, then educators' interpretations of the Es and Os lead to ineffective lessons as well as confusion and inconsistency across the subject. Similarly, the current thesis has shown that the educators' lack of curricular knowledge around moral education is significantly impacting their confidence in the explicit planning, implementation, and progression of this curricular area.

6.5 Synthesis – Big R and little m

Religious and Moral Education is the curricular name for the subject within non-denominational primary schools in Scotland, but the three data strands found that there was more emphasis placed on the 'religious' aspect. The current study aimed to understand how moral education was implemented in the case study school, however, it became clear that educators seldom differentiated between the R and M in RME. Consequently, much of the discussions and observations related back to Religious Education which ultimately highlights the power dynamics in play within this curricular area. During the semi-structured interviews, it was expressed that there is a confusion around the terminology of this subject. Some suggested that there have been several names for RME and that they do not know what its name is. This has resulted in many of the interviewees referring to the subject as Religious Education in their own practice, completely dismissing the moral aspect. The findings showed that even though educators were asked about their understanding of moral education, only one interviewee discussed moral education without reference to religion. The lesson observations support this as educators were asked to explicitly implement a moral education lesson yet less than half of these focused on a moral aspect or topic. Hence, this section is named 'Big R, little m' to highlight that this curricular area is currently being implemented with more focus placed on the religious aspect compared to the moral.

As mentioned in section '*6.3.1.2 Curricular and Content Knowledge of ME*' some of the educators have implemented previous curricula like the '5-14' where the terminology for Religious and Moral Education was slightly different. During the semi-structured interviews, it was mentioned that teaching this subject through religious festivals and celebrations has been the way it was always done in their practice. Despite this, not all of the interviewees have taught, or even experienced in their own learning, the 5-14 curriculum. Many stated that it was just easier to find resources for the religious festivals approach and that it saved time on planning. However, some of the interviewees were also very critical of their own practice and stated that, at times, they felt it was tokenistic and stereotypical. In particular, one educator shared that they felt that focussing on festivals could also be sending subliminal messages to students about the relative importance of different religious beliefs. This was supported by the lesson

observations as Christian and Islamic celebrations were the only ones being explored. It was also found, through the document analysis, that this focus on festivals was being promoted by the senior management team who wrote in their School Improvement Plan that a shared calendar of religious festivals should be created and implemented within the school.

6.6 Discussion – Big R and little m

6.6.1 Religious Education as the Main Terminology

Historically, there has been a strong association between religious and moral education, especially within the Scottish context (Metcalfe and Moulin-Stozek, 2020). Despite this, the Millar Report (1972) notably stated that "an understanding of moral issues and personal relationship and the formation of the code of behaviour, [can be] distinct from religious education" (p. 21-22). This was significant as it highlighted to educators that moral and religious education did not always have to be taught simultaneously (Halstead and Pike, 2006). Regardless, it has been argued that religious and moral education are still regularly taught together (Halstead and Pike, 2006), which is unsurprising since its curricular name is 'Religious and Moral Education'. But the close connection between religious and moral education has consequently created a confusion between the two which resulted in a 'Big R' focus, with a 'little m' often overlooked.

In the current academic literature surrounding Religious and Moral Education implementation within Scotland, there continues to be a use of these terms synonymously (Scholes, 2022; 2020; Clanachan and Matemba, 2015). Specifically, Matemba (2018) states that "to avoid confusion between the terms, the chapter will simply refer to 'RE', as the subject is commonly known" (p. 1). It is interesting that Matemba (2018) claims that RME is 'commonly known' as RE since, as stated above, there has been a distinction between these terms since 1972. Despite this, the current thesis showed findings consistent with Matemba's (2018) statement as one educator explained that they were confused by the curricular names given to RME so simply referred to it as RE. Furthermore, Matemba (2015) maintains this support for RE as the main terminology as he suggests that the philosophical rise in RME, described by Nixon (2009), is simply an attempt to make this subject more appealing to students. However, moral education is not a trend, it is a way to

include the diverse views and beliefs held in the Scottish society where there is arguably an increase in secularism (Scotland's Census, 2024; Nixon, 2009). Therefore, simply referring to RME as RE is dismissing the other beliefs held by those in society which are separate from religion, but also has implications for the explicit implementation of this curricular area depending on educators' own understanding of the terminology.

6.6.2 Christianity

As stated in the synthesis section '*6.4 Moral Education: Educators; Definitions*', many of the discussions around RME in this context related to the implementation of religious festivals, mainly based on Christian beliefs. In Scotland, during the 21st century, increased migration from different parts of the world led to more diversity in Scottish Christianity so it is important to emphasise the place this religion holds within CfE. In Curriculum for Excellence documentation relating to RME there are three overall headings: Christianity, World Religions, and Development of Beliefs and Values (Education Scotland, 2009b). The names have changed slightly since the 5-14 curriculum but the only one which has remained consistent is 'Christianity'. It is expressed in Education Scotland (2009b) CfE documents that "Scotland is a nation whose people hold a wide range of beliefs from the many branches of the Christian faith" (p. 213). This document goes further to explain that Christianity has shaped the history and culture of Scotland, which continues to influence students' present day lives (Education Scotland, 2009b). The academic literature supports these claims as McKinney and McCluskey (2017) outline that Christianity has been significant in shaping Scottish education and that it is important that these contributions are not forgotten or dismissed. Despite this, there are also arguments against placing a near exclusive focus on Christian beliefs (Riddell et al., 2009; McEwan, 1995). In their review of *Does Religious Education Work?* Conroy et al. (2013) found that schools "focused overwhelmingly… on Christianity alone" (p. 126) which was also highlighted by Riddell et al. (2009) where educators shared that the main focus within their practice was Christianity. This was also noted in a more historical paper by McEwan (1995) who found that during periods such as Christmas and Easter, there is a significant promotion of Christian beliefs with no discussion of other religious celebrations or cultures. Within the semi-structured interviews, one educator did admit that in their current practice they were discussing and exploring the story

of Easter with their class but had not provided any resources for Eid/Ramadan. This section highlights that there is still a powerful focus placed on exploring Christian beliefs within Scottish primary schools, but the following sections will explain how this can be, at times, exclusive of other religious and non-religious beliefs.

6.6.3 World Religions

The second heading in relation to Religious and Moral Education is 'World Religions' (Education Scotland, 2009b). This has changed since the 5-14 curriculum where it was previously known as 'Other World Religions', but it has been suggested that the use of the word 'other' could have been described as "pejorative" (McKinney, 2012:43). Much of the academic literature suggests a study of six world religions: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism (Holt, 2019; McCreery et al., 2008). But there are no references to any specific religions, other than Christianity, within CfE documents which, again, leaves a lot of interpretation and subject knowledge the responsibility of the classroom teacher. Additionally, Conroy et al. (2013) found that the majority of schools in the Scottish context focused primarily on Islam as a 'World Religion'. From the observation analysis, the student population in the case-study school included adherence of the major world religions and some of the interviewees shared that in their current practice they have tried to be more mindful of teaching about different religious beliefs.

6.6.4 Development of Beliefs and Values

The third heading is the 'Development of Beliefs and Values' and it has been suggested that this section has been added in response to the 'philosophication' of religious education in Scotland (Matemba, 2015; 2011; Nixon, 2009). Before the implementation of CfE, Nixon (2008b) highlighted that the previous curriculum was "marginalising non-religious views… which effectively excludes those who follow these philosophies" (p. 25). This point is further discussed by Holt (2019) who argues that there is a "silent majority" (p. 2) within society of those who are non-religious. Holt (2019) is correct in stating that those identifying as non-religious are becoming the majority as Scottish Census Data from 2022 shows that 51.1% of respondents identified in this way (Scotland's Census, 2024). Even though moral education is not always connected to secular beliefs, the current thesis

highlights that, in the case study school, there were no lessons that discussed moral values independent from religion. Unfortunately, this could be influenced by the CfE documents for this curricular area as the word 'moral' does not feature in any the primary-level Experiences and Outcomes within the 'Development of Beliefs and Values' heading (Education Scotland, 2009b). Overall, there are forty-six RME Es and Os from Early to Second level, and within these 'moral' only features four times yet 'Christian/Christianity' is mentioned twenty-three times (Education Scotland, 2009b). So, even within curricular documents there is a clear power dynamic which overlooks the importance of moral development in the primary school context. The lack of opportunities for students to develop their moral values either through religions or non-religious perspectives has been discussed by other scholars (Conroy et al., 2013; Conroy, 2009; Conroy and Davis, 2005) who argue that "young people need more opportunities to develop their own beliefs and values" (Education Scotland, 2014: 4). Yet, the current study has found that when asked about the development of values independent of religion, all of the interviewees expressed that they may be doing this implicitly rather than having explicit lessons. Therefore, there is a clear gap in RME implementation in this primary school where the development of moral values independent of religion is not being explored at any stage of learning.

6.6.5 A Focus on Festivals

In the curricular area of RME, there are often phrases used such as 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion. According to Grimmit (1987), learning about religion refers to "what the pupils learn about beliefs, teachings and practices of the great religious traditions of the world" (p. 225-226). Whereas the latter is when "pupils learn from their studies in religion about themselves" (Grimmit, 1987: 225-226). This approach places more emphasis on students reflections on how religious beliefs impact their own experiences. Analysis from the three data strands showed that the explicit implementation of RME was related to 'learning about' religious festivals. But Teece (2010) is critical that if learning in this curricular area is always based on gaining knowledge around religions, then pupils may not be able to see the connections between their own experiences. This was highlighted by one interviewee in particular who stated that learning about religions that have no relation to pupils' lives is not important within their practice. Yet, Baumfield et al. (2012) recognises the potential of learning *from* religious and non-religious

views as students can engage and reflect on these ideas and perspectives with direct implications to their own lives. Additionally, in terms of moral education, Conroy et al. (2013) suggest that learning from religions can provide opportunities for students to hold up 'mirrors' to the values that underpin these beliefs. That way, pupils can begin to challenge and understand the values of different religions, rather than continuing to reaffirm the cultural frameworks that exist (Conroy, 2009). Therefore, understanding and recognising the differences between learning about and from religions can have a significant impact on the teaching and learning approaches implemented within this curricular area.

During the semi-structured interviews, educators expressed that teaching RME through religious festivals and celebrations was common. The 5-14 curriculum, implemented from 1993 – 2009 (Matemba, 2018), has been mentioned several times, and it is important in understanding why there is a focus on festivals within CfE. Under the exploration of 'Christianity' and 'Other World Religions' there was a heading specifically related to "celebrations, festivals, ceremonies, and customs" within the 5-14 National Guidelines (Scottish Office Education Department, 1992: 5). As mentioned previously, some of the educators in the current study implemented the 5-14 curriculum within their own practice. The residue of the previous curriculum has also been identified by Grant and Matemba (2013) who found that "many RME teachers were stuck in the groove of the 5-14 curriculum" (p. 5). Additionally, this paper found that some of their participants also referred back to these documents as they were more prescriptive for RME which contrasted the broad nature of the Es and Os. Thus, one explanation of the continued focus on festivals is that many educators have not moved on from the 5-14 guidelines which did place emphasis on exploring religions through celebrations and customs.

Recently, Humes and Priestley (2021) have also suggested that "there is… considerable cultural diversity within the country… most evident in the major cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh" (p. 176). But the inclusion of these beliefs has also not been easy as Scotland has particularly battled with issues around sectarianism as well as racism (Education Scotland, 2021; Tinker, 2017; Education Scotland, 2015b; Meer, 2015) which have had to be addressed, and ultimately impacts the education system. Anti-racist education remains a significant priority for Education Scotland (2021) as well as having the policy related to anti-bullying,

named ‘Respect for All’ (The Scottish Government, 2017). The reason the anti-racism and anti-bullying policies are being discussed in relation to RME is that a number of the interviewees expressed that moral education relates to students’ behaviours, the motivations behind these as well as the consequences of certain choices. In the ‘Respect All’ policy, it states that “bullying is both behaviour and impact” (The Scottish Government, 2017: 1) which directly relates to the current educators’ ideas of what the purpose of moral education is. Furthermore, it has to be noted that schools are also evaluated on their ability to reduce bullying incidents, especially prejudiced-related issues, through the *How Good Is Our School?* Document (The Scottish Government, 2017). This highlights that a focus on festivals or celebrations could be the school’s attempt to teach students about different cultures and beliefs, to encourage an understanding and respect, and to decrease the prejudices or bullying. Despite this, McCreery et al. (2008) states that “many head teachers… like to announce that all major festivals are celebrated in the school” (p. 26). It is suggested that head teachers are doing this to show that their schools are inclusive of all beliefs and to demonstrate that they are being multicultural (McCreery et al., 2008). This was evident in the current study where a shared calendar of religious festivals was created and followed amongst staff. Therefore, the Scottish Government policies related to decreasing anti-racism and prejudice-related bullying issues is having a direct impact on the teaching and learning within primary schools as there is a current focus on teaching religious festivals in an attempt to show inclusivity within their practice.

