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**Harriet Zilliacus**

**SUPPORTING STUDENTS' IDENTITIES AND  
INCLUSION IN MINORITY RELIGIOUS AND  
SECULAR ETHICS EDUCATION**

**A Study on Plurality in the Finnish Comprehensive School**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this doctoral thesis is to explore how education in minority religions and secular ethics supports students' identities and inclusion in the Finnish comprehensive school. The focus is on students in grades 1–6 (age 7–13) in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The identities of the students are viewed from a constructivist perspective as their conceptions of themselves in the context of the instruction group and the school. The student's different identities, including his or her religious and non-religious identities, are examined as part of an intercultural educational context. In this context student inclusion is viewed as the student's experiences of him- or herself as equal and integrated. This article-based thesis takes a qualitative approach and is based on four articles, each targeting one sub-question which aims at answering the research problem.

Article I focused on how students experience instruction in their own minority religious education or in secular ethics, and how they perceive themselves as part of the overall school culture. This study was based on a participant observation study in 2009–10 undertaken in five different minority religion and secular ethics classes in one comprehensive school. The findings indicated that minority students generally found having their own group to be a positive experience. However, the study also showed that students expressed a negative sense of difference in relation to majority students and that there were several practical concerns in the organization of the classes.

The subsequent articles, Articles II–IV, were based on interviews with 31 teachers and 3 teacher coordinators in 2011. Article II focused on how minority religion and secular ethics teachers view the task of supporting and including plurality within the classroom. Article III focused on how teachers and teacher coordinators view the inclusion of minority religious education in the school culture. The final article, Article IV, focused on how teachers of minority religions view the significance of education in supporting students' identities. The findings within these articles illuminated how students' identities were embedded in the educational context, which included both supportive and

challenging aspects. The supportive aspects that the teachers and teacher coordinators emphasized included a sense of belonging and community in the group, the inclusion of students with immigrant backgrounds, as well as the support given to students' diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. The support given to students' backgrounds was strongly dependent on the size and structure of the mixed age class and the teachers' capacities to take all students into account. A central challenging aspect included structural discrimination in the education. In teachers' views, some minority students also felt separated and isolated in relation to majority students and were subject to instances of discrimination. Furthermore, the overall lack of dialogue within the schools and between the classes emerged as a challenge for including the minority students in the school cultures.

The findings moreover indicated that the way minority religious education supports students' identities includes challenges. The current system of education appears strong with regard to supporting students' identities within a given tradition. However, it does not always take into account modern plurality and the individual identities of students. In teachers' views students' identities were frequently seen as bound to a particular tradition, and socialization into the religious tradition was clearly present. This puts into question the adequacy of the current model and educational practice. For the future development of religious education it is vital that the challenges in the educational context are met and that students' identities are viewed as open to change and individual development.

**Keywords:** identity, inclusion, religious plurality, minority students, religious education, secular ethics education

**Harriet Zilliacus**

## **ATT STÖDA ELEVERS IDENTITETER OCH INKLUSION I UNDERVISNINGEN I MINORITETSRELIGIONER OCH LIVSÅSKÅDNING**

### **En studie i mångfald i den finländska grundläggande utbildningen**

#### **Sammandrag**

Syftet med denna avhandling är att undersöka hur undervisningen i minoritetsreligioner och livsåskådning stöder minoritetslevers identiteter och inklusion inom den grundläggande utbildningen. I fokus ligger elever i årsklasserna 1–6 i huvudstadsregionen. Elevernas identiteter betraktas ur ett konstruktivistiskt perspektiv såsom deras uppfattningar om sig själva i undervisningsgruppen och i skolan. Elevens olika identiteter, inklusive hans eller hennes religiösa och icke-religiösa identiteter, undersöks som del av en interkulturell utbildningskontext. I denna kontext betraktas elevens inklusion såsom elevens upplevelser av att vara jämlik och integrerad i skolkulturen. Denna artikelavhandling utgår från ett kvalitativt tillvägagångssätt och sammanfattar resultaten av fyra artiklar, som var och en strävar till att besvara en underfråga till forskningsproblemet.

Artikel I fokuserade på hur elever upplever undervisningen i den egna minoritetsreligionen eller i livsåskådning, och hur de upplever sig vara delaktiga av skolkulturen. Denna studie baserade sig på en deltagande observationsstudie läsåret 2009–10 i fem olika minoritetsreligions- och livsåskådningsklasser i en skola. Resultaten tydde på att minoritetsleverna i regel upplevde det som positivt att ha sin egen undervisningsklass. Dock visade studien även på att eleverna visade en negativ upplevelse av skillnad i relation till majoritetslever och att det fanns praktiska problem i organiseringen av undervisningen.

De tre påföljande artiklarna, artiklar II–IV, baserade sig på en intervjustudie år 2011 med 31 lärare och 3 lärarkoordinatorer. Artikel II fokuserade på hur lärare i minoritetsreligioner och livsåskådning ser på uppgiften att stöda och inkludera mångfald inom klassrummet. Artikel III fokuserade på hur lärare och lärarkoordinatorer upplever att undervisningen i minoritetsreligioner är inkluderad i skolkulturen. Den sista artikeln, artikel IV, fokuserade på vilken betydelse minoritetsreligionslärare upplever att undervisningen har för deras

elever. Resultaten i dessa artiklar belyser hur elevernas identiteter är del av undervisningskontexten, som innefattar både stödande aspekter och utmaningar. Bland de stödande aspekter som lärare och lärarkoordinatorer lyfte fanns känslan av tillhörighet och gemenskap i gruppen, inkluderingen av elever med invandrarbakgrund, samt stödandet av elevers skiftande kulturella och religiösa bakgrunder. Stödandet av elevernas bakgrunder var till betydande del beroende av gruppstorlekarna och strukturen på de åldersintegrerade klasserna, samt på lärarnas förmåga att beakta alla elever i klassen. En central utmaning i utbildningen utgjorde strukturell diskriminering. Dessutom ansåg lärare att en del minoritets elever kände sig åtskilda och isolerade i relation till majoritets elever och var föremål för enskilda fall av diskriminering. Den generella bristen på dialog inom skolorna och mellan undervisningsgrupperna framkom därtill som en utmaning när det gäller att inkludera minoritets elever i skolan.

I undervisningen i minoritetsreligioner pekade resultaten på ytterligare utmaningar när det gäller det sätt varpå undervisningen stöder elevers identiteter. Det nuvarande undervisningssystemet framstår som starkt när det gäller att stöda elevers identiteter inom en särskild tradition. Undervisningen tar dock inte alltid i beaktande den moderna pluralitet som råder i klassen och elevernas individuella identiteter. Ur ett lärarperspektiv betraktades elevernas identiteter ofta såsom bestämda till en särskild tradition, och traditionell socialisering hade en synlig roll. Detta ifrågasätter huruvida den nuvarande undervisningsmodellen och undervisningspraktiken är adekvata. För den framtida utvecklingen av undervisningen är det essentiellt att de aktuella utmaningarna i undervisningskontexten bemöts och att elevers identiteter ses som öppna för förändring och individuell utveckling.

**Nyckelord:** identitet, inklusion, religiös mångfald, minoritets elever, religionsundervisning, livsåskådningsundervisning

**Harriet Zilliacus**

**OPPILAIDEN IDENTITEETTIEN JA INKLUUSION TUKEMINEN  
VÄHEMMISTÖUSKONTOJEN JA ELÄMÄNKATSOMUSTIEDON  
OPETUKSESSA**

**Tutkimus moninaisuudesta suomalaisessa perusopetuksessa**

**Tiivistelmä**

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan, miten vähemmistöuskontojen ja elämänkatsomustiedon opetus tukee oppilaiden identiteettejä ja inklusiota perusopetuksessa. Tarkastelun kohteena ovat 1-6. luokan oppilaat pääkaupunkiseudulta. Oppilaan identiteettejä tarkastellaan konstruktivistisesta näkökulmasta, oppilaan omina käsityksinä itsestään koulussa ja opetusryhmässä. Oppilaan eri identiteettejä, mukaan lukien hänen uskonnollista ja ei-uskonnollista identiteettiään tarkastellaan osana interkulttuurista koulutuskontekstia. Tässä kontekstissa oppilaan inklusio rakentuu hänen kokemuksestaan tasavertaisuudesta ja integroitumisesta koulukulttuuriin. Artikkeliväitöskirja perustuu kvalitatiiviseen lähestymistapaan ja koostuu neljästä artikkelista. Kukaan artikkeli vastaa tutkimusongelman yhteen alakysymykseen.

Ensimmäinen artikkeli tarkastelee sitä, miten oppilaat kokevat opetuksen omassa uskonnonopetuksessaan tai elämänkatsomustiedossa, ja miten he arvioivat olevansa osa koulukulttuuria. Tutkimus perustuu lukuvuonna 2009–2010 tehtyyn osallistuvaan havainnointiin yhden koulun viidessä eri vähemmistöuskonnon ja elämänkatsomustiedon ryhmissä. Tulokset osoittavat, että vähemmistöoppilaat kokivat pääsääntöisesti opetuksen omassa ryhmässään myönteisenä. Tutkimus osoittaa kuitenkin myös, että oppilaille on kielteisiä kokemuksia erilaisuudesta suhteessa enemmistöoppilaisiin. Lisäksi opetuksen järjestelyissä ja toteutuksessa esiintyi käytännöllisiä ongelmia.