Despite the political, social, and curricular factors influencing the focus on festivals within the educators’ current RME practice, there was also a recognition that this approach has negative implications for inclusion. One interviewee expressed that they would only teach about religious festivals when they were approaching in the year but focussing on these festivals, practice “can reinforce people’s generalisations about particular groups” (Mullally, 2018: 47). This interviewee continued by stating that they would bring out shortbread on St Andrew’s Day or prawn crackers during Chinese New Year, which they felt was tokenistic. McCreery et al. (2008) recognise that using festivals can be “a popular entry point into the study of a religion” (p. 26) as it is a relatable experience for many students compared to more abstract ideas. But they also warn that if festivals are the only approach used to explore a religion then it can provide a “distorted picture” (p. 27) of what this religion looks like. Incorporating moral

education into these lessons could potentially result in a more inclusive approach, as looking at the values underpinning these celebrations could allow students to discuss issues surrounding racism or stereotypes (Conroy et al., 2013). It is discussed by Stables (2005) that in multicultural education, the learning often centres around what is different "in areas such as clothing, food and drink, rituals and festivals… rather than on the stories" (p. 188). These are often taught through 'one off' lessons rather than having a deep exploration of any religious belief or practice. But it was recently stated that "one off lessons that explore diversity or difference… can have unintended consequences of 'othering' those who are not… in the majority" (Education Scotland, 2021: 21). In the current thesis, this was discussed by an educator who believed that subliminal messages were sent to students that some religions were more important than others within the school. Furthermore, the growing proportion of society identifying as non-religious (Scotland's Census, 2024) will be impacting the student population. Having opportunities for students to discuss moral issues, independent of religious beliefs is also an important aspect of RME that is currently going under the radar within the case study primary school as the focus is on teaching through religions. Hence, this approach is not inclusive to all beliefs and can, at times, be reinforcing stereotypes or be tokenistic and the current thesis has shown that non-religious perspectives are absent from the current practice as this focus on festivals is dominating RME.

6.7 Synthesis – The 'Core' Curriculum

Across all data strands, it became clear that there was a performative influence within the case study primary school that was significantly impacting the explicit implementation of moral education. Consistently, educators explained that teaching moral education was squeezed out of their timetables by higher priority curricular areas like Literacy, Numeracy, and Health and Wellbeing. In one particular interview with a senior management member, they stated that moral education was not part of their 'core' curriculum. Through document analysis and the interviews, the 'core' curriculum was discovered to be the three curricular areas stated above. It was expressed that, especially since the global pandemic, there has been a significant focus placed on improving students' attainment in Literacy and Numeracy with a particular rise in supporting their Health and Wellbeing. However, in creating this 'core' three, there has become a disruption

within the Curriculum for Excellence which is supposed to consist of eight curricular areas.

The idea that there has become a rise in performative practices was discussed by all of the interviewees who expressed that each day they 'need' to do Literacy and Numeracy because of the pressures of external accountability. During these conversations, some admitted that they felt that moral education was a 'tick box' activity that they had to do, but even then they did not get around to teaching it every week. It was clear that the lack of moral education implementation in educators' practice was not always a choice made by the teacher as the document analysis showed that Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing were continuously mentioned and prioritised. Whereas within these documents, moral education only ever occurred when stating the eight curricular areas. This has implications for moral education as some interviewees suggested that if this subject was placed into a curricular area like Health and Wellbeing then they may teach it in their own classroom more frequently but through a more diluted approach.

One topic that was commonly mentioned in relation to moral education implementation was that there is not enough time in the curriculum to teach it. Time was identified as the biggest challenge to educators' implementation of the subject. But one interviewee also stated that this would be a cliché answer as it could be used to excuse the absence of any curricular area. Despite this, the lack of time had an impact on the ways in which educators chose to teach this curricular area. Some interviewees explained that they themselves do not teach it explicitly and that they ask the Non-Class Contact Time teacher to implement this subject. Additionally, interdisciplinary learning was discussed as an approach to link moral education with other curricular areas such as Health and Wellbeing, Literacy, and Social Subjects. But educators also explained that they felt less confident in their own abilities to make connections between moral education and areas like Numeracy or Science, which showed that there was a distinction between areas that 'fit' with RME and those that do not.

6.8 Discussion – The 'Core' Curriculum

6.8.1 The Three 'Core' Areas

A significant finding surrounds the idea that there is a 'core' curriculum which squeezes out moral education. The Curriculum for Excellence has been described as having eight curricular areas (Education Scotland, 2008) however, three of these have been given particular emphasis: Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing. These subjects have been described as going 'across learning' (Campbell et al., 2020) and it is expected that practitioners make links with these in their everyday practice. This is not a new finding as Hardley et al. (2021) have also highlighted that "the Scottish Government has prioritised three core learning areas" (p. 514). Additionally, an '*Evaluation of Curriculum Design in Scotland*' conducted by Education Scotland (2024b) stated that schools are placing too much focus on Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing, resulting in students lacking breadth in their education. Even though the 'core curriculum' has been previously identified, the current thesis contributes to this contemporary issue by highlighting how the Scottish Government have been responsible for disrupting Curriculum for Excellence by narrowing the focus to three areas and squeezing out moral education.

In Scotland there was a growing recognition that a large gap existed within education between the performance of students in low-socioeconomic areas compared to their more affluent peers (Peace-Hughes, 2021). This led to the introduction of the Scottish Attainment Challenge in 2015 which was "initially… focused at the primary school level to aid improvements in literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing" (Peace-Hughes, 2021: 270). The Attainment Challenge was referenced throughout the documents collected from the school, and even their shared vision stated that closing the gap was their main priority. Furthermore, this focus on the three 'core' areas has significantly strengthened post Covid-19 pandemic. A report conducted on the impact of the lockdown on students' learning suggested that there was a "heavy focus on literacy and numeracy" (McCluskey et al., 2023:12). Additionally, Colville et al. (2021) argue that Health and Wellbeing became crucial, especially during lockdown, as educators were aware that students would be feeling anxiety, stress, and fear which would be barriers to learning in any other area. In returning to school, one member of the Senior Management Team explained that the emphasis for

educators was to continue to support pupils' wellbeing first and foremost with the next focus placed on improving their Literacy and Numeracy skills. The general feeling expressed by all interviewees was that moral education is not part of these 'core' areas which has a significant impact on their explicit implementation of this subject.

6.8.2 Performative Curriculum for Excellence

Ideas and discussions around the purpose of education have always been popular within the field but, in more recent times, the Scottish education system has been under even more criticism (Humes, 2022; Livingston and Doherty, 2020; Peace-Hughes, 2021). One particular scholar, Gert Biesta, is well-known for his articles around what makes 'good education' (Biesta, 2020; 2010; 2009; 2008). Biesta (2009) recognised that there was increase in a performative culture within education systems, that focused on a "blame and shame" (p. 34) model to highlight schools that were failing to perform academically. Unfortunately, more recent articles have shown that the focus placed on 'performance' has only worsened within the Scottish context which is based on display rather than actual improvement (Humes, 2022; Peace-Hughes, 2021). In his paper, Humes (2022) reminds us that bureaucracies "do not exist in isolation. They gain their legitimacy from political decisions" (p. 239). This has also been identified by Peace-Hughes (2021) as "the trickle-down effect of global ideas from prominent organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development" (p. 268). International tests like OECD and PISA are now having a significant impact on educational policies and priorities which are implemented within primary schools. Mowat (2023) emphasises that the culture of performativity is now a key driver of the Scottish Government's agenda and Humes (2022) discusses that this creates tensions for educators. During the semi-structured interviews, educators described this tension within their own practice as they explained that moral education is a subject they enjoy teaching and pupils enjoy exploring, but that their focus is getting Literacy and Numeracy timetabled each day. Madan (2014) suggests that educators are "taught to smile as she or he bends over backwards to satisfy" (p. 95) the wants of other stakeholders like local councils and the government. This highlights that teachers' implementation of the curricular areas is heavily influenced by the pressures from the Scottish Government, where their policies are shaped by the performative culture. Thus, in understanding the lack

of moral education implementation, it is important to be aware of the external factors influencing educators' practice as there are pressures from other stakeholders to perform well academically in specific areas.

One of the main problems with the promotion of a performative culture is that it creates education systems where priority is placed on the curricular areas that can be measured (Biesta, 2009). This has been highlighted by Livingston and Doherty (2020) who discuss that there becomes a significant narrowing of the curriculum, placing focus on these measurable subjects. Particularly, they found that this narrowing is more prominent in lower-socioeconomic areas where there is significant pressure placed on students to perform well academically (Livingston and Doherty, 2020). In section '*2.6. Assessment of Moral Education'*, this idea of 'consumerism' in education was also discussed, highlighted the increased focus on using formalised testing to evaluate education systems (Stern, 2017). This was evident in the current case study school where eighty-nine percent of the student population were from SIMDs 1 and 2, which are the most deprived. There was a clear focus within this school on the Attainment Challenge as well as on the three 'core' curricular areas. Not only has this impacted the implementation of moral education in this context, but research within this curricular area has also been significantly affected. It has been noted, that since the Covid-19 pandemic, too much emphasis has been placed on Numeracy, Literacy and Health and Wellbeing (Education Scotland, 2024b) as these are areas that can more easily be assessed, are deemed 'more important', and performance can be measured. However, it was interesting that the Scottish Government (2020) also provided information around the impact of the pandemic on the development of religious values in the denominational schools. It stated that "school closures have negatively impacted upon denominational schools' ability to support pupils' spiritual development" and that "timetable constraints may continue" (The Scottish Government, 2020: 15). Although this was specific to denominational schools, the current thesis found that some educators discussed the impact of lockdown on students' moral development, stating that they had noticed gaps in their learning. A challenge in this curricular area is that measuring students' moral and value development is difficult (Sporre, 2019), and assessment of RME has a complex relationship within the Scottish context (Grant and Matemba, 2013; Halstead and McLaughlin, 2005). which was discussed earlier in '*2.6. Assessment of Moral Education'*. Furthermore, information on assessment in RME does not exist pre-pandemic, so making

comparisons would be impossible. However, what this does show is a glimmer of hope that the Scottish Government and Education Scotland are realising that the lockdown has impacted more than just students' performance in the 'core' areas. Hence, there is a space for more research to be conducted on the gaps within pupils learning in RME and how to support their moral development within the primary school context.

Unfortunately, no research has been conducted on the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of Religious and Moral Education within Scottish non-denominational primary schools. But a report conducted by the Scottish Government (2020) did provide information around the impact within denominational schools. During the semi-structured interviews, this was discussed in the non-denominational setting by one interviewee who expressed that no RME learning was provided to students during online learning, and they have noticed huge gaps in pupils' understanding of religious festivals. Thus, there needs to be more research conducted into how the pandemic has affected the moral development of students within Scotland, and how these gaps in understanding can be supported within the primary school context.

Additionally, the move towards subjects which can be measured and quantified (Biesta, 2009; 2010) has significant implications for moral education too as assessment in this subject is often contested (Sporre et al., 2022; Sporre, 2019; Grant and Matemba, 2013). On one hand, Sporre (2019) argues that due to the trend towards assessment within education, then performing tests within moral education could strengthen its position. This was discussed by one interviewee who suggested that the education system is more interested in seeing sums in jotters than in how students discuss or respond to moral issues. Yet, on the other hand, Sporre (2019) warns that moving towards performativity in this subject could narrow the focus of moral education, resulting in educators teaching to the test. Furthermore, Sporre (2019) also states that "the test interrupts the usual learning climate, as cooperation between children is no longer promoted" (p. 265). This point is significant to the current findings as all of the classroom educators explained that discussion, and debate with peers are important within moral education so, the introduction of assessments in this curricular area may actually change the pedagogies within educators' explicit practice. Overall, Humes (2022) warns that "unless a serious attempt to address the deeper issues

about the nature of bureaucracy… is undertaken, the situation is likely to get worse" (p. 249). Therefore, the purpose of moral education in Scotland should not be to fit the current focus on measurability of academic progression, it should aim to challenge these perspectives, and show that pedagogies focused on peer learning and discussion can be just as important within CfE.

6.8.3 Time for Moral Education

One of the unique aspects of RME is that it is the only curricular area to be a legal requirement (Scholes, 2022; Grant and Matemba, 2013; The Scottish Government, 2011b). This legality stems from the 1980 Education (Scotland) Act where guidelines were provided to local authorities and schools. Scholes (2022) discusses the law and RME within Scotland, explaining that it is unlawful for any primary school to cease the implementation of this subject. Within the current study, it was interesting to find that several of the interviewees were unaware of these legal requirements around the provision of RME. Despite this, the time allocated for the provision of RME has been described as unclear within the non-denominational context. Grant and Matemba (2013) outlined this in their paper where they explained that in Catholic schools, clear guidance is provided for educators to teach RE for a minimum of two and a half hours per week. Yet this same paper states that "we therefore wonder why similar guidance has not been given to specific time allocation in RME" (Grant and Matemba, 2013: 5). This was highlighted in the current thesis as an interviewee stated that there are clear guidelines provided for staff in Catholic schools, for a whole-school approach which does not exist within non-denominational schools. However, several papers have discussed that effective provision of RME can come down to a headteacher's own beliefs and use of the guidance provided by the Scottish Government (Scholes, 2020; Matemba, 2011). From the document analysis, there was no evidence of any moral education policies or support for staff in the case study primary school, in fact the subject was only mentioned by its curricular name, with no further mention of it in relation to the curriculum or school's ethos. Scholes (2022) argues that despite RME being the only curricular areas to have statutory guidelines around its implementation, the ambiguity around these has meant that the universal provision is lacking which was found in the current thesis around educators' knowledge and implementation of this subject.

In all of the interviews, educators explained that the biggest challenge in their explicit implementation of moral education was time as they prioritised the 'important' subjects within their daily practice which was Literacy and Numeracy. The lack of time to implement RME has been evidenced in the existing academic literature (Grant and Matemba, 2013; Matemba, 2011). To address the lack of time, literature has suggested that moral education can be explored across other curricular areas through an interdisciplinary approach (McKinney et al., 2014; The Scottish Government, 2008). This was frequently discussed by all of the interviewees, and even during their observed lessons they attempted to show this, which will be explored in section '*6.2.8. Explicit Implementation of Cross-Curricular Moral Education*'. However, a paper particularly focused on the interdisciplinary approach between science and RE in the secondary context highlighted that there can sometimes be tensions between curricular areas (McKinney et al., 2014). The authors discussed that some educators held the belief that science and RE are based on "polarised positions" (McKinney et al., 2014: 37) and this was also suggested in the current findings. Some educators explained that they would find it more challenging to link moral education with subjects like numeracy, science, and technology as the latter subjects are based on 'logical thinking' whereas moral development is through discussion and 'no right answer'. But it has been highlighted that educators' confidence in their knowledge of curricular areas can significantly impact their interdisciplinary approach (Campbell et al., 2020; McKinney et al., 2014), and as previously discussed, the educators in the current research do not have a strong sense of confidence in moral education. Hence, there are benefits to interdisciplinary learning with moral education and the other curricular areas as an attempt to provide more time to this subject but there are also challenges based on educators' knowledge which can be a barrier.

Finally, it was discussed earlier that educators often lack curricular knowledge around moral education which Clanachan and Matemba (2015) argue impacts their confidence in teaching and it is suggested that "teachers who lack confidence in religion tend to use avoidance techniques" (p. 123), focussing instead on 'core' subjects. These 'avoidance techniques' were evident in the current thesis as educators explained that RME was the first subject that they would ask Non-Class Contact Time teachers to explicitly plan and implement, rather than doing it in their own timetable. Again, the factors of pressure to meet academic results

(Peace-Hughes, 2021; Livingston and Doherty, 2020) as well as a lack of CPD in this curricular area (Education Scotland, 2014) impact practitioners' confidence in teaching RME. Matemba (2023) states that "some teachers in non-denominational primary schools tend to invoke McCrone Time as a way to avoid teaching religious education because they lack the confidence to deliver the subject" (p. 185). Yet, moral education is not the only subject 'passed on' as Bhachu (2019) found that primary teachers showed a "detachment… from music delivery as this became their non-class contact time" (p. 11). No literature currently exists around how frequently moral education is given to stand-in teachers nor how these teachers understand the subject. However, these findings from Matemba (2023) and Bhachu (2019) highlight that there are curricular areas which are consistently viewed as not the responsibility of the classroom teacher, which needs to be explored further. Overall, the current thesis has shown that there are clear indications that educators are detached from and actively avoid moral education in their own practice.

6.9 Synthesis – Explicit Implementation of Moral Education

In the explicit implementation of moral education, educators suggested that peers play a significant role in moral development and many stated that this curricular area should be implemented through debate and discussion. Yet, the lesson observations of 'moral education' across the stages of the school appeared to show that the practice of educators was frequently the opposite to what they stated in their interviews. During the lessons, conversations were guided by the teachers and resources closed down any opportunity for discussion or debate. Despite this, there were attempts to include pupils' perspectives through techniques like think-pair-share or asking probing questions at certain times of the lesson. But none of the observed lessons showed the types of pedagogies that were discussed during the semi-structured interviews that built upon peer relationships to enhance the development of moral values. These findings highlight that there is a clear contradiction between what teaching techniques educators believe would be most effective in moral education compared to the ones that are implemented in their delivery of moral lessons.

Interestingly, the lesson observations also showed that the two main areas educators explicitly linked with moral education were Health and Wellbeing and Social Studies. The lesson plans, voluntarily submitted, showed that there were

attempts to make links between the Experiences and Outcomes of these curricular areas. The lesson observations also highlighted that links were made between moral education and Health and Wellbeing in the lower stages of the primary school whereas the upper school educators made the connection between moral development and Social Subjects. Furthermore, the same topics were being explored in the lower stages of the primary school which showed that there were inconsistencies in planning and no dialogue between colleagues. The lesson observations highlighted that there were significant challenges in educators' planning, implementation, and evidence of assessment during moral education which was a result of their lack of knowledge around linking this with Health and Wellbeing and Social Subjects.

Across all of the observed lessons there were also links made to Literacy which was unsurprising as almost all of the educators explained that there were strong connections between this curricular area and moral education. The observed lessons highlighted a difference between educators' understanding of moral education and their practice since skills like critical thinking were discussed in the interviews but not observed during these lessons. Additionally, unlike Health and Wellbeing or Social Studies, the educators did not attempt to include Es and Os for Literacy in their lesson plans. Even the literacy skills that were being included in the observed lessons were not appropriate for the level of students' learning as they focussed on re-telling stories or creating posters. Similar to the observed lessons that connected moral education with other curricular areas, they highlighted that the explicit planning for this subject was inconsistent across the primary school.

6.10 Discussion – Explicit Implementation of Moral Education

6.10.1 Pedagogies and Moral Education

Different types of relationships on students' moral development have been discussed extensively in the literature, notably by Jean Piaget (1932) who identified two main categories: constraining and cooperative. These relationships were outlined in Chapter Two '*2.3. Social Interactions and Moral Development*' which discussed that cooperative relationships have been associated with interactions amongst peers who share the same levels of power and knowledge (Piaget, 1932). It has been described that these provide a 'safe haven' for pupils

to have open discussions around their values, be more receptive to different perspectives, and explore the norms within their social groups (Mammen, et al., 2019). These interactions were significantly discussed by interviewees who stated that moral development should be explored through discussions and debates amongst students. They explained that these approaches would be effective and engaging and would enable pupils to explore different opinions around moral decisions. Blatt and Kohlberg (1975), however, highlight that cooperative interactions can exist between students and teachers too. They explained that providing students with higher levels of moral reasoning can lead to further development (Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975) whereas students at the same moral level can possibly lead to just information sharing (Walker et al., 2000). Therefore, educators' understanding of effective pedagogies in moral education was similar to those identified in the literature which related to peer discussions and debate with a focus placed on the student.

Despite this, the current thesis found that there was a significant gap in what pedagogies practitioners stated they would use in moral education lessons versus what was actually used in their practice. In some of the lessons, there was a constraining relationship observed which existed between the students and the teacher where the balance of power was shifted towards the teacher (Piaget, 1932). Alternatively, this could be described as a conventional approach to moral education where "adults base their teaching on their own opinions of what they think children need to learn about showing consideration for others" (Johansson et al., 2011: 6). This was evidenced during the observed lessons, particularly in the early stages of the primary school, where the educators would tell the students what values make a 'good friend' rather than allowing the pupils to come to these answers in a more explorative or discursive manner. Johansson et al. (2011) suggest that social interactions are more effective in developing students' moral values. Furthermore, in the current thesis, it was also difficult to explore the way in which values were taught explicitly in the case study school as the majority of the observed lessons did not discuss moral values at all. Similar discussions were highlighted in Grant and Matemba's (2013) paper which showed that educators used resources and pedagogies based on rote learning techniques that developed lower-order thinking skills. The activities used in the observed 'moral education' lessons were cut-and-stick, colouring in, and sorting activities to which had no relation to any values or even the religions that were being

explored. Other scholars have identified this issue within RME which recognises that there is a significant absence of pedagogies and activities that encourage authentic discussions amongst students, that allow them the opportunities to explore their own and others' values (Conroy et al., 2013; Grant and Matemba, 2013). Overall, the observed lessons which did contain a moral education aspect relied upon more constraining relationships between the student and teacher, which is almost the exact opposite of what all interviewees expressed they would do in their practice.

6.10.2 Explicit ME Through Health and Wellbeing

From the observed lessons, it was found that educators commonly connected moral education and Health and Wellbeing. Some interviewees explained that the two subjects explore issues related to social interactions, emotions, and behaviours. It has been recognised that moral education is focussed on the development of values while subjects such as Health and Wellbeing explore how individuals develop the skills and attitudes relevant for living in society (Elias et al., 2008; Halstead and Pike, 2006). The lesson plans highlighted that all of the classes in the lower stages of the school used friendship to explore moral education. It has been argued by Bukowski and Sippola (1996) that friendship and moral education are interrelated as our interactions with others provide opportunities to develop values like honesty, loyalty, and trust. Furthermore, Kristjánsson (2020a) states that "we become friends by practising friendships, just as we become musicians by playing music" (p. 362). One idea suggested by Kristjánsson (2020b) is that we practice friendships through an educational process that allows individuals to learn from one another in organic relationships with others. However, these papers both approach friendships from an Aristotelian perspective with more focus placed on character education and virtues development (Kristjánsson, 2020a; 2020b). The current findings contribute to the academic literature by providing an insight into how friendships are being used to explore moral education within the Scottish context.

One of the significant observations, however, was that the link made between Health and Wellbeing and moral education was only explored in the lower stages of the primary school. It has been discussed that friendships in the early stages of childhood are crucial as it provides opportunities to share feelings, and grow empathy for others (McDonald et al., 2014; Rubin et al., 2011; Rogers and Kutnick,

1992). Interestingly, Healy (2011) suggests that younger children have a limited vocabulary in relation to friendship and use the term 'friend' to encompass many different relationships with their peers. In the lesson observations, it was found that the lower levels of the primary did have this limited vocabulary relating to friendship. Even though there were opportunities for students to describe the characteristics of a 'good' friend, many could not find the words to express this. In all of the lessons at the early stages of learning in moral education, classes were teacher-led and hierarchical as the educators were giving the words to students rather than there being a discussion around friendships. There is less research around the role of friendships and moral development in the upper stages of primary school, however, it is recognised that these relationships are still important (McDonald et al., 2014; Healy, 2011). It is suggested that older students begin to categorise friendships into different areas such as 'school friends', 'friends from outside of school' or even 'online friends' (Healy, 2011). Additionally, as students get older, the quality of the friendships become more significant on moral development than in younger years as there are opportunities for more mature conversations around social and behavioural norms (McDonald et al., 2014). Despite the benefits of friendships highlighted through these two articles, none of the educators in the upper primary school related moral education to Health and Wellbeing. This was surprising as all of the interviewees expressed that these subject areas have so many connections with one another, yet this was not observed during their practice. Therefore, the current thesis highlights that explicitly linking moral education and Health and Wellbeing was more confined within the lower stages of the case study primary school.

6.10.3 Explicit ME Through Social Studies

The second area linked with explicit implementation of moral education during the lesson observations was Social Studies, which was only explored in the upper stages of the primary school. Making connections between moral education and the humanities has been discussed in Halstead and Pike's (2006) book where they state this this subject addresses "questions about the nature of humanity… and they explore *why* people live as they do" (p. 82). A similar response was provided by the educators during the semi-structured interviews who stated that moral education related to how we live in our society, how this has changed historically, and how we can compare this to the ways in which other societies live.

Additionally, it has been suggested that exploring Social Studies topics with a moral lens can provide opportunities for students to develop critical thinking skills through questioning and reflecting upon previously accepted moral beliefs or values that would now not be acceptable (Merzifonluoglu and Hamarat, 2022; Schuitema et al., 2008). Furthermore, it is stated by Byrd (2012) that "regardless of whether… teachers realise their classes are places where students form opinions about the world and its diverse population, this process *is* taking place" (p. 1074). Some educators in the current research started to realise that by studying topics like the Rainforest or Victorians, they were implicitly exploring moral topics like how tribes construct their society or how discipline within schools has drastically changed over time.

Despite this, the lesson observations found that most of the upper stage classes explored moral issues through history rather than having a social or geographical focus. Although there are clear links between history and moral education, Byrd (2012) states that many lessons in the US context tend to rely upon memorising historical events rather than working towards a just society. Similar findings were observed in the Scottish context as students were asked to look at these moral issues of racism and war through a historical lens, but the lessons would become focused on retelling or summarising the events they had learned about. None of the lessons relating moral education and history brought these topics into a relevant context for the students. One issue with this approach to moral education is that 'these are soon forgotten and usually serve no purpose to those students who feel their lives are no longer impacted by these events' and can even lead to students becoming "apathetic" (Byrd, 2012: 1074). Despite this, it is recognised by many scholars that Social Studies can be a vehicle to explore, discuss and challenge moral values in the classroom if implemented effectively (Merzifonluoglu and Hamarat, 2022; Halstead and Pike, 2006). The current findings have highlighted that the current explicit implementation of moral education through Social Studies supports other findings which suggest that there is more focus placed on looking at historical values, rather than bringing those issues into the modern context for students, which is an ineffective approach.