Kolme muuta artikkelia (artikkelit II–IV) perustuivat vuonna 2011 tehtyyn haastattelututkimukseen, johon osallistui 31 opettajaa ja 3 opetuksen koordinaattoria. Artikkelit II–IV tarkastelivat, miten vähemmistöuskontojen ja elämänkatsomustiedon opettajat kokevat tehtävänsä tukea ja sisällyttää moninaisuutta opetukseensa. Artikkelit II–III käsittelivät, miten opettajat ja opetuskoordinaattorit kokivat vähemmistöuskontojen opetuksen integroitumisen osaksi koulukulttuuria. Viimeinen artikkeli (IV), tarkasteli, millaisia näkemyksiä vähemmistöuskontojen opettajat näkevät opetuksen merkityksen oppilaan identiteetin

tukemisessa. Tulokset näissä artikkeleissa avaavat sitä, miten oppilaiden identiteetit olivat osa opetuskontekstia, joka sisälsi sekä oppilaiden identiteettiä tukevia että haastavia näkökulmia. Tukevinä näkökulmina opettajat ja opetuskordinaattorit toivat esille erityisesti yhteenkuulumisen ja yhteisöllisyyden tunteen ryhmissä, maahanmuuttajataustaisten oppilaiden inklusion ja oppilaiden moninaisten kulttuuri- ja uskontotaustojen tukemisen. Oppilaiden taustojen tukeminen oli merkittävästi yhteydessä ryhmäkokoon ja oppilasryhmien ikärakenteeseen sekä opettajien kykyyn ottaa kaikki oppilaat huomioon. Merkittäväksi haasteeksi osoittautui rakenteellinen syrjintä. Lisäksi opettajien näkökulmasta katsottuna jotkut oppilaat tunsivat itsensä erillisiksi ja eristäytyneiksi suhteessa enemmistöoppilaisiin ja joutuivat yksittäisten syrjintätapausten kohteeksi. Yhteisen dialogin puute koulun ja opetusryhmien kesken osoittautui myös haasteeksi suhteessa vähemmistöoppilaiden inklusioon koulussa.

Vähemmistöuskontojen opetuksen suhteen tulokset viittasivat lisäksi siihen, että opetuksen nykyinen toteutustapa, joka tukee oppilaiden identiteettejä, sisältää haasteita. Nykyinen tapa tukee vahvana oppilaiden identiteettejä yhden tradition sisällä. Opetus ei aina ota huomioon nykyistä modernia monimuotoisuutta luokissa ja oppilaiden yksilöllisiä identiteettejä. Opettajien näkökulmasta oppilaiden identiteetit katsottiin usein olevan sidottu yhteen traditioon, ja traditionaalinen sosialisatio oli selvästi läsnä. Tämä kyseenalaistaa nykyisen tavan toteuttaa opetusta ja opetuksen käytäntöjä. Uskonnon opetuksen kehittämisen kannalta olisi oleellista, että haasteet opetuskontekstissa kohdataan ja että oppilaiden identiteetit katsottaisiin avoimiksi ja kehittyviksi.

**Asiasanat:** identiteetti, inklusio, uskonnollinen moninaisuus, vähemmistöoppilaat, katsomusaineet



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Helsinki, September 20, 2014

Harriet Zilliacus



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## LIST OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES

- I** Zilliacus, H. and G. Holm. 2013. 'We Have Our Own Religion': A Pupil Perspective on Minority Religion and Ethics Instruction in Finland, *British Journal of Religious Education* 35(3): 282–296, doi: 10.1080/01416200.2012.750707
- II** Zilliacus, H. 2013a. Addressing Religious Plurality – A Teacher Perspective on Minority Religion and Secular Ethics Education, *Intercultural Education* 24(6): 507–520, doi: 10.1080/14675986.2013.867761
- III** Zilliacus, H. 2013b. The Inclusion of Minority Religious Education in the Finnish Comprehensive School: A Teacher and Teacher Coordinator Perspective, *Nordidactica* 2: 93–114.
- IV** Zilliacus, H. and A. Kallioniemi. (Forthcoming). Supporting Minority Belonging: Finnish Minority RE Teacher Perspectives on the Significance of RE. *Religion & Education*. doi: 10.1080/15507394.2014.977099





# 1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this doctoral thesis is on the identities and the inclusion of students in minority religious and secular ethics education in the Finnish comprehensive school. Finland has a separative model of organizing religious education, which aims at supporting both majority Lutheran and minority students' religious and non-religious identities within the public school system. Religious education is offered in students' "own" religion or in secular ethics according to the students' religious affiliations or non-affiliation throughout the comprehensive school. On a societal level this system of education represents an active effort to accept religious plurality in Finnish society and support the inclusion of religious minorities in the school culture. The educational system formally provides a basis for supporting an identity development among students, which preserves the cultural background of the students and promotes freedom and equality in respect to religion (Kallioniemi and Matilainen 2011, 11; Ubani 2013, 205–207).

However, questions arise how these aims are achieved in practice. The current system of education raises some of the central concerns of intercultural education. These include concerns related to educating diverse classrooms and including all students and classes in the school culture (Banks 2006, 17–18). Several concerns have been pronounced in regards to the current system of education. The fact that students are separated into different instruction groups has commonly been subject to criticism. This has partly been in reference to the possible lack of dialogue between groups. The task of organizing a number of separate instruction groups is also challenging and raises concern regarding how education works in practice as it puts special demands on teachers, schedules, and instruction (Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 463–465; Rautio 2012). The critique raises questions regarding the position of minority religious and secular ethics education students in the comprehensive school culture as well as how education in predefined groups succeeds in supporting minority students' identities. Having separate religion groups raises questions regarding how students themselves experience this system and whether it supports inclusion or creates divisions between "us" and "them" in schools. Possible experiences of exclusion and discrimination among students or teachers stand out as fundamental obstacles for the development of education as well as for an open and interactive school culture. The question of students' identities within the minority classroom as well as in relation to the overall school culture stand out as a concern in the education and calls for further investigation.

The above challenges related to diversity in education are central to the Finnish system of religious education but generally reflect key issues in the

development of religious education in Europe and internationally. Changes in the religious and secular landscapes have generally put pressure on the development of religious education systems in many European countries and internationally. A major concern within religious and intercultural education research today is how the increasing plurality of students and school cultures are to be taken into consideration. This concern has been notable also within the Council of Europe through the introduction of several projects on religion and intercultural education (Jackson 2009; Coulby and Zambeta 2008; Council of Europe 2004; 2008a).

As in many European countries the Finnish system of religious education is a subject of ongoing debate within both academic and public discussion. The current system has support within Lutheran and minority religious communities as well as among researchers and administrators. However, repeatedly the separative model is also questioned in favor of an integrated subject of religious education or ethics for all (Kallioniemi 2013a; Mikkola 2013). Recently, new initiatives to develop religious education have been introduced in single schools. In autumn 2013 Kulosaari yhtenäiskoulu commenced a project of partly integrated religious and secular ethics education in which joint classes were organized for such content that is according to curricula common for all instruction groups (Grönholm 2013). Also the European school in Helsinki has since its opening in 2008 offered an integrated subject of religion for all (Helsingin eurooppalainen koulu 2014).

This thesis investigates student, teacher and teacher coordinator perspectives of minority religious education and secular ethics education in the comprehensive school grades 1–6 (age 7–13). The investigation is made through the perspectives of the educational and social sciences. The aim of the research is to construct a holistic view of how education supports students' identities and inclusion in the school context. This is a research area which has been scarcely investigated and little research in Finnish minority religious and ethics education has been undertaken over all. The thesis aims at new understandings of religious and secular ethics instruction in Finland, and to shed light on the possibilities and challenges connected with addressing plurality in a separative model of education. The thesis does not examine the subject content in different classes, but focuses on students' and teachers' experiences of the education.

In Finland the use of the Finnish term *katsomusaineet* and the Swedish term *åskådningsämnen* came into common use in the 1990s as covering both the subjects of religion and secular ethics. During a few years also philosophy was included in this subject group (Salmenkivi 2007, 85). The concepts “*katsomus*”, and “*åskådning*”, have many meanings but express a conception of life or the world, an outlook, or an enduring conviction or belief, and may include both religious and non-religious elements (Nykysuomen sanakirja 1992; Gunnarsson

2009, 43–52). There has been discussion in regards to how well the term “katsomusaineet” distinguishes and unites both the subject of religion and secular ethics. The fact that all comprehensive school subjects actually aim at supporting students’ world-views does not clearly differentiate the scope of the subjects of religion and secular ethics. In addition, the main focus of religious education is generally in the teaching and learning about religions and world-views. The subject of secular ethics on the other hand does not solely focus on world-views or religion, but has a multidisciplinary perspective. However, the term *katsomusaineet* is today widely used in Finnish educational terminology. Even if the subjects of religion and secular ethics are different, secular ethics is in practice linked to religious education through functioning as an alternative to religious education (Salmenkivi 2007, 85; 2003, 34–35; Kallioniemi 2003, 3–30). In this thesis the term religious education is generally used to refer to education in the subject of religion, and is differentiated from education in the subject of secular ethics. However, in the theoretical discussion on religious and secular ethics education as a whole, the term refers to a wider meaning of the concept, as including both subjects, similarly to the term *katsomusaineet*. Notably, the term religious education in this use focuses on education within the comprehensive school context, and does not cover education in religious institutions such as churches or congregations.

The term *minority religious education* refers in this thesis to all other religious education options than majority Lutheran religious education. In Finland the term “pienryhmäisten uskontojen opetus” (In English: small-group religious education) has also been used to refer to these instruction groups (cf. Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009). However, as some of the instruction groups today are as large as majority Lutheran groups, the term *minority religious education* is here preferred as it reflects the overall minority position in relation to Lutheran religious education in the comprehensive school. Similarly, the term *minority student* refers here to a student who attends other religious education than the Lutheran education or who attends secular ethics education. The minority position is defined through the overall minority position even if the group sizes of single minority classes may in some cases exceed those of Lutheran classes.

This thesis follows the structure of an article based dissertation, and has two parts. The first part is the summary of the thesis, and introduces to begin with the research question and sub-questions in chapter 2. Thereafter the background of minority religious and secular ethics education in Finland is presented in chapter 3. The theoretical framework on students’ identities and inclusion in the education is presented in chapter 4. The methodological framework is thereafter presented in chapter 5 followed by the findings and the methodological considerations and evaluation of the study in chapters 6–7. Finally, the findings

and the implications of the study are discussed in chapter 8. The second part of this thesis consists of the four original publications, and they are found in the latter part of the book.

## 2 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question of the thesis is:

1. How does education in minority religions and secular ethics support students' identities and inclusion in the comprehensive school grades 1–6 (age 7–13) in the Helsinki metropolitan area in Finland?

This research question is investigated through the following sub-questions:

- 1.1 How do students experience instruction in their own minority religious education and secular ethics, and how do they perceive themselves as part of the overall school culture?
- 1.2 How do minority religion and secular ethics teachers view the task of supporting and including plurality within the classroom?
- 1.3 How do teachers and teacher coordinators view the inclusion of minority religious education in the school culture?
- 1.4 How do teachers of minority religions view the significance of education in supporting students' identities?