6.10.4 Explicit ME and Literacy

During the semi-structured interviews, all of the interviewees expressed that Literacy contains stories with a moral focus, it includes discussing the values of

characters and can develop critical thinking. Despite this, none of the lesson plans included Experiences and Outcomes related to Literacy, therefore the links between moral education and literacy were not explicitly planned by educators. One educational programme that has used Literacy at its core is Philosophy 4 Children which focuses on the use of novels being read to students which leads to conversations and activities around the characters' behaviours (Wahab et al., 2022; Lipman, 1976). Using stories to explore moral issues and topics has been strongly supported by the academic literature, especially in the earlier years of education (Rahiem et al., 2020; Carr and Harrison, 2015; Grant and Matemba, 2013). Even the Millar Report (1972) criticised moral education lessons for being focussed on religious texts such as Bible stories. Despite the benefits of using stories to develop and discuss moral values, this was not an approach taken during the lesson observations and the use of religious or non-religious texts was completely missed by all educators across the school.

In the lesson plans provided by the educators, there were no examples that showed an attempt to link the Experiences and Outcomes of Literacy and Moral Education. But in every lesson, there were Literacy approaches used from retelling religious stories to summarising key facts from texts. This finding was also reported in Grant and Matemba's (2013) study which found that during RME lessons there became a focus on the literacy skills, moving away from the religious aspect of the lesson. In their study, one of the examples they state was that 'students were merely being asked to make their front page cover "informative and eye catching" (Grant and Matemba, 2013: 8). The reason this has been highlighted is because the current lesson observations in the present study included one lesson where students were asked to create a poster to discourage slavery. This and similar activities show that educators move away from the moral education focus and more emphasis is placed on students' ability to write or create pieces of work. From the lesson observations, it was found that some of the lessons started with a moral topic or issue, but the main learning activity shifted towards skills such as retelling the religious story or summarising the main points from a historical text. This was also discussed in the Grant and Matemba (2013) paper which outlined that the activities were not thought-provoking or encouraging students to question their current ways of thinking. Unfortunately, these lessons show the move away from moral issues, but they also highlight that the 'Literacy' aspects of these were developing lower-order thinking skills that would not be acceptable in a fully

Literacy focussed lesson at the same level. During the interviews, many educators discussed that moral education could be a great vehicle for critical thinking development, yet no skills close to this were displayed at any level in the case study school. Therefore, the findings from this research show that the connections between moral education and Literacy are negatively impacting the deeper exploration and development of moral values.

A final area that was discussed in the semi-structured interviews related to Literacy and moral education by educators was the development of critical thinking. In their book, Halstead and Pike (2006) state that "critical readers are not passive recipients but come to text and interrogate them" (p. 52). Critical thinking was mentioned by some of the interviewees as being an especially important skill for students to develop with the increased amount of time spent on social media. One issue highlighted by Marcinek (2024) was that the Covid-19 pandemic drastically increased students' screen time and that this has had a negative impact on society since. In this book, it is stated that "the way Facebook's algorithms are designed will only further the spread of misinformation and lies and create more conspiracy theories" (Marcinek, 2024: 18). The idea of conspiracy theories and social media were discussed by some of the educators in the current study who stated that students are exposed to negative perspectives online such as misogyny from Andrew Tate, hatred from the news around the refugee crisis and even sectarian opinions. As Marcinek (2024) discusses, the social media algorithms then continue to show students' posts and comments that support these views. So, some of the interviewees expressed that schools have to do more to develop students' critical thinking skills as they are experiencing a vast amount of information online that they need to be able to approach with criticality. These findings highlight that social media is becoming an increasingly significant area within moral education, and that educators are worried about how to approach this in their own practice. But the academic literature relating to moral education and the issues raised on social media are not yet common, which is something that the current thesis has found to be significant.

6.11 Synthesis – Moral Education Through the Implicit Curriculum

The data strands revealed significant findings around the creation of the school's values, and how they are communicated. During the interviews, the three members of the senior management team agreed that the school's values should

be revisited every seven years to ensure that students have a 'full school life cycle' to develop these. However, the current school values had not been renewed in over nine years. One interviewee highlighted that this makes the values irrelevant to the current staff and students, as they were not included in the creation of these. The members of staff who were included in the creation of the values described it as a whole-school, democratic process but there were concerns raised about how authentic this was. Educators also discussed that the values being so outdated made them less important to them, the students, and the school as a whole. This was also found during the document analysis as the Curriculum Design was missing one of the five school values. Significantly, this shows the lack of importance and priority given to the communication of these to members of the school's community.

Additionally, it became apparent that there was a blurring between the school's values and rules as the terms were often used interchangeably. All of the interviewees admitted that they were confused between the rules and values and believed that the students would not know all five of the values. When asked, only one member of staff could recall all of the school's values while all other members of staff could remember, on average, three. Confusion between the rules and values could also be explained by the findings from the observations from the school. Throughout classrooms, corridors and even the assembly hall there were displays and posters showing the school rules. But there was no display of the values anywhere in the school for students or visitors to see. This was a contrast to the document analysis of the school's website which stated that 'everything we do is based on our values'. Instead, it appeared that everything the school was doing was based on their rules, not their values. Therefore, the confusion around the school rules and values had a significant impact on how these were understood by staff, and ultimately communicated to students.

Another finding highlighted that there was a focus placed on compliance within the primary school rather than the development of values. Analysis of the behaviour policy found that there was communication that students should follow the three school rules and punishment/reward incentives would be used. Additionally, observations of the whole-school assemblies again showed that there was a clear focus placed on the students' ability to follow the three school rules and that staff would be observing these through '30-day challenges'. Having such

a strong emphasis on the promotion of certain behaviours in the primary school has implications for moral education. Therefore, the data strands highlight that the current 'hidden' moral education curriculum within the primary school is does not encourage the development of values through pupil participation and activities to practice moral decision making.

Finally, the current thesis also recognises that moral education can be implicit through extra-curricular activities that take place and observations of the primary school's environment provided further information around this aspect. During the semi-structured interviews, educators were asked about the implicit development of moral values around the school, but no one mentioned the extra-curricular activities which highlights a lack of knowledge or understanding around this. The document analysis showed that there was no mention of extra-curricular activities in relation to the development of moral values. So, the main findings came from the researcher observations which found that there were displays for an Eco-Committee and Family Grouping that take place within the school. These were displayed in the school's main entrance where every visitor could view them, suggesting it is something the school places importance on. However, further inspection of these showed they were significantly outdated which, again, signifies the priority placed on these implicit approaches to moral education.

6.12 Discussion – Moral Education Through the Implicit Curriculum

6.12.1 The Implicit or 'Hidden' Curriculum

It has been suggested that moral education can occur through a 'hidden curriculum' within primary schools through interactions within the community, the physical layout of the building and diversity of the school's population (Ramberg, 2019; Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008; Husu and Tirri, 2007). More recently, there has started to be a recognition of the impact the global pandemic has had on school's hidden curriculum (McCluskey et al., 2023). With Uleanya (2022) expressing that during lockdown, education systems moved online which eliminated almost all of the hidden curriculum that students would usually have experienced. It has been recognised that moral education can be implemented through the hidden or implicit curriculum where values can be 'caught' (Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008; Husu and Tirri, 2007). But Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2008) also warn that if the hidden moral education

curriculum goes unexamined, then it can significantly impact the explicit curriculum. Other scholars have also discussed that the implicit curriculum can become "taken-for-granted pattern of habits" (Thornberg, 2008: 54) and that implicit learning can only become tangible when it is spoken about and reinforced. Within the case study primary school, the hidden moral education curriculum has become unexamined as educators shared that the school's values have been reduced to simply words on the bottom of correspondence, with no real impact. Unfortunately, Maynard et al. (2023) has found that since returning back to in-person education in schools, the priority of the hidden curriculum has been reduced. The current research has found similar reports from educators as the primary school's values have not been renewed in over nine years, with the Senior Management Team admitting that it has not been a priority. But this is not a completely unique situation as a case study school researched by Education Scotland (2024a) also found that their 'school vision and values were out of date and no longer relevant to the context of the school'. Therefore, the current thesis contributes to this new area of emerging research which is understanding the impact of the pandemic on schools' hidden curriculum, with a specific focus on the development of school values.

6.12.2 Creation of the School Values

In their paper, Priestley and Humes (2010) state that CfE is based on values which are "the words… inscribed on the mace of the Scottish Parliament – *wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity*" (p. 351). Even more recently, a report of the Curriculum for Excellence reinforced the idea that these four values are important to develop at every opportunity for all young people (Scottish Government, 2018a). These papers highlight that there are national values in the Scottish context that underpin CfE yet no knowledge of these were shown in the case study primary school. It became evident that instead of national values, developing local values related to the school's own context was more important. Curren (2017) has identified that primary schools often create their school values to be reflective of the context in which they are in, whether that be areas of higher deprivation or where student population is very culturally diverse.

Having students active in the creation of these values that underpin their school could also relate to pupil participation. It was stated by Hulme et al. (2011) that "pupil participation… [is] an attempt to move away from the transmission-based

and assessment-driven approaches… towards active and enquiry-based learning" (p. 134). This idea echoes what Kohlberg described as the 'just community' approach to moral education that places student participation in decisions within the school at the heart (Power, 1988; Kohlberg, 1970; White and Lippitt, 1960). These 'just community' papers are significantly dated compared to the work being conducted in the Scottish context relating to the impact of pupil participation, but they are strongly linked to one another. The research conducted on pupil participation has found that having more of these opportunities can increase the positive impact of the school's ethos (The Scottish Government, 2018a; Cross et al., 2014; Hulme et al., 2011; Cross et al., 2009). Additionally, Ramberg (2019) highlights that the stronger the school's ethos is, the more likely students are to participate in decision-making activities. In their paper, Hulme et al. (2011) also described different levels of pupil participation within primary schools. There are classroom activities such as working collaboratively (Hulme et al., 2011) which some interviewees stated that they encourage within their classrooms. But then there are school level activities like Pupil Council, whole-school assemblies, and eco-schools (Hulme et al., 2011). Unfortunately, these were all missed opportunities within the case study school and the observations showed no evidence of a Pupil Council being in place. Thus, it has been suggested that there is a relationship between the pupil participation opportunities and the school ethos.

The creation of the school's values was discussed by a number of the interviewees which gave insights into the decision-making process. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the focus on attainment and improving academic development has had a significant impact on the education systems but it has also affected the way in which schools create their values (Gurley et al., 2015; Claire, 2004). In particular, Courtney and Gunter (2015) discuss that a school's value formulation is viewed as a performative exercise, something that they have to 'tick off', and ultimately comes down to the decision of the headteacher. In an interview with a member of the Senior Management Team, there was a clear admission that some of the school's values were based on educational trends. For example, nine years ago, when these values were created, the interviewee explained that 'inclusion' was trending but now their values would likely include 'equity' as that is popular. Performative approaches have been discussed in Peace-Hughes' (2020) paper and how this impacted the culture of Scottish secondary schools. But their findings

highlighted that the educators within the school have the power to shift this focus as they stated that by emphasising community over performance, it "often [led] staff to act counter to the national curriculum… in order to foster a positive school culture" (p. 18). So, although there is pressure from other stakeholders, individuals school also have the autonomy within their own context to place a priority on their shared values that are relevant to their students.

6.12.3 Emphasis on Rules Rather than Values

There is a large body of research that suggests moral values and school rules do have a connection (Merzifonluoglu and Hamarat, 2022; Rowe, 2006; Powney et al., 1995). In one paper, Thornberg (2008) states that the rules provide "order to the school" (p. 54) which allows moral development to foster. Despite this, Goodman (2006) discusses that there can be a confusion around the school values and rules especially when there is a lack of understanding of how to distinguish between the two. This was certainly the case in the current study as the probationary teacher asked what to display in their classroom, and colleagues did not know which resulted in the display being titled 'School Values' but showing the three school rules. So, these findings support the academic literature which shows that there can be a confusion between rules and values, if not clarified.

Within the case study primary school there was a clear focus placed on the behavioural expectations of students. One critic of this type of moral education was Kohlberg (1971) who describes it as a 'bag of virtues' approach which can result in educators choosing generic behavioural expectations rather than developing values or moral decision-making (Kohlberg, 1971). Furthermore, Rowe (2006) describes that this can lead to conventional rules such as 'no make-up' which have no moral underpinning, but students are still required to follow. In the Scottish policies and documents related creating a school ethos, there is a consistent message that focuses on behavioural expectations (Education Scotland, 2024a; The Scottish Government, 2018a). In the document *Developing a Positive Whole-School Ethos and Culture* the term 'behaviour' is mentioned thirty-three times whilst 'values' is stated once, which highlights where the priority is placed (The Scottish Government, 2018a). So, it unsurprising that the case study school also reflected the dominance placed on rules over values. However, it does raise questions around the relationship between values and rules: should one be viewed as more important than the other or should they be used to complement one

another? The current literature would argue that they should be complementary (Thornberg, 2008; Powney et al., 1995), but findings from the case study primary school prove that rules are currently being emphasised and referenced more frequently.