## 3 BACKGROUND

### 3.1 Minority religious and secular ethics education in Finland

The Finnish model of religious education represents a separative and religion-based approach as education is organized in distinct groups according to the religious or non-religious affiliations of the students (Kallioniemi and Ubani 2012, 179; Knauth and Körs 2008, 401). Religious education has historically been an integral part of the Finnish school system and taught as an individual subject. The roots of the Finnish religious education model are in the 1920s when the Finnish compulsory education system was introduced. It was stipulated that schools were obliged to arrange religious education according to the religious affiliation of the majority of students in schools. Religious alternatives were generally limited to Evangelical Lutheran religious education, which included the vast majority of students, and to Orthodox religious education. The Orthodox minority has the longest traditions of religious education among the religious minorities. This is connected to the Orthodox Church in Finland historically having had the status as the second national church alongside the Lutheran National Church, and today generally being defined as a “folk church”. The basic organization of religious education as organized according to religious affiliation has been of general importance in securing the rights of minorities to religious education. Starting from the 1920s, confessional religious education in other religions than the majority religion could be provided in the elementary school upon the request of the parent or caregiver. However, a minimum requirement of at least 20 students per school was to be fulfilled, which in practice made minority groups rare. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century religious minorities other than the Orthodox minority continued to provide religious education within the congregation or at home. For instance, among the Catholic minority religious education was until the 80s largely organized as Catechetical education in the congregation, and most Catholic students followed Lutheran education in school (Kähkönen 1976, 13, 98–118; Jaanu-Schröder 2007, 75; Kallioniemi 2007a, 63–65; Pyysiäinen 2008, 301–2).

For students not belonging to a congregation a subject in history of religion and ethics (in Finnish: *uskonnonhistoria ja siveysoppi*) was also introduced in the 1920s. This subject was initially planned to be offered to all students not belonging to a congregation. However, only a small number of those entitled to the subject participated in classes. A general view within the school system was that students should participate in Lutheran education. Notably, until 1957 only 1 lesson per week was offered in history of religion and ethics, at the same time

as religious education was offered 3–4 hours a week (Salmenkivi et al. 2007, 129–130; Saine 2000, 75; Kähkönen 1976, 108).

Over the years the position and nature of religious education has been subject to on-going political debate. The discussions have been particularly strong in connection with reforms within the educational system and curricula. However, the general organization of education has remained unaltered (Seppo 2001, 518). In the past few decades the religious landscape in Finland has changed due to increasing immigration as from the 1990s as well as to secularization. This has also had an impact on Finnish religious education. In 2013 a majority of 75.3 % of the population still belong to the Lutheran National Church. However, the number of people with no religious affiliation has increased to 22.1%. Approximately 1.1% of the population belong to the Orthodox Church in Finland and 1.5% of the population are members of another religious community (Statistics Finland 2013a). However, not all individuals are registered as members of a minority community. Particularly the Muslim minority has grown in Finland, and Muslims are not always affiliated with a religious community. As a consequence the Muslim minority does not fully show in the statistics, but is estimated to be around 1% of the population (Martikainen 2011, 76).

The changes in the religious landscape have contributed to the introduction of new religious education alternatives in the comprehensive school. A major development within religious education occurred in the 1990s when the National Board of Education affirmed several new minority religious education curricula. By 2006 the National framework curriculum included all in all 13 religious education curricula and a secular ethics curriculum. This is the number of curricula also offered today. The comprehensive school offers curricula in Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, the Protestant Society Herran Kansa ry, The Christ Community [Kristiyhteisö], Latter Day Saints, Free Church, Adventist, Bahá'í, and Krishna Consciousness religious education as well as secular ethics education (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCC) 2004, National Core Curriculum for Other Religions within Basic Education (NCCO) 2006). Of the above Free Church, Herran Kansa ry, and Latter Day Saints education have only occasionally been taught in comprehensive schools (Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 456–458; Iivonen 2009). Jewish and Adventist religious education have been largely concentrated to the Jewish school and the four existing Adventist schools, and The Christ Community to Steiner schools. All in all, less than 20 religious schools exist in Finland. These are mainly minority protestant based. Religious education is therefore predominantly offered within the public comprehensive school sector (Kallioniemi and Ubani 2012, 178; Kuusisto 2011, 146).



Minority religious education curricula have been produced by the National Board of Education in co-operation with several different parties including the religious communities, experts within religious studies, and teachers (Jamisto 2007, 118). The religious congregations have been important in the development of religious education in Finland, but the general goals and structure of education has been laid down by the National Board of Education and the organization of education functions independently from the congregations. Notably several different alternatives within Christianity are taught, but for instance within Islam only one curriculum has been introduced. Differing views on which forms and interpretations of the religion should be taught have been particularly discussed with regard to Islam. This concern is present also within Buddhism and Hinduism, the latter being taught in the form of Krishna Consciousness. In many of these minority religion classes students may belong to a range of different congregations (Sakaranaho 2008, 173–4; Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 462; Onnisekka, 2011, 126).

The subject history of religion and ethics was originally directed for students not belonging to a congregation and intended to have a neutral stance. However, it had a clear religious focus and a Christian emphasis from the start (Saine 2000, 185–6). This came to be subject to critique particularly in connection to the renewal of the curriculum in the late 60s. In the late 70s the critique led to a redefinition of the subject. On the initiative of the society *Vapaa-ajattelijat* [Freethinkers] a complaint was brought to the UN Human Rights Committee. The Committee did not see that Finland had committed a direct offence against the declaration, but considered the situation as unsatisfactory. In 1985 the curriculum was finally renewed and the subject was renamed secular ethics (in Finnish: *elämänkatsomustieto*). Secular ethics education was developed as an alternative to religious instruction aimed at students who do not belong to a religious congregation. However, today it is also open to students of minority religions (Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 456; Salmenkivi et al., 2007, 131–133). The term *elämänkatsomustieto* does not have a direct translation and has been translated varyingly, for instance as education in life stance, philosophy of life, and life questions and ethics (cf. Salmenkivi, 2003, 33; Kallioniemi and Ubani, 2012, 180). In this thesis secular ethics is used in line with Aarnio-Linnanvuori (2013, 135) to distinguish it from ethics as a field of philosophy and as a subject-matter area in religious education.

The Freedom of Religion Act of 2003 (453/2003) has been of central importance to the development of the Finnish model of religious education. It articulated the child's right to religious education and also strengthened the current religion-based system of education. This law emphasized the positive right to religious education contrastingly to the previous freedom of Religion Act from 1922, which emphasized negative religious freedom in the right to

exemption from religious education. The new Act of Religious Freedom is also echoed in the amendments of the Basic School Act in 2003 (§13 454/2003). At this time a change in terminology from confessional education to education in “own” religion was made. From a human rights perspective offering religious education according to the student’s religious or non-religious background represents a support for religious freedom in its organization. The legislation may be seen to be in line with international agreements connected to the right to religious education, such as the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948, article 18 and 26), the UN Declaration of the General Assembly on the elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion and Belief (1981, 5) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, article 14). The legislation of 2003 and the change to education in the “own” religion strengthened the religion-based approach and the position of religious minorities in education. At the same time it also importantly reified and secured the fundamental position of Lutheran instruction within the comprehensive school (Sakaranaho 2006, 227, 333–344; Seppo 2003, 43, 179, 182; Räsänen and Innanen 2009, 139).

Alongside the development of curricula the legislation on the minimum number of students required for the organization of minority religious education has changed over the years. The number of students required has successively been decreased from 20 in the 20s to 3 in the early 90s. The number required for offering secular ethics education is currently also 3. In the Basic School Act of 1998 an additional change was made in that the number of students required was no longer based on the number of students in single schools. Instead the basis for organizing education was the number of minority students of the educational provider, that is, principally the municipality. This substantially increased the number of students entitled to minority religious education (Kallioniemi 2007a, 63–65). The weekly number of religious and secular ethics education lessons has gradually gone down for all instruction groups. The distribution of lesson hours in the National Core Curriculum of 2004 included an overall of 11 weekly lessons per year (in Finnish: *vuosiviikkotuntia*) in religion or secular ethics in grades 1–9. One weekly lesson per year corresponds to 38 lessons (NCC 2004, 304). In grades 1–6 students generally had one lesson per week and an additional second lesson during two years. The timing of the lessons was decided upon locally. In the new distribution of lesson hours of 2012 the number of lessons in grades 1–9 was reduced by one weekly lesson per year, that is, from 11 to 10 weekly lessons per year (Ministry of Culture and Education 2012).

Students taking minority religious education or secular ethics are still small in number. In 2010, around the time of the field studies of this thesis, 92.8% of comprehensive school students took Evangelical Lutheran classes, 3.2% secular

ethics, 1.3% Orthodox religion, and 1.9% other religions. The percentage of students who were exempted from religious education was 0.7% (Statistics Finland 2011). By 2012 the number of students taking Lutheran classes had slightly decreased to 91.8%. The number of students in secular ethics had grown to 4.0%, and represents the fastest growing minority group alongside Islam. Islam students had exceeded those taking Orthodox religion, representing 1.5% and respectively 1.4% of the students. Students taking other religions, than the above, represented 0.5% of the students (or 2 416 in numbers). The percentage of students who did not participate in religious education was 0.7% (Statistics Finland 2013b). The number of minority students varies significantly regionally, and the change towards offering a diversity of religious education alternatives is mainly found in southern Finland. In the southern county *Uusimaa*, the number of students in Orthodox and other religions has steadily increased and amounted to 6.5% in 2012. The corresponding number of secular ethics students was 8% (Statistics Finland 2013b).

### **3.1.1 Legislation on *own* religious and secular ethics education**

Current legislation and curricula of religion and ethics education are based on the Freedom of Religion Act 453/2003 and the Basic Education Act 628/1998 and its amendments in §13 454/2003. The Basic School Act gives students the right to receive instruction in their “own” religion or in ethics throughout the 9-year compulsory comprehensive school (age 7–16). This right is notably a compulsory right in the sense that students have to take either religion or ethics. The provider of education has the duty to organize instruction if there are 3 or more students in the school district belonging to the same denomination or who are non-affiliated. The educational provider needs to find out what the religious preferences of their students are. Instruction in Orthodox religion as well as ethics is organized solely on the basis of the number of students. But for other religions, a parental or caregiver request for instruction is required. As classes are organized based on the number of students of the provider of education, which is principally the municipalities, there may be classes of only 1 or 2 students at the school level (Basic Education Act §13 454/2003; National Board of Education 2006).

If a student belongs to more than one religious community, the parent, or caregiver, has to decide in which religious education the student will participate. A student belonging to a religious community who is not provided religious education in accordance with his or her religion is to be taught secular ethics when requested by the parent or caregiver. Students who do not belong to any religious community and do not partake in majority religious education are also primarily to be taught secular ethics. However, a student not belonging to a religious community may also at the request of his or her parent participate in a

minority religious instruction group. The parents then need to confirm that the education in view of the students' upbringing and cultural background evidently corresponds to his or her religious beliefs. Opting-out of religious and secular ethics education is possible. Upon the request of the parent a religious community may give the education as external education. However, the student will in this case not receive a grade for the education given by the religious community. If the student does not partake in the religious or secular ethics education provided by the school nor in external education the school needs to organise some other activity for the children (Basic Education Act §13 454/2003; National Board of Education 2006).

Criticism of the current legislation has focused on the fact that the choice of instruction is linked to parental congregational belonging and that the child cannot make the choice of group. From a children's rights perspective the child's voice is not necessarily heard when the parent chooses the instruction group. Only at the age of 18 it is possible to independently choose one's religious affiliation. By law the child can choose to become a member of a religious community at the age of 15, although a written consent of the parents is needed. Until the age of 12 the child's parents can freely decide whether the child enters or leaves a religion. From the age of 12 the child's written consent to changing his or her religious affiliation is required (Freedom of Religion Act 453/2003, §3). Parental choice overriding the student's voice in the choice of instruction has therefore been subject to critique (Koikkalainen 2010, 66–67; Scheinin 2001, 516–517). The fact that the decision is made according to parental religious or non-religious affiliation may also be seen to limit human rights in that it makes students representatives of a religion, which they may not identify with (Kallioniemi and Matilainen 2011, 5). All in all education being obligatory has its weakness in not taking into consideration the question of negative freedom of religion, that is, the right of a student who belongs to a particular religious community to be exempted from education in the religion (Sakaranaho 2006, 339).

Another point of criticism has been that legislation does not give minority and majority students equal rights to choose instruction groups. Even though current legislation may be seen to strive for equality in considering students' religious backgrounds, it does not give students the same options to choose between different instructional alternatives. For instance, minority students may if they wish also opt for Lutheran instruction or secular ethics, but, conversely, Lutherans may not do the same. Majority Lutheran education is open to all students, but students belonging to the Lutheran faith cannot choose other options than Lutheran. A third point of criticism has been that according to legislation the provision of education requires parental membership in a religious community. This proves problematic as not all adherents of a religion

have registered membership and can demonstrate their affiliation. This is commonly the case among Muslim students as only 10 to 15 per cent are members of a registered Islamic community (Sakaranaho 2013, 232).

### **3.1.2 Curricular aims of religious and secular ethics education**

The national curricular aims for religious and secular ethics education are stated in the National core curricula 2004 and 2006 (NCC 2004, NCCO 2006). In addition to these also local curricula are developed on municipal level, which may differ from the above (Sakaranaho 2013, 239). The general scope of religious education in the Finnish curriculum is articulated as follows:

*“In instruction in religion, life’s religious and ethical dimension comes under examination from the standpoint of the student’s growth, and as a broader social phenomenon. Religion is treated as one of the undercurrents influencing human culture. Instruction in religion emphasizes the student’s own religious knowledge and readiness to encounter other religions and views, especially spiritual traditions that exert influence in Finnish society. The task of religion is to offer the students knowledge, skills and experience, from which they may obtain materials for building their own identity and world-view.”* (NCC 2004, 202)

The above aims include all forms of religious education. Religious education focuses on the religious and ethical dimension of life from the viewpoint of the students’ own development and also as a broader social phenomenon in society. The aim of religious education is to develop general literacy in religions and different world-views. According to the general objectives of religious education the task of education include the following main objectives: to familiarize the student with his or her “own” religion, to familiarize the student with the Finnish spiritual tradition, to introduce the student to other religions, to help the students understand the cultural and human meaning of religions, and to educate the students about ethical living and to help him or her to understand the ethical dimension of religion. The objectives include both the acquisition of knowledge as well as the development of skills for personal development. Curricula being religion-specific have meant that they differ from each other. Central to the lower comprehensive school classes is that education generally takes as its starting point the student and his or her proximate environments, and then questions are broadened to other areas. Other religions and world-views besides one’s “own” are also to be studied, however may be first introduced as late as in grades 5 or 6 (NCC 2004, 202; NCCO 2006, Kallioniemi and Ubani 2012, 180–181; Hella and Wright 2009, 54).

Both secular ethics and religious education are closely concerned with identity development. However, the frameworks for these subjects are quite

different from each other. As Hella and Wright (2009, 54) argue religious education adopts a particular religious framework as the socio-cultural context for student personal development. Secular ethics on the other hand focuses on students learning about different cultures and philosophies of life within a secular framework. Secular ethics is not a religious subject. The focus is generally on the student's own identity development, and the student's aspiration to gain understanding of him- or herself and the surrounding world. The starting point is the perspective of the student in contrast to a religious perspective. As a subject, secular ethics is a multidisciplinary whole in terms of its foundation. Its starting points include philosophy, the social sciences, and cultural studies. The curricula and goals of secular ethics centrally underline active identity seeking. The focus is on seeing humans as active agents who renew and create their cultures, and who create meaning through mutual interaction (Salmenkivi 2007, 84–85; 2003, 33; Tomperi 2013; NCC, 2004, 214). Furthermore, the general scope of the subject is stated as follows:

*"The task of instruction is to give students the material to grow into independent, tolerant, responsible, and judicious members of their society. Instruction in ethics supports growth into full, democratic citizenship, which, in a globalizing and swiftly changing society requires the ability to think and act ethically, broad related knowledge and skills, and the accumulation of general education in culture and a personal world-view."* (NCC 2004, 214)

The core task of secular ethics education is to support the students' growth and give students tools for investigating and developing personal conceptions of the world and philosophies of life. A personal world-view has within secular ethics commonly been defined according to Niiniluoto (1984, 87) as including both views about the world, ethics and values, as well as an epistemological view as to how knowledge is acquired (Tomperi 2004, 394). From the sixth grade onwards increasing attention is given to a variety of world-views and religions as well as supporting the students' growth to active and responsible members of society (NCC 2004, 214–218). Secular ethics is in some respects similar to citizenship education, which during the past decades has developed into an important field of education internationally. Citizenship education takes on different forms both on a national and local level, but commonly includes themes such as human rights education and civic education, which are strongly present within secular ethics (cf. Jackson 2007, 30–33).

### **3.1.3 Non-confessional religious education**

Finnish religious education is officially defined as non-confessional, in the sense that education does not include religious practice. Religious rituals such as

prayers or hymns may be taught, but the practice of religion is not to take place in class. Familiarization with religious practice and rituals for instance through visits at a church, mosque or other religious building is part of education. However, education does not include partaking in religious ceremony or practice (Kallioniemi 2009; National Board of Education 2006). By separating religious education from religious practice, there is in principal no need for exemptions from education on the basis of the constitutional right not to participate in the practice of religion against one's conscience (Sakaranaho 2013, 235).

Education is oriented towards knowledge *about* and *from religion* rather than *learning religion*. Learning about expresses that religions are taught from the outside rather than from a religious perspective and a descriptive and historical approach lies in focus. Learning from religion focuses on how the student can benefit from the religious studies in his or her own lives. However, this is made without expecting students to participate in the beliefs and practices of the religion, and with maintaining a distance between the student and the religious content. In contrast, *learning religion* is taught from the inside of the religious tradition and has as its object that students come to believe in the religion or strengthen their commitment to it (Hull 2001; Kallioniemi 2009, 409). Finnish religious education strives to gain knowledge, rather than creating a commitment. This has commonly been the case within majority Lutheran education (Sakaranaho 2006, 333). However, the interpretations of confessionality are often discussed with regard to minority religious education (Sakaranaho 2006, 344–7; Kallioniemi 2009; Lyhykäinen 2009, 203). This has partly to do with the concept of confessionality having several dimensions and also frequently being contested.

Kähkönen (1976) has articulated a legal, theological and pedagogical perspective on confessionality. From a legal perspective Finnish religious education can be seen as confessional as the education is organized according to students' religious denominations, and students have a right to receive religious education according to their own confession. From a theological perspective education may be seen as confessional if the aims and contents of religious education are to a large extent determined by the religious community. The purpose of education is in this case to bring up children as committed adherents of the religious tradition (Kähkönen 1976, 237–242; Sakaranaho 2006, 333). Theological confessionality has generally been seen as discarded in Lutheran instruction. When the terminology of education in one's "own" religion came into use in 2003, this was generally perceived as not requiring changes in the curricula and educational practice. Particularly within majority Lutheran education the education was perceived as having a non-confessional character already in the curricula of 1994 (Kallioniemi 2007a, 64; Seppo 2003, 85, 180–181; Pruuki 2009).

However, for the minority religious education curricula and education this change towards non-confessionality has not been evident. Regarding the curricula for minority religions, it is notable that strengthening rather than creating religious identity is emphasized. There is a focus on the “own” religion and religious community. Attempts to lessen the bond to the religious community have been made compared to previous curricula. However these bonds are still present in curricula (Pyysiäinen 2000, 76–83; Kastila 2009, 34–62; Jamisto 2007, 121; NCC 2004; 207–211; NCCO 2006). The curricula commonly assume that students have a bond with their “own” religion and education aims at strengthening this particular bond. For instance the Orthodox and Catholic religious education have a close connection to the catechetical education of the church. In Orthodox education the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church is a central point in teaching. The notion of non-confessional education is generally not easily applicable to minority religious education as religions are perceived as an integral part of daily life (Aikonen, 2007 58–61; Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi, 2009, 461). In a recent study of Islamic religious education, Rissanen (2014, 135–136) argues that socialization into tradition was strongly present even if attempts to incorporate liberal values in the education were also found. The close bond to the “own” minority religion can partly be seen as connected to the minority position in relation to majority Lutheran society. Reinforcing the religious identity generally requires a greater effort when the religion of the home is different from the majority. Often the religious education stands out as an essential way of transferring the religion (Sakaranaho 2006, 344; Lyhykäinen 2009, 203).