Additionally, Powney et al. (1995) highlights that school rules tend to focus on the negative language such as 'do not bully' whereas values tend to be more positive like 'be kind to others'. The significant focus on school rules and this negative language has an impact on the implicit moral education within the primary school. Many studies have shown that when students are following rules and their behaviour is corrected on these expectations it is less effective than if they were aware of the moral impact on others (Rowe, 2006; Halstead and Taylor, 2000; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). Specifically, Thornberg (2008) states that this traditional approach to implicit moral education focuses on "adult transmission of the moral of society through… the use of reward and punishment" (p. 52). But adult transmission of values is not always negative as some teachers in the semi-structured interviews expressed that they believed they were positive moral role models for students. It was discussed that teachers showed students respect, honesty, and fairness in their classrooms so they thought that pupils would reciprocate these values. However, a study conducted by Sanderse (2013) found that few students recognised their teachers as being role models in their moral development. Furthermore, Halstead and Taylor (2000) suggested that teachers may not even be aware of the moral values that they are displaying on a daily basis, or that students may not be conscious of these values. Therefore, to make these role-modelling acts more prominent Lumpkin (2008) suggests that teachers should pause lessons to highlight moments when they show specific values. Hence, there is a potential for educators to be showing vertical transmission of values and rules in both negative and positive ways, but regardless, these need to be more explicit so that teachers can actively reflect on what they are promoting through this approach.

6.12.4 Extra-Curricular Activities and Moral Education

Another aspect of the current thesis was to understand how moral education could be implicitly developed through the school's environment and extra-curricular activities. These are areas of the school that educators may not be necessarily planning in relation to moral education but could be developing certain values.

This is discussed within the academic literature by Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) who suggested that moral education has "lurked beneath the surface in school" through "the hidden curriculum" (p. 54). They argue that the school cannot be neutral when it comes to the development of values as the rules and interactions are implicitly developing these daily (Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). It was identified by one of the interviewees that educators are probably implicitly implementing moral education daily through their class charters and behavioural expectations of students. However, no other interviewees discussed the implicit aspect of moral education during their interviews which highlights that these are potential activities or areas that educators are unaware of. Therefore, it was a crucial to understand what activities were in place that could be developing students' moral values, so that this information could be used by educators to improve both the implicit moral education.

During the observations, the only times the whole-school was together was during the assemblies which were led by the Senior Management Team. It has been argued that assemblies provide opportunities "to shape and celebrate the ethos and priorities of the school" (Smith and Smith, 2013: 5). Papers by Smith and Smith (2013) as well as Riddell et al. (2009) emphasise the importance of the whole-school assemblies in moral development as these are a chance for all pupils to be together and reflect on the values of their school's ethos. Educators in this primary school recognised that the school assemblies can be a crucial part of moral development, but, in the current practice, one interviewee stated that they were frustrated at the assemblies now, as they were not being used to celebrate or recognise the culture within the school. Additionally, one interviewee remembered that the school used to have faith leaders as visitors in the school to hold whole-school assemblies, but that this no longer exists. This is important to highlight as recent literature has emphasised the importance of having diverse visitors in school to share their beliefs, values, and worldview with students in an active and discursive approach (Ackroyd et al., 2024; Lundie et al., 2022; Education Scotland, 2011). In the academic literature, Halstead and Taylor (2000) discuss that having these collective moments to reflect on beliefs and values needs to be improved in primary schools, as they could have a significant impact on development in this area if they were well-planned and implemented. Researcher observations confirmed this, as there were no whole-school assemblies that mentioned the school's values, even when talking about topics that directly linked

to them. For example, one assembly addressed the issue that boys in the school had been leaving out the girls from sports, which could easily have linked to the school's value of inclusiveness, but this connection was never made. Overall, the observations and semi-structured interviews show that the whole-school assemblies are not currently effective in the implicit development of moral values, yet they do have a great potential to impact students' development as it has done before in this specific context.

Moral education can also be implicit though the extra-curricular activities that are available and undertaken within the school as Halstead and Taylor (2000) suggest that students can work towards a common goal, develop their cooperation skills, and allows pupils to be subject to other and more mature ways of thinking. The first identified in the primary school was the Eco-Committee which included pupils from across the learning levels who were working together to improve the school's approach to environmental issues. From the display available in the school entrance, the pupils had introduced a recycling policy into the classrooms and were going to reduce the food waste in the dinner hall. Participating in the Eco-Committee could be evidence of students being "active, competent and vocal members of society" (Maitles and Deucahr, 2006: 251) as they are having an impact on their school and reflecting on their own impact on the planet. Despite this, the teacher who would usually bring together the students for this group had been absent that academic year, and the Eco-Committee had not worked together. This highlights that moral education activities are not being prioritised or there is a lack of awareness of these activities within the school. It also supports the claim made by Maynard et al. (2023) that less focus is being given to the implicit hidden curriculum post-pandemic. So, the Eco-Committee does have the potential to develop students' moral values, but the current practice shows that this opportunity has easily fallen off the radar.

Another extra-curricular activity was the school's implementation of Family Grouping which is based on an Australian initiative where learning occurs by "organising children of different age levels into the one class group" (Education Department Tasmania, n.d.). Essentially, groups are created in the school made up of students from each class with the captains of the group being students from Primary 7, and sub-captains from Primary 6. In this approach, it is the responsibility of the P7 and P6 students to plan the learning activities based

around the topic for that week and are in charge of implementing this learning. The topics are based on the school's values and each week the groups are brought together to discuss explore these values in more detail. One benefit of Family Grouping is based on the idea proposed by Blatt and Kohlberg (1975) which suggests that moral development can be enhanced with opportunities for students to listen to and discuss more mature levels of moral thinking. The Family Grouping supports this idea as this approach is based on the understanding that "moral development [is] not best served when pupils spend almost all their school lives in contact with those of their own age" (Education Department Tasmania, n.d.). Within these groups, younger students are able to listen to the moral decision-making from the older students, and the upper school students can support younger pupils in their moral judgements. Despite the benefits relating to moral development through this approach, again, the display for this activity was significantly outdate by two years, and this was not implemented during the researcher observations. Overall, the implicit moral education in the current primary school is going unnoticed and unplanned, which is negatively impacting the development of students' values within the school.

6.13 Summary of Key Findings

The thematic analysis of the three data collection tools has been significant in understanding the implementation of moral education. The findings of the semi-structured interviews were outlined in Chapter Four, whilst the researcher's observations and document analysis were discussed in Chapter Five. In this section, the main findings will be briefly summarised in terms of the two research aims:

- How is Moral Education understood as a Curriculum for Excellence area?
- How well is Moral Education implemented in a primary school context?

6.13.1 A Performative Curriculum and Moral Education

Across all three data strands, it was evident that educators' implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence was based on the performative pressures that are placed on them from several stakeholders. This was a significant finding in relation to moral education, as this is a curricular area deemed of lesser importance and where assessment is a contested issue and difficult to evidence (Sporre et al.,

2022; Sporre, 2019). The participants explained that this subject was not a priority in their practice, and that this would only change if moral education was taught through other curricular areas. The idea of performativity within Scottish schools is becoming an increasing concern from scholars and policy makers (Education Scotland, 2024b; Humes, 2022; Peace-Hughes, 2021; Livingston and Doherty, 2020). From educators own admission, the focus on Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing has meant that moral education is not part of their own timetable. 'Avoidance techniques' were evident as educators stated they would often pass moral education onto 'Non-Class Contact' substitute teachers to implement. The impact of performativity in the case study school created a greater challenge in moral education implementation than it was first anticipated as some educators admitted that they would, at times, not 'get round' to teaching RME at all. This is significant as this curricular area remains the only subject in Scotland to be a legal requirement (Scholes, 2022) yet some of the participants in this study were unaware of this fact. Unfortunately, the focus on performativity has impacted moral education implementation on several levels within the current case study primary school and was a consistent finding across all of the data strands. Therefore, this was a crucial finding in the current study as this was an underlying priority of the primary school which continuously 'squeezed out' moral education from educators' explicit teaching as well as the implicit curriculum across the whole school.

6.13.2 Lack of Moral Education Curricular Knowledge

A significant finding relates to educators' lack of curricular knowledge in relation to moral education in the primary school context. In Chapter Four, it was highlighted that the participants in the current study discussed the Continuing Professional Development opportunities that are available, and undertaken, for moral education. From these discussions, it became clear that these training opportunities are not readily available to educators in this primary school, although they also admitted that they did not go searching for moral education training either. This is important as, in Scotland, research shows that CPD is a crucial part for teacher development in all curricular areas (Evans, 2019; Fraser et al., 2007) yet the lack of moral education opportunities has existed for a long period of time. An unexpected finding from this study was that the lack of curricular knowledge related to moral education goes back even further than the

introduction of Curriculum for Excellence, for some of the participating educators and that moving from the 5-14 curriculum to CfE left educators unsure of how to implement RME. The significance of this was summed up by one interviewee in Chapter Four who stated that '*I have had no training in my twenty-seven years of teaching on RE and moral education'* (Interviewee B). Whilst it may seem that this issue only exists amongst educators who have experienced the 5-14 curriculum, this is not the case. Educators who were only in their first few years of their career also explained that they lacked knowledge around RME as there were minimal inputs at university combined with no official training through the local authority. Consequently, the findings of the current study showed that the planning and implementation of moral education were significantly impacted as educators were unsure how to use the Es and Os in their lessons and struggled to include moral content. So, the lack of moral education curricular knowledge is something that has been ongoing and is still prevalent in today's practice as newly qualified educators share the same concerns.

6.13.3 Big R and little m in RME

The finding 'Big R and little m' was named as such to highlight that Religious and Moral Education in the case school is currently being implemented with more focus placed on the religious aspect compared to the moral. In relation to the explicit implementation of moral education, a major finding from the current thesis was that Religious and Moral education was mainly taught through religious festivals, and these were commonly focused on Christianity. In section 6.2.4. this theme is explored in detail, explaining the significance Christian beliefs have in the Scottish education system. Despite this, it has also been outlined throughout this thesis that society's beliefs are changing, with the majority of the Scottish Census participants identifying as having no religious belief (Scotland's Census, 2024). Previous studies and scholars have also discussed that RME in Scotland often lacks relevance to students' lives as well as providing few opportunities for pupils to explore their values independent of religion (Conroy et al., 2013; Conroy and Davis, 2005). This was a shared feeling by some participants who believed that teaching students about religions did not seem relevant to their lives. In another perspective, participants suggested that approaching RME through only religious festivals and only when they are occurring in the year actually makes this subject tokenistic and stereotypical. It has been suggested that these 'one-off' lessons

attempting to be multi-cultural and inclusive may actually be having the opposite effect by 'othering' these beliefs or providing a distorted view of religion (Education Scotland, 2021; Mullally, 2018; McCreery et al., 2008). These findings were very interesting as educators were only ever asked about moral education, yet all of their responses were around how they implemented RE, and even when asked about non-religious views, participants could not think of a lesson based solely on values. Significantly, this highlighted that educators in the current primary school were chiefly viewing moral education as something taught through religion and were not able to view these as independent aspects.

6.13.4 Implicit Moral Education Through the Life of the School

The final main finding discussed in this section is related to the implicit moral education curriculum that was observed in the current study. This aspect was important as this can sometimes go unnoticed within primary schools but can be crucial in how values are communicated or developed in this context (Çubukçu, 2012; Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). In Chapter Five, the findings from the researcher's observations and document analysis highlighted that this was a significantly underdeveloped area in the case study school. The displays related to the extra-curricular activities were outdated, the assemblies lacked any reference to the school's values, and the values themselves were not communicated effectively. Implicit moral education was an area in this primary school that was not considered by the educators. Additionally, the creation of the school values was discussed during the semi-structured interviews with some of the individuals who were involved in that process. From these, it was found that the values were based on educational trends such as inclusion or equity, and that this was essentially a 'tick-box' exercise. Overall, the implicit moral education in the current primary school was not fully developed by the headteacher, senior management team, or educators.

6.14 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has provided a synthesis and discussion of the five main groupings gathered from the three data strands. The first of these groupings related to how educators understood and implemented moral education in their own practice. One of the most significant findings, however, related to educators' training within moral education and how this impacts their curricular knowledge.

The second focused on the priority given to the moral and religious aspects of RME since, across the data strands, there was a consistent reference to how religious education is taught within the school. The moral aspect was consistently overlooked and resulting in a Big R, little m implementation. Again, this relates to the current academic literature within the Scottish context, as scholars in this area simply refer to RME as Religious Education (Matemba, 2018). One negative impact of this is that lessons can become tokenistic or stereotypical, but also, during specific times of the year, there can be a clear promotion of Christian values over other beliefs (McEwan, 1995). Thus, the current thesis challenges the current practice within RME and shows that a focus on festivals is having an implicitly negative impact on the inclusion of other beliefs, which has been less explored in the literature in recent times.

In the third main grouping, the focus on a 'core' curriculum and its impact on moral education was discussed. During the semi-structured interviews, educators expressed that there was pressure to focus on the curricular areas of Numeracy, Literacy and Health and Wellbeing. Consequently, moral education has become less prioritised within the curriculum and has been passed on by teachers to others, viewing it as the responsibility of someone else. Additionally, the focus on the three 'core' curricular areas has left teachers explaining that they do not have the time. It has been identified that CfE has become overcrowded, and the performativity culture is on the rise within Scotland.

Finally, the implicit impact of the school's values and rules was explored in relation to the 'hidden' moral education across the school. In creating the values that underpin the school, it was described as a 'democratic' process, but the literature highlights that this can never be authentic as the final decisions are the responsibility of the head of the school (Courtney and Gunter, 2015; Claire, 2004). This section also explained how extra-curricular activities could develop students' moral values. Overall, the data strands showed that these activities were not given priority within the school, which negatively impacts the implicit moral education curriculum.