According to Kähkönen (1976) religious education can from a pedagogical perspective be seen as confessional when it takes the familiar religious context and religious tradition as the starting point and focus of education. The tradition of the student’s family constitutes the point of departure for the education, which then proceeds to other religions in the surroundings and beyond (in Finnish named as *kotiseutuperiaate*) (Kähkönen 1976, 241–242). However, from a pedagogical point of view any school subject can be perceived as “confessional” when it moves from the familiar and local to less familiar contexts. This is a strongly present organizing principle in the comprehensive school education at large (Sakaranaho 2006, 334). Hella and Wright (2009, 56) argue for a definition of confessionalism as any form of religious education in which learners and the curriculum share a common world-view. By adopting a particular framework, be it Lutheranism, Buddhism, secular ethics or other, a plurality of different world-views is not ensured. Non-confessional, or liberal, education implies in this perspective any form of religious education in which both learners and the curriculum engage with a plurality of different world-views. According to Hella and Wright (2009, 56) the relationship between



confessionalism and liberalism in Finnish education is not clear-cut. Finnish religious education generally promotes a liberal form of religious education but retains elements of confessionalism as education is expected to be taught from the standpoint of the “own” religion.

The above perspectives on confessionality, can be further investigated with regard to the impact they have on the student, the teacher, and the teaching materials (Pyysiäinen 1982, 62). Concerning the teacher, legally, a religious education teacher’s qualification is since 2003 not linked to membership in a religious community (Pyysiäinen 2008, 306). However, minority teachers often have strong bonds to their religious communities and see their confessional stance and personal experience of the religion as important for the education (Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 462–463; Rissanen 2014, 135–136; Onniselkä 2011, 128–133). In connection to Orthodox education Aikonen (2007, 52) argues, that teachers need to have experience in congregational life and culture as members of the religious community. In another study, teachers of Islam saw their profession strongly as a calling and experienced themselves as functioning as role models for students (Lempinen 2007, 239–245). In regard to how the above perspectives of confessionality influence the view of the student, we can conclude that the general aims for all forms of religious education include a view of students’ identities as being active and evolving and as focusing on *learning about* and *from religion*. However, the above aspects of confessionality connected to minority religious education put the student in a more pre-defined and committed position, which will be further discussed in section 4.1.7 on identity development in minority religious and secular ethics education.

### **3.1.4 Challenges in the organization of education**

Research on minority religious and secular ethics instruction has been scarce. The main focus of previous research in minority religious education has emphasized the challenges of organizing education, the lack of qualified teachers, lack of textbooks, and classroom heterogeneity (Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 460–465; Sakaranaho and Jamisto 2007). The lack of qualified teachers and the challenges in organizing instruction have been the main focus.

An important concern is the need for formally qualified teachers for the increasing number of minority instruction groups in both ethics and religion (Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 464–465; Salmenkivi 2007, 88–89; Onniselkä 2011, 134). The general requirements for teacher qualification are high in Finland. For formal certification to teach in grades 1–6 the religion teacher needs to have a Master’s degree level education with a class teacher or subject teacher qualification. A class teacher needs additionally to have undertaken university-level studies in the religion or in secular ethics as part of

the teacher education or as additional studies in order to teach religion or secular ethics. In the case of religions other than Lutheran or Orthodox religion sufficient education and knowledge in the religion acquired in other ways, may suffice as qualification. The assessment of this education is not specified, but this option has been introduced due to the lack of available teacher education. For subject teacher qualification a Master's degree, subject specific studies as well as pedagogical studies are required. The subject specific studies are to be university level studies, or as in the above case of class teachers in other ways acquired sufficient competence and knowledge (Kallioniemi 2006). Presently it is not possible to take a Master's degree in secular ethics as a major subject. As a consequence studies for teaching secular ethics need to be taken as a minor subject (Salmenkivi 2007, 90–91).

Teacher education within minority religious education has confronted many challenges and there is a serious shortage of qualified teachers apart from teachers of Orthodox religion. Orthodox teacher education has a long tradition and is therefore in a different position than other minority religious education. Orthodox teacher education has been developed since the 1880s and is today mainly situated at the University of Joensuu (Aikonen 2007, 43, 54–57). A lack of qualified teachers still prevails. In an interview study by Rusama in 2002 less than half of Orthodox religion teachers had teacher qualification, however the number of qualified teachers have since then steadily increased (Rusama 2002a, 217; Lyhykäinen 2007, 21). Teacher education for other minority religious education teachers has been developed since 2007 at University of Helsinki. In 2007 a teacher education programme for Muslim religious education was developed and today Buddhism is also offered as a subject teacher programme. There have been problems in developing the teacher education programmes, as well as a lack of teacher applicants. The fact that knowledge of Finnish or Swedish is required to enter the programmes has been a particular challenge for applicants with an immigrant background. For instance the Finnish Muslim population mainly consists of first- or second-generation immigrants. This usually means that they do not know Finnish at the level required in the university entrance examinations (Kallioniemi and Ubani 2012, 185; Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 465).

Due to the general lack of qualified teachers a regulation on temporary teachers has in many schools been applied. This regulation states that a person with sufficient education and with the abilities that the task requires has the right to educate temporarily during one year (Asetus opetustoimen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksista 986/1998, 23§). However, without formal qualifications, teachers commonly work with minimum salaries. The teachers' lack of formal competence has raised questions about whether the quality of minority religious education meets the same standards as majority Lutheran

education, and if the shortcoming in teaching practice generally weakens equality in education (Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 465; Sisäasiainministeriö 2008, 27). There is also a lack of qualified secular ethics teachers. The secular ethics education is commonly given by an already appointed teacher in the school who is certified in another subject (Rusama 2002, 32).

A further challenge to education is that offering minority religious classes requires substantial administrative resources. In the metropolitan municipalities the organization of education has been centralized, and part-time teacher coordinators have been appointed to coordinate and support teachers as well as assist schools and rectors in the scheduling of classes. The coordination of instruction is often a demanding task (Vahtera and Kuukka 2007, 127). At the school level some schools in the metropolitan area provide religious education lessons in at least six or seven different forms (Vaara 2013). There is also concern that the number of congregations demanding religious education will be unsustainable as diversity continues to increase (Sakaranaho 2006, 342). However, according to Iivonen (2009) the overall financial resources required for religious education are still comparable to subjects like history and geography, which are not strongly resource-demanding subjects.

The lack of textbooks has been an enduring problem among many minority religious education and secular ethics classes (Sakaranaho 2007a, 25). This has been a problem in both Finnish and Swedish-speaking schools in Finland. Orthodox religious education books are notably available throughout the comprehensive school classes including both text- and workbooks. Orthodox religion textbooks have also been published in Swedish (e.g. Kantola and Taljakka 2007). The Catechetical Centre has produced a Finnish textbook series for Catholic religious education. A few general Finnish textbooks are also available in Jewish religious education (e.g. Hasenson 1997). For Islam a long awaited first textbook series was introduced in 2011 for grade levels 1–6 (e.g. Aboulfaouz et al. 2011). The book for grades 1–2 has also been published in Swedish in 2013. A recent book series is also available in both Finnish and Swedish for secular ethics education (e.g. Honkala, Tukonen and Tuominen 2010). A development towards more extensive textbook series can therefore be seen in recent years, however for other religious education, such as in Buddhism and Krishna Consciousness, no textbooks are available to date.

Student heterogeneity within the classrooms has also stood out as a major challenge for teachers in combination with the varying sizes of mixed age classrooms. Few other classes in the Finnish school are as diverse as minority religious education classes. Classes are taught in mixed age classrooms, often including all grade levels between first and sixth grade (age 7–13) or seventh and ninth grade (age 14–16). Instruction groups are commonly less than 10 students, but classes of only 1 student exist, as well as large classes, particularly in Islam

and ethics. The classes are culturally diverse, including a large number of immigrant students and students with different religious and linguistic backgrounds. This heterogeneity poses particular challenges for education and will be further explored in the theoretical framework on students' identities in the education in section 4.1. (Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 463–464; Lempinen 2007, 246–248).

### **3.1.5 Finnish religious education in an international context**

Within Europe and internationally, countries have developed a large variety of nation-specific systems of religious education. These stem from the particular national histories, religious landscapes and educational contexts of each country. In comparing educational systems different kinds of categorizations can be made. Commonly distinctions are made between those who offer religious education within the public school system and those who do not, and whether the education is organized as integrative or separative religious education, or correspondingly as multi-faith or faith-specific education (Knauth and Körs 2008, 401–2; Cush 2007, 218–221; Alberts 2010, 276). Evans (2008, 461) has outlined six broad approaches to how religious education can be organized:

1. Strict secularism: there is no discussion of religion at all in the classroom.
2. Incidental religious education: religion is taught about only to the extent that it is necessary to understand other subjects.
3. Plural religious education: students learn about the basic practices, beliefs, rituals etc. of a variety of religions, possibly including philosophies and beliefs of non-religious nature.
4. Sectarian religious education: students are broken up into groups and given instruction in their religion. An alternative class in a subject such as secular ethics is given to students who do not wish to have religious education.
5. Unitary religious education: there are classes about the dominant religion of the state, dealing either exclusively or predominantly with a single tradition. The classes present information about the religion, without the teacher claiming that the religion is true.
6. Religious or ideological instruction: there is only one class in religion available in the dominant religion. The religion is taught as true and children may be prepared to participate in religious rituals.

The Finnish model of religious education has largely a sectarian, or separative, approach, even if the aim of education is also to learn about other religions and beliefs. Similarities to the Finnish approach are found in countries such as Belgium, Austria, Germany as well as Australia.

The Belgian constitution secures the right to organize religious education for the majority Catholic as well as the Protestant, Jewish, Anglican, Muslim, and Orthodox religious communities. Since 1993 also a non-confessional ethics subject has been offered (Heinonen and Kallioniemi, forthcoming). Loobyck and Franken (2011, 45–46) argue that the Belgian separative system has confronted many practical problems connected to the country's requirements of official recognition of religions for the right to provide education as well as in questions of students' exemption from education. Similarly to Finland, also problems in the practical organization of the system have been important. In Austria religious education is also organized according to students' denominations and the right to provide education is given to officially recognized religious communities. An alternative subject of ethics has been offered as compulsory for students who do not attend religious instruction in individual schools starting from 1997 (Königsberger and Kubarth 2013, 33–39). In Austria as well as Belgium the religious communities are closely integrated and responsible for the curriculum and instruction as well as authorizing religious education textbooks (Schelander 2009, 22; Heinonen and Kallioniemi, forthcoming). Finnish religious education is similarly linked to the religious communities as curricula are made in co-operation between the National Board of Education and the religious communities. However, instruction is controlled and enforced by the National Board of education within the comprehensive school system (Kallioniemi and Ubani 2012, 179; Jamisto 2007, 117–125).