Chapter 7 : Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This research aimed to understand how moral education was implemented in a non-denominational primary school. It was intended that the findings could highlight the implicit and explicit approaches utilised to develop the moral values of students within this context, identifying areas of strength and those that needed further development. A single case study provided the opportunity to gain in-depth perspectives and an understanding of the factors influencing the implementation of moral education. However, it is also recognised that these findings are tentative and are not conclusive or generalisable.

In the first section of this chapter, a summary of the key findings will be provided. Secondly, the research question and sub-questions will be addressed, which provides a further understanding of how moral education was implemented in the case study school. In the third section, the contributions this study makes to the existing body of literature will be discussed and how the findings provide unique perspectives to research relating to moral education. Next, the limitations of the current study will be examined concerning the research methods. Finally, this chapter will conclude with recommendations for various stakeholders in education as well as future directions for moral education researchers in the primary school context.

7.2 Addressing the Research Questions

The current thesis was guided by two research aims (Agee, 2009), but to provide more specific details about this phenomenon, there were also six sub-questions outlined. In this section, these questions will be addressed, which will ultimately answer the central research aim.

7.2.1 How do primary school leaders and teachers understand the aims and terminology of Moral Education in the Curriculum for Excellence?

The qualitative findings have suggested that primary school educators, in this case study, lack an understanding of the terminology within CfE documents related to moral education. Primary school practitioners discussed that their curricular knowledge of moral education was essentially non-existent, as they would shift

the responsibility of this subject to other colleagues. One unexpected finding was that the three members of the senior management team also shared that their understanding of the curricular documents for moral education was significantly lacking. Despite this, during the discussions with all of the participants, there was a clear understanding, at least, that moral education was about the development of values. In the '*Literature Review of Key Terminology*' chapter of the current thesis, it was outlined that there can be many terms related to moral education, such as character education and citizenship education. But the findings suggest that the primary school educators and leaders in the case study primary school consistently used 'values' when discussing moral education. This suggests that although there may not be strong curricular knowledge related to the subject, there are glimmers of content knowledge shown by the participants. Shulman (1987) describes content knowledge as practitioners' understanding of the "structures of subject matter" (p. 9) which exist irrespective of a given curriculum, and the findings showed that the educators were aware, perhaps unconsciously, of some relationship between moral education and the development of values.

7.2.2 How are the CfE Benchmarks and Es and Os used by primary school teachers in the planning and teaching of moral education?

This question follows from the preceding, as it showed how the educators use the Curriculum for Excellence documents in their planning and teaching of moral education across the levels of learning. What the findings highlighted was that there is inconsistency across the case study primary school, where a lack of communication amongst staff was having an impact on the implementation of moral education. For example, from the lesson plans provided by participants, it was found that the Es and Os were being repeated across the levels. This raised concerns around the breadth and depth of learning opportunities being provided to students in the case study primary school within moral education. The staff stated that one challenge in their practice was the lack of consistency across the school when it came to this curricular area and suggested that having a whole-school approach would benefit the students. Overall, the findings suggested that the CfE Benchmarks and Es and Os were not being effectively or consistently used by the primary school practitioners when planning for moral education in the case study.

7.2.3 How is moral education taught through explicit teaching approaches?

The findings from the data strands provided a deeper understanding of how moral education was explicitly implemented in the case study primary school. It was suggested that the main barrier to the teaching of this curricular area was time. Educators shared that there is pressure to focus on Literacy, Numeracy, and Health and Wellbeing in their daily practice, which pushes moral education out of their timetables. Admittedly, primary educators discussed that there are strategies they use in an attempt to combat this barrier (one of which is to ask Non-Class Contact teachers to implement these lessons). However, a more common suggestion was that moral issues may be explored through an interdisciplinary approach. The lesson observations showed that commonly the classroom teachers would connect moral education with Health and Wellbeing and Social Studies. But, in Chapter Five, it was discussed that, often, 'moral education' lessons were not based on moral values or topics; instead, they became focused on literacy skills. Therefore, the strategies being implemented in the case study school were ineffective in relation to moral development and lacked content relating to moral topics or issues.

7.2.4 What do primary school teachers formally assess in ME, and what strategies are adopted to assess these areas?

From the findings in the current thesis, it can be ascertained that assessment, in the case study school, in moral education, was not happening in a formal sense. During the semi-structured interviews, educators explained that they would use strategies like observation to determine if students were progressing in their moral standpoints. In '*2.6. Assessment of Moral Education'* it was highlighted that Education Scotland (2017) produced Benchmarks for RME "to assess the knowledge, understanding, and skills" (p. 3) from Early to Fourth Levels. But not one participant suggested that they would use the Experiences and Outcomes or Benchmarks in their assessment of progression. Additionally, findings from the data highlighted that within moral education lessons, the focus was on developing lower-order thinking skills such as recalling and listing facts. Unfortunately, no formal evidence of progression was collected during the current study, as this was not provided by educators during lesson observations, nor readily available from existing classroom documents.

7.2.5 How is ME implicitly implemented through the life of the school?

Data collected from the semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and document analysis within the case study school provided more detail around the implicit ways in which moral education was implemented. One of the significant findings was that this is an underdeveloped area within the primary school and was not reflected upon by practitioners. Within Chapter Two of the current thesis, it was discussed that the implicit approaches to moral education can have a great impact on the development of students' values and that it often goes unnoticed. The data suggests that activities like whole-school assemblies, Eco-Committees, and approaches like Family Grouping do exist within the primary school. However, they were missed opportunities to promote the school's shared values and were often neglected. Additionally, the promotion of the school's rules over the values highlighted that there was a focus on compliance and behaviour rather than on developing moral values and decision-making. Therefore, the implicit moral education curriculum, in the case study, may be having an impact on students' moral development without acknowledgement or understanding from the educators within this context.

7.2.6 What professional development opportunities are undertaken by primary school teachers and leaders to develop their knowledge and understanding of moral education, and why?

The final question aimed to understand what professional development opportunities were undertaken by the primary school educators, and what impact this had on their implementation of moral education. It had been assumed by the researcher that, as part of the eight curricular subjects, educators would have participated in some form of training in moral education recently. However, the findings highlighted that this was an area significantly lacking within the case study school. Participants explained that they had not undergone explicit training in moral education, with some sharing extreme cases of having no training through initial teacher training due to the global pandemic. But even more experienced educators could not recall professional development opportunities for moral education in their career journeys. Despite this, one unexpected finding was that training for this subject may be happening implicitly through other topics like Black Lives Matter or LGBTQ+ issues. So, on reflection, some educators in the case study suggested that there could be underlying moral aspects being explored

through other training opportunities, but that they had not realised this until the semi-structured interview discussion.

7.3 Contribution to Knowledge

Firstly, the current study contributes to the lack of empirical research relating to the pedagogical approaches adopted within moral education lessons. Within the academic literature, it is suggested that moral reasoning often occurs in the moments when there are disagreements around what is right or wrong in moral dilemmas (Dahl et al., 2025; Piaget, 1977), and that social interactions during these discussions are the driver for values development (Bleazby, 2020; Mammen et al., 2019; De Lisi, 2002). Yet, there are limited empirical studies that aim to understand if these approaches are part of educators' current and daily practice. A paper published by Berkowitz and Bier (2005) reviewed the existing literature on character education programmes but admitted that "most educators do not utilise pre-packaged programmes, but rather create their own" (p. 4). Additionally, Chen et al. (2023) discuss that empirical research has been conducted in China and Pakistan on university teachers' beliefs around sustainability and moral education. However, studies from 2000-2022 continue to support the theoretical trend of moral education (Chen et al., 2023). De Ruyter (2019) explains that moral development theories are significant in building an understanding, but that making recommendations for educational purposes would be made stronger through the use of empirical research. So, the findings from the current research provide new empirical evidence of what pedagogies and approaches were used by educators in the case study primary school. One of the main findings from the present thesis was that a contradiction arose between what all of the interviewees believed to be effective approaches, compared to what was observed in their moral education lessons. Similar to the literature (Mammen et al., 2019; De Lisi, 2002; Piaget, 1932), participants expressed that discussions and peer interactions were essential for moral development. But researcher observations showed that moral education lessons were heavily teacher-led with no discussions amongst students. Hence, the current thesis contributes to the existing literature by providing evidence around what pedagogies are currently implemented at the primary school level.

The originality of this study is based in part on the fact that it completely focused on the moral aspect of 'Religious and Moral Education'. In Chapter One, it was

outlined that 'moral' was defined, for the present study, as a focus on the development of values based on students' reasoning when faced with moral dilemmas, which are enhanced through their interactions with others and their environment. In Chapter One, it was also identified that there is a gap in research that specifically studies the implementation of moral education. A significant author in this field within Scotland is Yonah Matemba, who has published several papers on RME (Matemba, 2015; Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Grant and Matemba, 2013). But Matemba has been very open in his critique of philosophical approaches in this curricular area, suggesting that Religious Education should have the teaching of and about religion at its 'core' (Matemba, 2015). This has been further evidenced by many studies, including moral education within the title, but the content of the research is very much focused on the religious aspect of RME (Cameron and Cassidy, 2022; Scholes, 2022; Conroy et al., 2013). Additionally, in the international context, moral education is again used in the titles of papers, but then either philosophy or ethics education is discussed. Particularly, Bleazby (2020) has discussed 'moral education' in the Australian context but has then detailed the Philosophy for Children approach or ethics education. Another scholar, Nixon (2015; 2008a) has discussed the 'philosophication' in Scottish education, but again, no reference to the moral component of Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies in the secondary school implementation. Furthermore, within the European literature, moral education is often associated with ethics education and ethical development (Sporre, 2019). Therefore, the current research addresses a significant gap in the literature, which looks specifically at the implementation of moral education in a primary school setting.

The implicit moral education curriculum has been discussed in research conducted in other countries, but this is an aspect not been explored in relation to Scottish primary schools until now. The current thesis is innovative in this area as it provides current insights into how practitioners view and prioritise the 'hidden' moral curriculum. In the American context, the idea of an implicit moral education curriculum has been previously discussed in purely theoretical terms (Çubukçu, 2012; Power and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2008). Yet, in the current literature, empirical research conducted on the implicit moral education activities of schools has been under-researched. This was a significant component of the current study as it was important to understand what factors, as part of the life of the school, could be influencing the moral development of students. The findings from the

current study aim to contribute to the existing narrative, recognised by Kohlberg and Hersh (1977), that this 'hidden' moral education has "lurked beneath the surface in school" (p. 54). Pring (2005) further expanded on this idea by stating that there is a "danger" (p.196) in allowing these moral activities to go unnoticed. He suggests that "the actual practice of education… becomes detached from a moral perspective. There remains no driving and unifying ideal, no coherent set of values" (Pring, 2005:196). Findings from the current thesis found this in the case study school; there was no cohesiveness in the shared values of the school, and the activities had become detached from their moral perspective. The implicit moral education curriculum, in the case school, was given no conscious thought as to how it could be contributing to the development of values, as none of the interviewees mentioned it, and the researcher's observations showed the activities lacked a moral component. There has been research conducted into some of the activities that were observed, such as Pupil Councils (Cross et al., 2014; 2009; Hulme et al., 2011), whole-school activities (Smith and Smith, 2013; Halstead and Taylor, 2000) and Eco-Committees (Maitles and Deuchar, 2006), but the research does not discuss what moral impact these are having on students' values. Hence, the findings from the current study bring a relevant contribution to the knowledge around and renewed awareness of the development of an implicit moral education curriculum within a primary school context.

The use of a single case study provided a novel approach to understanding the implementation of moral education within a non-denominational primary school context. Semi-structured interviews with educators provided information around implementation, planning, and the challenges in moral education; the researcher observations provided an understanding around the school's life as well as the pedagogies adopted within moral education lessons; and document analysis showed what underlying principles shaped the school's moral context as well as how CfE documents inform the planning of moral education across the stages of learning. Existing literature in the Scottish context has used qualitative research methods to study RME (Cameron and Cassidy, 2020; Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Grant and Matemba, 2013), but this thesis is unique in using the three data collection tools in combination. The data collection methods of the current thesis provide a new way of understanding moral education implementation from multiple perspectives. Additionally, the single-case study methodology also contributes to the broader scope of literature relating to this qualitative

approach. The “intimate insider” (Taylor, 2011: 8) positionality of the researcher has been discussed in Chapter 3 as being a significant benefit to the current thesis. Yet, it has been suggested that “the recruitment of respondents from amongst our personal networks is not commonly reported in qualitative… publications” (Brewis, 2014: 3). It has been the researcher’s ability to build on the strong, pre-existing relationships with colleagues, as well as the familiarity of the school being studied, that deepened the data collection process. Overall, the combination of the three qualitative data collection tools, as well as the researcher’s insider position, provided a more comprehensive understanding of the implicit and explicit implementation of moral education within this primary school.