Similarly, many German federal states (Bundesländer) have separative religious education, which is offered mainly in Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. For instance in North-Rhine Westphalia education is also offered in Orthodox and Jewish religion in some schools, as well as a subject of philosophy as an alternative to religious education. Generally, religious education is in Germany a confessional subject, and organized as a joint responsibility between the state and the religious communities. The organization and nature of education in Islam has been strongly debated, partly due to that no Islamic organization in line with the German Constitution has been recognised as a legal community, which can be entitled to provide education. In North-Rhine Westphalia, as in several states, a supplementary non-confessional subject of "Islam studies" is offered to Muslim children, however different trends in regards to developing Islamic education exist within the country (Sakaranaho 2006, 320–25; Jozsa 2007, 75–79; 2008, 173–175). Similarities to the Finnish system of education are also found in Australia, where several religious

education options are offered. In the Australian religious education system the religious communities play a key role within the organization and enforcement of religious education (Byrne 2012, 318–319).

The Finnish model contrasts with the strict secularist and incidental models of instruction, which do not give room for religious education as a school subject within the public school. In France, for some 20 years, and particularly in recent years, practice has moved from a strict secular approach, which excluded religion from the curriculum, to a more incidental approach which includes teaching about religions within other school subjects (Pepin 2009, 68–73). In contrast with a strict secular approach to religious education are ideological models of education provided in the dominant religion. For example, in Greece religious education is organized as confessional Orthodox religious education. Similarly, Italian religious education is based on the Roman Catholic tradition (Kallioniemi 2007b, 102; Pepin 2009, 20–21).

A number of countries have moved towards plural, or integrative, forms of religious education. In England a plural multi-faith education was introduced already in the 70s, and importantly aimed at seeing religious education in global context (Jackson 2004b, 3–4). The education system in Quebec in Canada also represents a plural religious education, which was launched in 2008 under the subject “Ethics and Religious Culture” (Kallioniemi 2013b). Plural religious education has moreover been developed in the other Nordic countries. These countries have followed a different development than Finland, even though the countries have a similar religious background through a history of state Lutheran religion (Biseth 2009, 249).

In Sweden religious education was renewed in 1962 when the comprehensive school started to offer plural religious education as a single compulsory subject to all students (Selander 1993, 10). A move towards plural models of education has also been seen in Denmark starting from 1975 under the subject heading “Christian knowledge”, and in Norway from 1997 under the title “Christianity, religion and ethics” (Jensen 2007; Lied 2009). The religious education subjects within these Nordic countries differ from each other, but are non-confessional in the sense that the subjects do not derive from the students’ denominational backgrounds, and do not nurture into religious practice. Religious education is viewed as a general compulsory academic subject and the content of education draws from a variety of religions and world-views (Cush 2011, 71). However, there has been discussion in all three countries on the role of Christianity within education, and how comprehensively education reflects a pluralist view or if it has elements of a unitary religious education (Jensen 2007, 14–16; Lied 2009; von Brömssen and Olgac 2010, 128–129). In 2008 Norwegian religious education was renamed “Religion, world-views and ethics” to advance the notion of a more neutral subject, which all students could partake in (Biseth 2009, 249).

## 4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 4.1 Students' identities in minority religious and secular ethics education

In the following sections the theoretical background concerning students' identities within minority religious and secular ethics education are presented. First an introduction to the concept of identity and identities as well as religious and non-religious identities are given. In the following modern and traditional views of plurality and students' identities within religious education are elaborated. Hereafter religious education is discussed within an intercultural educational context, followed by perspectives on identity development in minority religious and secular ethics education. Finally, previous research in minority religious and secular ethics educational practice is presented.

#### 4.1.1 The concept of identity and identities

"Identity" is a contested concept with manifold uses. It has often been criticized for being slippery and undifferentiated, saying both too much and too little and therefore being weak as an analytical concept (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, 1, 11; Anthias 2009, 9). Still, "identity" is widely used, and represents a central concept within social sciences. As Appiah argues: "Identity may not be the best word for bringing together the roles gender, class, race, nationality and so on play in our lives, but it is the one we use" (Appiah 2006, 15). The Latin origin of the term, *idem*, has its roots in the 16<sup>th</sup> century expressing the quality of being identical, and meaning "same" (Oxford Dictionaries 2013). Within social sciences the concept has principally been used as a means for understanding selfhood and individuality (Kuusisto 2011, 102).

Among the many uses of the concept two contrasting uses are prominent, and stand as a background to the perspectives developed in this thesis. These represent respectively essential and non-essential perspectives on identity. The former has historically preceded the latter but both perspectives continue to influence our present views and research today. Hall (1996a, 4) describes the essential and non-essential views as representing a move from stable towards temporary conceptions of identity and self, that is, from *being* to a *process of becoming*. This change can according to Hall roughly be described in the move from the *Enlightenment subject* to the *sociological subject* and finally to the *postmodern subject*. The roots of the essential views of identity lie in the development of the *Enlightenment subject* which was based on the conception of the human person as "a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the

capacities of reason, consciousness and action” (Hall 1996b, 597). Identity in this view consists of an inner core, which emerges at birth, and unfolds during the course of life, but essentially remains the same. Identity is seen as an independent, solid and stable entity. It refers to a core aspect of selfhood, pointing to something deep, basic, and foundational, which is to be valued, cultivated, and recognized. A major figure who gave this conception its primary formulation was Descartes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Cartesian ideal of the subject as being uniform and independent stands out as a cornerstone in the history of the essential self. Similarly, thinkers such as Rousseau have further developed conceptions of individuality and of being true to the inner self (Hall 1996b, 579–604; von Brömssen 2003, 59–61; Taylor 1994, 30–31; Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 7–8, 14).

The above view of identity has been challenged through the development of modern society. Modern society has implied growing complexity as well as societies acquiring more collective and social forms. The individual came to be seen as more located within the supporting structures and formations of modern society. Also scientific developments such as for example Darwinian biology and the emergence of new social sciences made the subject more socially, culturally and physically grounded. Hall argues that an important change towards a more contemporary view of identity emerged in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in *the sociological subject*. The sociological subject emerges as an awareness that the inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but formed in relation to others. This interactive conception of identity represents a view, that identity is formed in the interaction between self and society. The subject still has a core or essence, but it is formed and modified in continuous dialogue with culture and the identities that the “outside” world offers. This sociological view, bridges the gap between the “inside” and the “outside”, and the internalized identities become part of us. Identity is in this view still traditional in that it is tied to a unified identity, and the development of identity is seen as the relation between two connected but separate entities, that is the individual and the culture (Hall 1996b, 579, 604–605).

A third shift in the meaning of identity emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely *the postmodern identity*. This identity reflected the increasingly globalising society and culture, being under constant, rapid and permanent change. The shift implied a de-centering or loss of the unified and stable subject. Instead identity becomes fragmented, composed not of a single but several, sometimes contradicting identities. The postmodern subject has no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity is continuously formed and transformed. Identity is seen upon as a process, in which cultural aspects such as ethnicity, language, sex, religion, and nationality take part and change in time and space. The subject assumes different identities at different times, which are



not unified by a coherent “self”. The unified self is rather constructed through a narrative of the self. This contemporary view challenges the essential self and highlights a multiple, unstable nature of identity. Postcolonial and postmodern researchers have had an important part in criticizing the essential views of identity (Hall 1996b, 598–611; von Brömssen 2003, 59; Benjamin 2013, 119–120).

Fundamental to a non-essential view is that culture just as identities are seen as fluid and changing. Cultures are not seen as solid or fixed, but rather as liquid (Bauman 2004, 53). Hall (1997, 2) defines *culture* as “whatever is distinctive about the ‘way of life’ of a people, community, nation or social group”. Members of the same culture share sets of concepts, images and ideas which enable them to think and feel about the world, and interpret the world, in roughly similar ways. By having similar maps of meaning a sense of belonging and identity is created (Hall 1997, 2–4). The contemporary individual is confronted with a plurality of cultures and maps of meaning. Von Brömssen (2003, 63) argues in light of postmodern and modern research that the concept of culture is perceived as “neither uniform, static or for once and all given, but [...] complex, and characterized by great variation, diversity and fragmentizing tendencies”. Similarly, Abdallah-Pretceille (2006, 479–470) describes contemporary cultures as increasingly changing and fluent and has coined the concept of *culturality* to be used rather than “culture”. *Culturality* expresses “the fragmentary, multicoloured, mixing and crossing over conventions, which occurs in the interaction between individuals and groups” (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006, 478). As a reaction to a fixed and exclusionary view of identity the idea of multiple and hybrid identities emerges in the interplay of different culturalities. Hybridity can be perceived as a space of no man’s land, or “third space”, and expresses ambivalent and creative processes of identity-making (Anthias 2011, 209; von Brömssen 2003, 84–86).

The non-essential view of identity is fundamentally linked to the concept of culture. The concept *cultural identity* is often used as synonym to identity, expressing those aspects of our identities which arise from belonging to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and national cultures (Hall 1996b, 596). Cultural identity can as Benjamin (2011, 62) argues be seen as including a number of different identities, that is, gender, home culture, country or dominant culture, ethnicity or appearance, religion, language, sexuality, subcultures/hobbies, profession, and social class. Included are also individual qualities, which can for instance refer to individual abilities or disabilities. These different identities intersect, that is, the different aspects inter-relate and cross-cut within people’s lives and in social relations (Anthias 2011, 210–211).

In the perspective of a non-essential identity the term identity is often expressed in plural as *identities* to better respond to the openness and manifold character of the concept. As Appiah (2006, 19) argues: “Identities are so diverse and extensive because in the modern world, people need an enormous array of tools in making life [...]. Indeed people are making up new identities all the time”. There is today more space to negotiate and chose our identities. However, there are notably also inequalities in the distribution of opportunities among people (Gewirtz and Cribb 2008, 41). The flexibility to choose between different alternative becomes central to the postmodern identity. Bauman (2004, 77– 78) argues that identity has become a battlefield between the freedom of choice and the security of belonging. This view of the postmodern identity emphasises the problematic nature and disintegration of identity. Constant change rather than development of identity is at the forefront.