An unexpected new contribution to the existing literature relates to the performative nature of curricula (Humes, 2022; Livingston and Doherty, 2020; Peace-Hughes, 2021). This thesis shows how this focus on performance is directly impacting the reduced implementation of moral education. Sporre (2019) states that the increased national testing in education with “its focus on competence” has been “initiated and influenced by the OECD” (p. 264). In Scotland, specifically in primary schools, it has been noted that there is pressure on educators to increase students’ progression in Literacy, Numeracy, and Health and Wellbeing (McCluskey et al., 2023; Colville et al., 2021). The impact of the performative focus on these ‘core’ subjects has been discussed by Bhachu (2019) in terms of music education, suggesting that this curricular area is commonly given to non-class contact teachers (NCCTs) to meet the demands of an overstretched timetable. Findings from the present thesis have shown that teachers in the case study primary school would often rely on NCCT teachers to implement moral education and admitted that they do not have time in the curriculum to explore this in their practice. These results support Matemba’s (2023) claim that:

> “some teachers in non-denominational primary schools tend to invoke McCrone Time [non-contact hours to allow teachers time to prepare, mark and attend professional development courses] as a way to avoid teaching religious education because they lack the confidence to deliver the subject” (p. 185).

Even though Scholes’ (2024; 2022) work provides a reminder that provision of RME in Scotland is a statutory requirement, two of the classroom educators in the present study were unaware of the legal requirement of this curricular area. Thus,

the impact of how performativity has 'squeezed out' moral education from Curriculum for Excellence highlights the issue with a Scottish context, but also contributes to the bigger trend that many curricula are placing a heightened focus on students' performance, influenced by international tests such as PISA and the OECD, indicating that there may be similar issues with moral education internationally.

7.4 Limitations of the Study

Even though the current thesis has provided some understanding of how moral education was implemented in a non-denominational primary school in Scotland, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations that could be addressed through further research. In Chapter Three, the methodology and research design were outlined, explaining the rationale behind selecting a single-case study. Whilst the benefits of this approach have been discussed in this and other chapters, there are clear limitations of basing results on just one case (Yin, 2003). Issues around generalisation have also been addressed previously, as the purpose of the current study was to provide in-depth descriptions of moral education implementation (Stake, 1995). Despite this, it is recognised that using such methods could lead to broader definitions of generalisation (Flyvbjerg, 2011; 2006; Firestone, 1993); so, one suggestion draws upon the terminology used by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as they prefer to use the term *transferability* over generalisation. Transferability suggests that there can be similarities made between contexts, but that these can "only be possible when thick description provides a rich enough portrayal of circumstance" (Stahl and King, 2020: 27). In this study, rich descriptions have been provided around the implicit and explicit implementation of moral education within a primary school context. For other practitioners, these findings could be used to reflect on the current practice within their own context, which could inform their own school's strengths and areas of improvement. But the use of a single case study means that the findings presented are specific to evaluating that school's practice and cannot be used to make assumptions about other contexts.

Secondly, the current thesis is based solely on qualitative data collection and analysis tools, which have been purposeful for the research question and sub-questions, but there are limitations to this approach. In Chapter Three, it was highlighted that a significant aspect of a qualitative study is that the researcher is at the heart of the data tool creation, collection, and analysis (Priya, 2021;

Creswell and Poth, 2018). This approach makes it essentially impossible to separate the researcher from the research as they bring their own knowledge, experiences, and biases to the study (Omodan, 2024). Whilst this can be viewed as a positive since it means the researcher has a passion for the topic (Wa-Mbaleka, 2020; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), literature also highlights that this can cause challenges at various stages of the research process (Brewis, 2014; Taylor, 2011; Tillman-Healy, 2003). An additional layer to the current thesis is that the researcher is also a primary school educator, and although not in full-time employment, there is a clear shared 'doxa' between the researcher and the participants (Bourdieu, 1997). The researcher shares similar habits, practices, and knowledge with the interviewees, which could impact the way the data is collected or interpreted (Bourdieu, 2000; 1997). Some critics have suggested that the researcher's bias and ability to 'step back' from the context could impact the study's reliability (Brewis, 2014). Despite this, on reflection, the researcher's "intimate insider" (Taylor, 2011: 8) perspective was significantly beneficial to the data collection. As reported by some scholars, conducting research with 'friends' can elicit deeper discussions as there is a familiarity and rapport built before data collection (Brewis, 2014; Yuan, 2014). This was certainly the case in the current research as educators provided detailed and honest descriptions of their current moral education practice, which would not have been collected had the researcher been an 'outsider'. Therefore, although crucial to acknowledge the limitations of placing the researcher at the heart of qualitative research, this was certainly one of the main strengths in relation to this study.

A third limitation of the current thesis relates to the time spent within the primary school case study, as it was intended to be a longer period; however, ethical approval delayed the initial data collection. One thing to note is that the researcher did spend four months in the primary school, conducting interviews and observations as well as collating documents for analysis. So, the length of time spent in the case study school was still a notable duration, as it meant that a full term of the year was observed. However, it had been intended that the researcher would have observed all four terms to gain information on how moral education may be prioritised or communicated at different times of the year. Naturally, primary schools also have holidays and other commitments during the year, so even though ethical approval was gained, working with the school's timeline was essential. Consequently, the data collected was around the time of

March/April, when there are some major religious festivals and celebrations occurring, which gave some useful insights into moral education implementation during these periods. Additionally, the reduced time spent in the primary school also narrowed the focus on studying moral development only through the curricular area of RME. It has been highlighted by scholars that there are strong links to Literacy (Wahab et al., 2022; Halstead and Pike, 2006), Health and Wellbeing (Mercia, 2023; Lumpkin, 2008), and Social Studies (Robertson et al., 2017; Byrd, 2012) when implementing moral education. One interviewee stated that '*maybe we do it [moral education] without realising'* (Interviewee B), which was a view shared by other colleagues. So, observing lessons across the Curriculum for Excellence subjects, may have found that moral education was being implemented implicitly through interdisciplinary learning or other curricular areas. As a way to address this limitation, further research could be conducted as a longitudinal study or at different stages of the primary school terms to observe moral education implementation at various stages of the year, and through all other seven areas of the curriculum.

7.5 Future Directions and Recommendations

Possible recommendations for diverse educational stakeholders will be discussed in the following section, based on the findings presented in the current thesis. These recommendations are tentative, with issues around generalisation having been addressed in previous sections throughout the present thesis (Stake, 1995). The results from this study have highlighted that there are some changes that could be made at different levels of moral education implementation, from the classroom educators to those who inform educational policies. Additionally, there will be a discussion about what these findings mean for the future directions of research within the field of moral education from the context of Scottish non-denominational primary schools, and beyond.

7.5.1 Primary School Leaders and Educators

One practical suggestion for primary school educators implementing moral education is to reflect on how their practice is inclusive of non-religious views. As it has been discussed throughout the current thesis, there is a growing number of the Scottish population identifying as having no religious belief (Scotland's Census, 2024), which will ultimately impact the students in our classrooms. Findings from

the case study primary school suggested that the current moral education practice is heavily reliant upon teaching about religious festivals, and educators could not recall a time they taught a lesson based upon values without a religious connotation. It has been highlighted that students with no religious background are becoming a silent population within schools (Holt, 2019), as there are often very few opportunities for these viewpoints to be discussed and explored within education. Therefore, primary school educators should also plan lessons that are based on values development, separate from the religious aspect of RME, that encourage students to discuss and debate moral issues that are relevant within their lives.

Another practical recommendation is for primary school headteachers and senior management teams in relation to a whole-school approach to moral education implementation. Participants in the case study school suggested that moral education was not made a priority throughout the implicit or explicit curriculum. But some scholars have highlighted that many of the decisions made around this curricular area do, ultimately, fall upon the management team within the primary school (Peace-Hughes, 2020; Scholes, 2020; Courtney and Gunter, 2015; Matemba, 2011) and that they have some room to shape the priority of values in their own context. Through the findings, it was discussed that the creation of the school's values and the communication of these can be a significant aspect of the implicit moral education. So, a tentative recommendation is that headteachers critically reflect on what values are underpinning their school's community, why these are reflective of their own context, and how these are actually shown by staff and students. Additionally, each school will have various extra-curricular activities available to students in their own contexts, but this study has highlighted that these areas should be recognised as part of the moral education curriculum. Pupil councils, eco-committees and assemblies are just some examples that provide opportunities for schools and students to communicate as well as practice their values in real-life situations (Cross et al., 2014; Smith and Smith, 2013; Hulme et al., 2011). Despite this, these activities were underdeveloped and outdated in the current case study primary school. So, it is recommended that headteachers provide these opportunities to students and ensure that the moral values are clearly communicated within the activities.

7.5.2 Local Councils and Policymakers

In terms of suggestions for policymakers of moral education, the current thesis has highlighted areas that require changes and support to aid educators in their implementation of this subject. The first of these relates to Humes' (2022) call to "address the deeper issues about the nature of bureaucracy" before the "situation…get[s] worse" (p. 249). Findings from this study have supported the belief that there is a 'core' curriculum being implemented in Scottish primary schools, which consists of Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing (Hardley et al., 2021). This was summarised in Chapter Four by one participant who stated that '*a really great thought about what they think in this particular moral situation might not be as excit[ing]… as stunning sums in jotters'* (Interviewee E). The focus on performativity in this case study primary school was also discussed thoroughly in Chapter Six, highlighting that this is significantly affecting educators' implementation of moral education. Reports are now being conducted and published that are questioning the impact of focusing on these three 'core' areas within the primary school context (Education Scotland, 2024b; McCluskey et al., 2023), suggesting that there are issues around the breadth of learning. Yet issues around performativity are not unique to Scotland, and international scholars have also noted how curricula are being increasingly focused on performativity, directly impacted by the influence of international testing (Sporre et al., 2022; Sporre, 2019). In the current study, the educators stated that they believed moral education was crucial for students to live in a multi-cultural Scottish society, yet the performance pressures were detrimental to their implementation of this curricular area. Issues around the breadth and depth of learning opportunities available to students are becoming an increasingly topical issue within Scotland (Education Scotland, 2024b; McCluskey et al., 2023), but this has been highlighted as a challenge in moral education for a significant amount of time (Education Scotland, 2014). Therefore, it is recommended that policymakers are aware of this shift towards performative factors within Curriculum for Excellence and international curricula, and how this is impacting the implementation of moral education.

For policymakers and local authorities in Scotland, there is also a suggestion to improve how policies are communicated to primary school educators about moral education. Findings from the primary case study school highlighted a significant

gap in the educators' curricular knowledge around RME, which ultimately impacted their implementation. Participants shared that the training for moral education has been an issue throughout their careers, and that these opportunities are not made clear to them through the local authority of Glasgow City Council. So, a potential recommendation for policymakers is to provide additional policies or guidelines for RME in the primary school context. Although the CfE documents are intended to be non-prescriptive, there needs to be more clarification and guidance around moral education for primary school educators. The concept of values development is not strong in the Es and Os until the third level, which is often secondary school education, with the word 'moral' not featuring in any of the primary-level Experiences and Outcomes. But local authorities also have a responsibility to have training opportunities for all eight curricular areas, and the current findings highlight that the primary educators are unaware of moral education CPD.

7.5.3 Initial Teacher Education Programmes

The findings in this study have indicated that there are recommendations that could be made for initial teacher education programmes in Scotland that could lead to a more effective implementation of moral education at the primary school level. The nine participants shared their educational journeys during the semi-structured interviews, which ranged from different universities across Scotland. No generalisations will be made about specific institutions nor educational programmes; rather, there will be tentative recommendations that would be beneficial for all ITE to consider. Initial teacher education programmes for primary teachers could be significant in making the links between moral education and other curricular areas clearer. Consistently, educators in the current study shared that using an interdisciplinary approach could be a way of exploring moral education in their own practice. However, the data also showed that these links were not very strong as teachers lacked the curricular knowledge around moral education, and because there is a hierarchy of disciplines. But it was also discussed that the educators would feel more comfortable making connections between moral education and areas like Literacy, Health and Wellbeing or Social Studies. Whereas they admitted that this confidence would diminish when linking moral education with Numeracy, Technology or Science. In many ITE programmes, interdisciplinary approaches are discussed in the primary context, as this is a

feature of Curriculum for Excellence (The Scottish Government, 2008). During these classes and tutorials, student teachers could be given more opportunities to discuss how moral education can be linked to the other seven curricular areas, which could increase educators' confidence in its implementation, though there is an attendant risk associated with performativity here.

7.5.4 Moral Education Researchers

In this section, the final recommendations will be outlined for those in the field of moral education research. In Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence can be interpreted by educators in different ways, and the priority of moral education can also be down to the headteachers' discretion (Scholes, 2020; Matemba, 2011). Hence, it would be beneficial to the Scottish literature, and beyond, to conduct research with a larger range of comparative case studies to understand the opportunities available to educators in moral education training and their own local policies for moral education. Further research could either be done through the use of multiple case studies or by including quantitative tools like surveys/questionnaires to reach a broader range of case studies across local authorities. However, these studies may not be able to explore all of the main findings from the current research, so they may focus on one or two aspects, but on a larger scale. If similar issues are found in different contexts, then this could further inform policymakers, local authorities, and initial teacher education programmes.