Woodhead (1999, 69) argues in connection to religion, that even if the modern self is confronted with a large number of cultural possibilities, which compete for the self in the contemporary context, these multiple sources of selfhood also include stable identities. In a similar vein Poulter (2013, 28–29) argues for a view of the self as being a whole, and not consisting only of a set of different identities or parts. As different identities intertwine there may still be a sense of a whole as well as a sense of continuum, despite the inherent change. Significant to an identity is that it has patterns built into it, which help the individual think about his or her life: “To adopt an identity, to make it mine, is to see it as structuring my way through life” (Appiah 2005, 24). Some identities may also be seen as more stable than others. Anthias (2011, 209) argues that some identities, such as religion and gender roles, are more stable than others and have not been equally flexible in the process of postmodernization. The pick and mix of different identities transform identities but does not necessarily mean a breakdown of all cultural identities adopted.

Contrasting still to the above wide conceptions of identity the term has often been given a more narrow meaning within contemporary research. From a postmodern perspective identity commonly refers solely to a process of *identification* with others or different situations or categories in particular contexts, such as for example identifying with a religion in the context of a religious community. Rather than seeing identity as something attained, the term identification expresses it as being and process (Anthias 2009, 9; Hall 1996b, 608). Similarly, within social identity theory the term generally has a limited meaning such the individual’s or group’s “identification” or “self-categorization” in relation to other social categories or classifications (Stets and Burke 2000, 224).

## 4.1.2 Identities as active and evolving

This thesis adopts a general view of identities as representing the individual's conceptions of her- or himself. Identities are about who we think we are and who we want to be, and fundamentally includes a multitude of cultural aspects (Gewirtz and Cribb 2008, 40; Benjamin 2013, 122). Due to the wide meaning of the concept this thesis does not cover all dimensions of identities. Instead the main focus is narrowed down to students' and teachers' identities in relation to the school context and their religious and non-religious identities. This view is grounded in a non-essential and constructivist perspective on the concepts of identity and identities. The constructivist perspective is further explicated in the philosophical base of this thesis in section 5.1, but implies that students' identities, including their religious identities, are seen as constructed within cultural contexts and individually developed in an ongoing process (von Brömssen 2003, 57–61; Sterkens 2001, 76–80). Identity and identity development are seen as narrative processes regarding the self and its boundaries, including the continuous activity of construction and reconstruction. From a contextual view identity is formed in the cultural context in a process of interplay and dialogue between the individual, family, peers, school, social communities and society. Language and the narrative are fundamental for the development and expression of identity. Identities are defined always in dialogue with others and through the recognition of others (Vermeer 2010, 110–12; 2009; Kuusisto 2011, 59–62; Taylor 1994, 33–38).

Identities are closely connected with a sense of belonging when they express membership in a social group or community. It can create forms of solidarity bringing people and groups together. Students' identities are importantly developed within the context of the school and with peers, which will be further discussed in section 4.2. However, the process of adopting an identity, or identification, necessarily also involves construction of boundaries and exclusion, separating ourselves from what we are not. Identities have the capacities to leave out, to render to the "outside", to define that which is the other (Anthias 2011, 208, 211; Appiah 2006, 19–21, 25; Hall 1996a, 7). One problem with the concept is that it easily suggests that everyone of a certain identity is in some strong sense *idem*, i.e. the same. However, most groups are in fact internally quite heterogeneous, partly because each of us has many identities (Appiah 2006, 15). We may therefore be entrapped, or boxed, into one identity, such as for instance through assuming that individuals of one group are the same (Dervin 2013, 21). As Benjamin (2013, 121–122) argues individuals should and cannot be defined only from the outside or from one single identity, rather a range of identities need to be considered. The term "groupism" articulates the assumption that identity is derived simply from being member of a group, rather than as processes or social relations (Anthias 2009, 9–10).

### 4.1.3 The religious identities of students

According to von Brömssen (2003, 64) religious identities can be seen as part of cultural identities, and are developed in a constructivist perspective within the context of culture. A religious identity represents in this view one out of multiple identities that may be developed within particular cultures. “Culture” is by this definition seen as an overarching concept. However, often religion is perceived as fundamental to culture, and therefore seen as not to be reduced only to culture. Von Brömssen (2003, 64) argues for the view that culture and religion are constructed in constant interplay and the relation between the two concepts are dependent on the meanings we give them. Cush (1999, 6) contends, that “what we call a religion is a fluid, developing, fuzzy edged stream of ideas and practices, influenced by and influencing other such streams and not easily distinguishable from ‘culture’.” To distinguish the two “culture” generally includes the more time-location-relative aspects of life, and “religion” the eternal verities of life and beyond (Cush 1999, 7). “Religions”, just as the concept of “cultures”, are generally not to be seen as discrete, closed systems of belief, but rather as being internally diverse and subject to change (Jackson 1995, 287). The fluidity connected to this view of religion reflects onto religious identities as also being diverse and constantly developed during the course of life.

The roots of an individual’s religious identity, or identities, are traditionally seen as being part of the process of early socialisation. Religious identities are often developed in early age and the family generally functions as the main socialiser (von Brömssen 2003, 64). Research within both the Finnish and international context show, that the home education strongly influences the individual’s religiosity later in life, and that the mother’s religious affiliation is often decisive for the child’s choice of affiliation (Niemelä 2011, 57). The role of family and home education have an important role in religious socialisation, but school, peers and the surrounding culture, including the media culture, also have crucial influence (Kuusisto 2011, 56–63; Benjamin 2011, 74; Klingenberg 2014, 190–191). An individual’s religious identity may include social, cultural and spiritual dimensions (Kuusisto 2006, 136). The child’s awareness about his or her religious and cultural identities develop in an individual manner, depending importantly on whether the child experiences him- or herself as different from peers and other people in the surroundings. As the child enters kindergarten and school, a major shift with regard to new influences occur. The kindergarten and school generally strengthen the socialization of majority children, and minority children may at this stage enter into a quite new culture. If the school culture with its ideologies and values are different from those of the home, this change and contrast will be an important source of influences but also challenges (Benjamin 2011, 72–74).

The cognitive, emotional and moral development of the child during the age of pre-adolescence (age 7–12) influences religious identity development. Cognitive stage theories emphasize such developments in pre-adolescence as moving towards increased independent and conceptual thinking and a more distinct sense of self. The search of an independent and individual identity is heightened during adolescence, when the identity can be set in crisis. This also influences religious identity development (Sterkens 2001, 86–109; Boyatzis 2009, 31–63). As Sterkens (2001, 90–93) and Boyatzis (2009, 61–63) argue, a rigid view of stage theories of religious development may not reflect its complexity and variety nor does it see identity as an ongoing individual process involving multiple belongings. In a pluralistic society the nature of religious identity becomes a process of constant negotiation during the course of life. Individuals are not necessarily tied to their childhood religious affiliation, but can identify with several groups and communities, and try out and explore different religious identities and develop a personal identity. Today the socialising process is more open than before and it is not evident how children and youth relate to religious and secular questions. Different identities are developed based on influences from both religious and secular cultures (von Brömssen 2003, 62–68; Larsson 2003, 15–20).

Still, religion stands out as a cultural identity, which often has a profound and enduring character. Being a member of a religious group can represent an important source of identity (Ysseldyk, Matheson and Anisman 2010, 60–71; Kuusisto 2011, 7; Talib and Lipponen 2008, 90–92). A longitudinal study among Norwegian Pakistani children becoming adolescents showed that the youth negotiated their identities within different social contexts. Individualization was clearly present among the adolescents. However, the study also showed how adolescents made efforts to preserve their religious belonging in relation to Muslim tradition and social life. In regards to Muslim identity there was a movement back to what was experienced as their own group, and a strengthening of Muslim identity (Østberg 2003, 176–177). Another study by von Brömssen (2003) among adolescents aged 13–15 from a multi-ethnic school environment in Sweden shows that despite an increased diversity present in the school culture religion still appears important in reproducing boundaries. In interviews about religion and ethnicity students did not express crossings of boundaries in regard to their religion, and new form of hybrid religions were not present among these adolescents. The students expressed themselves from within their given religious context rather than new religious positions, and also often discussed religion predominantly with peers from the same religious background (von Brömssen 2003, 333–335).

From a social identity perspective religious identity is importantly seen as connected with “an individual’s knowledge of his membership in a social group

(or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1981, 255). Kuusisto (2011, 19) defines religious identity as “an individual’s closer identification as a member of a religious group”. As part of this closer identification a commitment stands out as important. A commitment can according to Kuusisto (2006, 135) in a broad sense include both a personal sense of “ownership” of the religious culture, social networks within it, personal faith, and “investments”, such as time and effort. Religious identity in this thesis refers to the individual’s perceptions concerning her- or himself as members of a religious community and the minority religion class. This applies in the field study to both the students’ and the teachers’ perceptions of themselves.

Liebkind (1988, 66–67), in line with Lange and Westin (1981, 200–201), distinguishes between identities that are ascribed, achieved or adopted. The ascribed identities cannot be chosen or easily changed, as they are given at birth and represent identities such as sex or age. Religion, nationality, and mother tongue may also be perceived as ascribed. The ascribed identities differ from the achieved and adopted identities, which are grounded in choices that the individual takes, such as the groups which the individual joins, or the roles, which the individual takes on. In a somewhat similar vein Peek (2005) distinguishes between three stages of religious identity development in connection to a study of Muslim identities. That is, religion as ascribed, chosen and declared identity. An ascribed identity implies that religion is something that is given, and can be taken for granted or alternatively be denied. Religion as a chosen identity means that the individual consciously decides to embrace the religious identity, which may take place after much reflection. The third stage, religion as a declared identity, implies a need to strengthen and assert the religious identity in relation to society. Within Peeks study among young Muslims this referred to the need for a declaration of Muslim identity as a result of September 11, 2001. This crisis created a need to both strengthen and assert Muslim identity to retain a positive self-perception (Peek 2005, 223–237).

The above distinctions between ascribed and chosen identities stand out as important for how religious identities are perceived. From the perspective of the Finnish religious education system it seems essential to make a distinction between students’ given and chosen religious identities. Religion is within the Finnish religious education system treated more or less as an ascribed identity, as religious education is decided according to religious affiliation. However, this may easily be assumed to be a chosen identity, which is problematic. This is clearly the case with students of mixed faith, but applies to all students whose belongings cannot be assumed. Arweck and Nesbitt (2010, 41) argue in the context of children from mixed-faith families in Britain the need for teachers to avoid generalizing about mixed-faith families or judging people by their physical appearances and names assuming knowledge about their identities.