One of the areas that was lightly discussed in the current thesis was the impact the global pandemic has had on the implicit and explicit implementation of moral education in the case study primary school, primarily the consistent focus placed on Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing. Emerging research is beginning to discuss the impact of focusing on three curricular areas within Scotland (Education Scotland, 2024b; McCluskey et al., 2023), but research is required around this gap within RME. However, the curriculum impact report published in 2014 highlighted that issues around the 'squeezing' of moral education have existed for more than a decade within Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2014), significantly earlier than the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this, the current findings provide a unique perspective on the lockdown of primary schools as well as the return to in-person education, as they highlight that moral education was essentially gone from the curriculum during this time. In this post-

pandemic education, it could be useful to gain a further understanding of what knowledge and skills students have around Religious and Moral Education at the primary school stage. To address this gap, research could be conducted with students themselves to understand what they understand about RME, and their feelings about this curricular area.

A final aspect that could be researched further is how the implicit moral education curriculum impacts the values and ethos within primary schools. This revealed aspects that could be researched independently as a separate thesis, as there were many underlying components of implicit moral education in this context. One of these surrounds the creation of the school's values. The school's values were poorly displayed, inconsistently communicated, and significantly outdated. As part of another primary school's inspection report, Education Scotland (2024a) discovered that their values were also significantly outdated and poorly communicated to students. In this school, it had been recognised that this lack of shared visions was negatively impacting the students' behaviour, and that strengthening this aspect of the school's life significantly reduced the level of dysregulated behaviour in their context (Education Scotland, 2024a). Furthermore, there were no data on the impact of visitors on the creation or development of the primary school's values and moral education. Visitors across different school contexts may influence the implicit moral education in various ways, and it is an important aspect to explore through further research. In attempting to understand how the current case study school selected their values, more questions were raised around what constitutes a value, who decides which values are selected for discussion, and what relation they have to the school's context or to Scottish education in general. These could not all be answered in the current thesis, but it is certainly an area that would be beneficial in further research. Findings suggested that the creation of school values fell into the performative view of education, and that they are not a priority within the primary school. Future research could be conducted into other primary schools' processes of creating shared values and how they are communicated to students. This would gain more understanding into whether the school's values are completely dependent on their own contexts or if there are similar values being communicated across Scottish primary schools, and why.

7.6 Concluding Remarks

Reflecting on the findings from the present thesis, it can be concluded that moral education implementation in the case study primary school faces many challenges, from training opportunities available to educators, to the pressures placed on schools to show students' performance within the 'core' curricular areas. Despite this, there are glimmers of hope as all of the interviewees have expressed a belief that moral education is crucial for living in a multi-cultural society, and a recognition that the teachers themselves have strong values like kindness and respect at their core. These findings highlight that the issues facing moral education are complex and multifaceted, with no clear solution in sight for the near future. But the present study has provided innovative and unique contributions to the literature that can be further developed within the Scottish context, and beyond.

Overall, the present research addresses a significant gap within the literature relating to the implementation of moral education at the primary school level, where existing studies have primarily focused on the 'religious' aspect (Matemba, 2023; 2018; Clanachan and Matemba, 2015; Grant and Matemba, 2013). These findings come at a timely and important moment as Scottish society is becoming increasingly secular in its beliefs (Scotland's Census, 2024), with a recognition that schools need to do more to include the diverse beliefs held by students (Education Scotland, 2021). Furthermore, Education Scotland (2024b) is beginning to report that the increased focus on performativity is negatively impacting students' breadth of learning experiences. Thus, as Curriculum for Excellence moves into a process of review through the Curriculum Improvement Cycle, it is hoped that the findings from the present thesis can shed some light on the current challenges and next steps for moral education implementation in the primary context.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Ethical Approval University of Glasgow

07 December 2022

Dear Chantelle

College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Project Title: How is moral education implemented in Scottish non-denominational primary schools?

Application No: 400220023
The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 07/12/2022
- Project end date: 30/09/2024
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences: socsci-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research: (https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf)
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The **Request for Amendments to an Approved Application** form should be used: https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/

Yours sincerely,

Dr Susan A. Batchelor

College Ethics Lead

Appendix 2 – Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Educators

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Educators

Below is a guide for the semi-structured interviews. It includes the main themes and questions that will be explored with participants but may vary between interviews. Additionally, general prompts may be used that are not outlined here to gain further information on the questions.

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am interviewing you to gain a deeper understanding about the implementation of moral education both explicitly and implicitly. So, there are no right or wrong answers here, I am interested in your experiences and perspective.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and at any time you can choose to stop or end the interview. If you no longer wish to take part, you have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research and there will be no questions asked. The interview should take approximately one hour, depending on how much information you would like to share today. If I have your permission, I would like to audio record this interview so that I do not miss any of your answers. All the comments or information you share in the interview will be kept confidential, meaning that your name will not be mentioned. The only identification will be a pseudonym that will be used to identify this interview, however, since there are only a small number of participants, other members of staff may be able to identify you as the participant. During the interview, you can decline any questions and you can stop the interview at any time. Based on this information, do you have any questions you would like to ask?

If you are ready, can I turn on the audio recorder and begin?

Building Rapport

Before we begin, could you tell me a bit about yourself? The questions can be tailored for probationers, senior management, those who have worked here for a longer time.

Rapport:

1. Which primary do you currently teach?
2. Have you always taught at that level?

3. How long have you been teaching for?
4. Could you tell me a bit about your education background in terms of gaining your teaching degree?
5. Did you complete the undergraduate/postgraduate course?

1 Moral Education Definition

In the Curriculum for Excellence, there is the curricular area Religious and Moral Education. Could you tell me in your own words, how you would describe moral education?

Prompt: When you are presented with the term 'moral education' what do you think of?

Prompt: Are there any experiences that have shaped your definition of moral education e.g., education, experiences, interactions with other?

2 Age/Stage of Moral Education

Could you explain to me when you believe it is the most appropriate age or stage to start teaching moral education?

Prompt: Why do you believe this is the age it should be taught at?

3 Curriculum for Excellence Documentation

In the Curriculum for Excellence Es and Os, as well as the Principles and Practice, terms are used such as 'moral values'. Could you describe what this term means to you?

Prompt: What values do you believe are important to develop in the pupils in your classroom?

Prompt: Are you clear on what values are important to the Scottish education system, based on CfE?

4 Moral Education and Other Subjects

How well do you think moral education relates to other areas of the curriculum?

Prompt: What areas do you think moral education fits well with?

Prompt: What areas do you think moral education does not fit well with?

Prompt: Can you give me a time when you combined moral education with learning in another area of the curriculum?

5 Moral Education Planning

Could you describe, in your own words, the process you have for planning a moral education lesson?

Prompt: How do you use CfE documents and plan your activities around the Es and Os?

Prompt: Have you seen anyone that has good resources or content for moral education that gives you ideas?

Prompt: What is one of the challenges you face when planning moral education lessons?

6 Whole School Planning

In terms of across the school, who would you say is in charge of the RME curriculum?

Prompt: Would you know who to go to if you had concerns or new ideas about moral education within the school?

Prompt: Are there any moral education areas that are to be covered across the school?

7 Diversity in the Classroom

In the school that you teach in now, there is a diverse pupil population in relation to beliefs both religious and non-religious. Could you describe how you teach moral education in such a diverse context?

Prompt: What type of lessons have you taught that were non-religious?

Prompt: Have you seen any good examples of moral education at university or during your teaching?

8 Moral Decision Making

What is moral decision making?

Prompt: Have you heard of this terminology being used before?

Prompt: Can you describe a lesson which has encouraged moral decision making?

9 Teaching

What activities or lessons have you implemented previously that have encourage moral decision making?

Prompt: Can you describe any occasions where students have been able to challenge views or religious and non-religious perspectives?

Prompt: Can you describe a lesson where you felt that students made moral development?

10 Resources

Where do you get inspiration for your moral education lessons?

Prompt: What type of resources do you usually use?

Prompt: What resources are available within the school that you know of?

11 Time

How long many hours would you say you spend teaching moral education per week?

Prompt: Would you like to spend more or less time teaching this area?

Prompt: Why do you feel like there is less time spent on moral education?

12 Progression in Moral Education

When you are looking for progression in moral education in your classroom, what kind of evidence are you looking for from pupils to show their development?

Prompt: Can you explain how the Benchmarks are used in your record of progression in ME?

13 Challenges in Moral Education

Could you describe what you believe to be the biggest challenge in implementing moral education in your own practice is, and why?

14 Strengths in Moral Education

Could you describe how you think you are performing well in the implementation of moral education?

15 Continuing Professional Development

Continuing to improve our skills, knowledge and experience is important in all curricular areas. Could you describe how you continue to develop within the subject of moral education?

Prompt: How important are colleagues in your professional development of moral education, and why?

Prompt: What type of activities do you usually take part in to develop your moral education knowledge and skills?

16 Importance of Moral Education

Just to finish off our interview today, could you explain in your own words how important you believe moral education is for living in society today and why you believe this?

Conclusion

Thank you for participating in the interview today and for sharing your answers in such depth. It has been great hearing about the implementation of moral education from your experiences and knowledge. If any other information comes to mind, you can share it with me at a later date. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please email or find me when I am in the building and I will be happy to help. Enjoy the rest of your day and take care.

Appendix 3 – Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Senior Management Team

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Senior Management Team

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am interviewing you to gain a deeper understanding about the implementation of moral education both explicitly and implicitly. So, there are no right or wrong answers here, I am interested in your experiences and perspective.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and at any time you can choose to stop or end the interview. If you no longer wish to take part, you have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research and there will be no questions asked. The interview should take approximately one hour, depending on how much information you would like to share today. If I have your permission, I would like to audio record this interview so that I do not miss any of your answers. All the comments or information you share in the interview will be kept confidential, meaning that your name will not be mentioned. The only identification will be a pseudonym that will be used to identify this interview, however, since there are only [x] participants, other members of staff may be able to identify you as the participant. During the interview, you can decline any questions and you can stop the interview at any time. Based on this information, do you have any questions you would like to ask?

If you are ready, can I turn on the audio recorder and begin?

Building Rapport

Before we begin, could you tell me a bit about yourself? The questions can be tailored for probationers, senior management, those who have worked here for a longer time.

Rapport:

1. How long have you taught for?
2. How long have you been in a managerial position within this school?
3. Could you tell me a bit about your education background in terms of gaining your teaching degree?

1. Moral Education Definition

In the Curriculum for Excellence, there is the curricular area Religious and Moral Education. Could you tell me in your own words, how you would describe moral education?

Prompt: When you are presented with the term ‘moral education’ what do you think of?

Prompt: Are there any experiences that have shaped your definition of moral education e.g., education, experiences, interactions with other?

2. **Age/Stage of Moral Education**

Could you explain to me when you believe it is the most appropriate age or stage to start teaching moral education?

Prompt: Why do you believe this is the age it should be taught at?

3. **Diversity in the School**

Could you describe to me the diversity in your school in relation to the pupil population?

Prompt: Has it changed in you time being here?

Prompt: How many different religious or non-religious beliefs are in the school?

4. **School Values**

In your school, there are key values. Could you explain to me what the values are and how they are implemented in your school?

Prompt 1: Are the school values part of school assemblies or a particular set of lessons?

Prompt 2: Where are the school values displayed?

5. **Decision Making Process**

Could you explain why the values (kindness, respect, inclusiveness, and fairness) were chosen for your school and who was involved in this process?

Prompt 1: In what way were any students’ opinions used to influence that values that were chosen?

Prompt 2: How often do the values of your school change and why?

6. **Planning Moral Education**

Could you explain who is responsible for the RME curriculum within the school?

Prompt: Are there any topics or areas that are implemented across the whole school?

7. **Resources**

What kind of resources do you know of that are available for teaching moral education within the school?

Prompt: Are there any resources that you would recommend to staff?

Prompt: Are there any resources you have seen being used in other schools for this area?

8. **Progression in Moral Education**

When you are looking for progression in moral education across the school, what kind of evidence are you looking for from pupils to show their development?

9. **Moral Education and Other Subjects**

How well do you think moral education relates to other areas of the curriculum?

Prompt: What areas do you think moral education fits well with?

Prompt: What areas do you think moral education does not fit well with?

Prompt: Can you give me a time when you combined moral education with learning in another area of the curriculum?

10. **Other Policies that Promote Moral Education**

What other policies in your school do you feel develop the morality of the students in your school?

Prompt: Are there any documents that you use more commonly than others?

11. **Moral Education Continuing Professional Development Opportunities for Staff**

What opportunities are available to the staff in your school to develop the skills, pedagogy, and knowledge in moral education?

Prompt 1: Are there any CPD opportunities that are particularly effective in this curricular area?

Prompt 2: Are there any areas for development in the CPD opportunities for moral education?

12. **Continuing Professional Development**

Continuing to improve our skills, knowledge and experience is important in all curricular areas. Could you describe how you continue to develop within the subject of moral education?

Prompt: How important are colleagues in your professional development of moral education, and why?

Prompt: What type of activities do you usually take part in to develop your moral education knowledge and skills?

13. Challenges in Moral Education

Could you describe what you believe to be the biggest challenge in implementing moral education in your own practice is, and why?

14. Strengths in Moral Education

Could you describe how you think you are performing well in the implementation of moral education?

15. Importance of Moral Education

Just to finish off our interview today, could you explain in your own words how important you believe moral education is for living in society today and why you believe this?

Conclusion

Thank you for participating in the interview today and for sharing your answers in such depth. It has been great hearing about the implementation of moral education from your experiences and knowledge. If any other information comes to mind, you can share it with me in our next interview. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please email or find me when I am in the building and I will be happy to help. Enjoy the rest of your day and take care.