#### 4.1.4 The non-religious identities of students

The term “non-religious” has a variety of uses, and is generally defined through difference from religion. The scope of non-religious identities is in fact as diversified as the religious, and the two overlap depending on how the terms are defined. Non-religion is commonly defined as “not relating to or believing in a religion” and is also closely associated to the term “irreligious” (Oxford Dictionaries 2013; Lee 2012, 130). Non-religion is also viewed as being connected to a lack of commitment to that which characterizes religion, both on an institutional and personal level. Non-religiosity may include a number of different stances towards religion, for example a hostility or rejection (anti-religious) stance towards religion or an indifference (a-religious) stance towards religion. Non-religion can moreover represent a clear and deliberate choice or be a passive position, representing a mundane, unknowing orientation towards religion. Also, the non-religious can include individuals who are in-between. An individual may identify with a religion, even while simultaneously rejecting its creeds and supernatural assumptions (Zuckermann 2012, 8, 19).

Lee (2012, 135) argues for non-religion to be a general concept encompassing a variety of different positions such as the atheistic, agnostic, humanistic as well as the secular. The secular is a widely used concept and has several meanings on individual, institutional and societal level. However, its meaning in relation to non-religion may be restricted to “something for which religion is not the primary reference point” (Lee 2012, 134). The secular is in this view primarily defined by something other than religion, but not necessarily in opposition to religion. In this view a secular person may even belong to a religion, but not adhere to its doctrines, and represent the non-believing “cultural religiosity” (Zuckermann 2012, 8).

Non-religiosity can also be seen as a world-view, which is not religious. A personal world-view expresses the individual’s view on life, the world and humanity, and is, similarly to religious identities, developed throughout life, and in constant negotiation within the surrounding culture. A world-view can be seen to answer existential questions, contain moral values and intrinsically imply experiencing meaning in life (van der Kooij, Ruyter and Miedema 2013, 213–219). Riitaoja, Poulter and Kuusisto (2010, 87), argue for the term world-view to be an “ontological and ethical orientation to the world, humanity and life questions”. A world-view may encompass both religious and non-religious world-views. Similarly, Niiniluoto (1984) defines a personal world-view as including both views about the world, ethics and values, as well as an epistemological view as to how knowledge is acquired (Niiniluoto 1984, 87). From a non-religious world-view all knowledge and meaning are fundamentally connected to the human being, and do not exist independent from us (Tomperi 2003, 13).

The non-religious identities of students within this thesis are primarily defined through their non-affiliations to a religious congregation. Those students within religious and secular ethics education who do not belong to a congregation may be called “non-religious”. As discussed above in section 4.1.3 religious identity refers in this thesis to the individual’s perceptions concerning her- or himself as members of a religious community and the minority religion class. In a similar vein non-religious identity can within the school context be defined through the individual’s perceptions concerning him- or herself as non-affiliated to a religious congregation or community. This conception of non-religious identity does not include the individual conceptions of his or her self in relation to religion and other world-views. Notably, a non-religious identity does not apply to the secular ethics class as a whole, as some of the students are affiliated to a religious minority congregation or community, and the class does not represent only the non-affiliated. In this view the non-religious identity of a student does not exclude that he or she can have religious beliefs.

#### **4.1.5 Traditional and modern views of identity and plurality in religious education**

The development towards increasing plurality and secularization in Finnish society and in European societies at large has had a profound effect on religious education. Addressing plurality in religious education has become a key question within religious education research in many countries in Europe and internationally. In many ways plurality has taken the central position which secularism had in research during the last half of 20<sup>th</sup> century and reflects many of the challenges that religious education encounters. A plural society raises demands on taking into consideration different religious identities as well as the non-religious within religious education (Jackson 2004b, 5–7; Skeie 2006, 308).

Skeie (2006) argues that religious education needs to take into consideration both a traditional and a modern perspective on plurality in society. Traditional plurality expresses a descriptive view of plurality, indicating the existence of a variety of different religious groups and/or views in a specific context in society or in education. This concept reflects the perception that societies or states consist of different groups, such as for example religious or ethnic groups. These groups may be living parallel to each other or represent a more “creole plurality” with open groups allowing individuals to cross over, change religion, or speak each other’s languages. Modern plurality on the other hand expresses the intellectual climate in late modern and postmodern times, which “breaks down traditional bases of authority, such as the religious ones, and accelerates the rate of change in many areas of life” (Skeie 2006, 313). Modern plurality refers to fragmentation, increasing individualism as well as privatisation of religion. Religious plurality becomes increasingly context bound and subject to competing



rationalities. This form of plurality often comprises a constant reinterpretation of traditions, and the individual's life world is pluralised. Through being exposed to a plurality of ideas, values and alternative choices identity becomes a major project and the individual is impelled to question his or her identities over and over again (Skeie 2006b. 312–314; 2002; 52–55; Jackson 2004a, 8). Skeie (2006, 314–5) argues that the plurality of present societies is partly a matter of traditional plurality and partly modern plurality. The two dimensions are present and intersect both within society and in the individual. Both dimensions are dynamic in that they can be more or less pronounced or “strong”. Modern plurality can be seen to represent the general context of society today. However, both forms of plurality need to be considered in education.

Skeie (2002; 2006) distinguishes between naturalistic, rationalistic and romantic attitudes towards plurality. The naturalistic attitude sees diversity as inevitable and divides people into reified categories, whereas the rationalistic attitude stresses fundamental similarities among human beings. The romantic attitude stresses individual freedom to construct one's own identity (Skeie 2002, 49–51; 2006; 310–311; Cush 2007, 219). Depending on the attitude taken religious education may see plurality as a given and inevitable part of the child's surroundings, which needs to be taken into consideration. In a rationalistic view plurality is considered to be more apparent than real, and emphasize that human beings are actually much the same and that there are possibilities to reach common understandings. A romantic, modern, alternative is to make individuals' become increasingly conscious of being part of religious plurality and its flow of different meanings and interpretations (Skeie 2006, 316).

The above distinctions between different attitudes to plurality illustrate alternative positions within both traditional and modern plurality. However, generally the distinction between traditional and modern religious plurality has similarities with essential and non-essential views of identity and culture in regard to seeing plurality as given and alternatively seeing plurality as a process of constant change and fragmentation. Within traditional plurality the child's religious identity is seen in relation to a given specific tradition. In contrast, modern plurality stresses the necessity and freedom of the child to construct a personal world-view or religion, and that a given identification cannot be taken for granted. In this perspective it is not evident how children relate to different religions and secular world-views. Different identities are tried out and developed, and plural and hybrid identities may also emerge.

Vermeer (2010; 2009) argues in a similar vein for distinguishing between traditional and modern socialization within religious education. In today's postmodern society education is moving from traditional socialization towards modern socialization. However, both forms of socialization are still present. Traditional religious socialization has focused on the transmission of religious

faith, values and norms. Modern socialization, on the other hand, considers individuation as the core of socialization and includes the acquisition of hermeneutic and critical reflective skills. Transmission of faith is replaced with the goal of transformation and individual change. The aims of supporting students' autonomy and individuality lie in focus. However, supporting students to be part of culture and society are still important and modern socialization includes the pursuit of common values and social cohesion. Socializing and integrating as well as individualizing aims are therefore present (Vermeer 2010, 106–116; 2009, 204; Rissanen 2014, 125). Rissanen (2014, 125) argues for the term socialization to refer specially to traditional socialization and “the idea of educating the students towards the ideals of a religious community and strengthening salience of religious identity”. Its modern interpretation, that is, modern socialization, can be referred to as identity development. Identity development means “an emphasis on the autonomy of the student and the construction of an individual religious identity” (Rissanen 2014, 125).

#### **4.1.6 Intercultural educational approaches to plurality in religious education**

New critical and reflective approaches to religious education make an effort to address religious plurality as part of an intercultural education context (Jackson 2004b, 6–10; 2009b, 22–25; Council of Europe 2008a). These approaches adopt a perspective which is close to critical intercultural and multicultural theory (Holm and Zilliacus 2009, 23–24), and centrally aim at contextualizing religions and world-views, seeing them in a wider and dynamic cultural context. Characteristic of intercultural as well as multicultural education is the perception that diversity in education includes a number of different cultural aspects. Aside from religion these aspects include at least ethnicity, race, nationality, social class, gender, dis/ability and language. Education includes all cultural aspects plus the personal qualities of the students. Multicultural and intercultural education notably represents a broad field of different educational solutions and practices, and several research traditions. The more traditional and conservative types focus on getting along and learning about different cultures. Education is in this view often focused on particular immigrant and minority groups, whereas the culture of the dominant state group is taken for granted. Hereby a static and essentialist views of culture may be assumed. The more progressive, critical types focus on social justice and working against prejudice and discrimination. In a critical view diversity in the classroom includes everyone in the school culture, all students as well as teachers, not only immigrant students (Holm and Zilliacus 2009, 23–25; Banks 2004, 4; Anthias 2011, 206–7).

Religion was not until the turn of the century recognised as an important factor to discuss within intercultural education. It was often a contested field,

sometimes forgotten, and often seen as part of the problem rather than the solution to challenges in education (Cush 1999, 10). The political, social and educational value of religious issues has received particular weight in Europe and globally as a consequence of the terror attack on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 and its repercussions. This has also had strong impact on the importance of religion within intercultural education. In the 1990s the Council of Europe still mainly mentioned religion as a source of conflict that can foster negative phenomena such as intolerance and fundamentalism. However, since the beginning of the century the points of emphasis of the Council of Europe have changed and religion has been seen as an important element within intercultural education and connected to fostering peace, cohesion and dialogue (Jackson 2004b; Schreiner 2011, 27–28). In 2002 the Council of Europe initiated a first intercultural project under the heading "Intercultural Education and the Challenge of Religious Diversity in Europe". In year 2008 "The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue" was published, which included religion as a dimension of education. Also, a first general recommendation to member states on the dimension of religious and non-religious convictions within intercultural education was published (Council of Europe 2008a; Jackson 2009a, 86). Also, previously in 2007, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe published the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in the Public Schools (OSCE 2007), which supported the above efforts to include religion within the intercultural context. Notably, recommendations and reports of the Council of Europe are not binding, but serve as guidelines for its 47 member states. The recommendations and reports are the result of political compromises and efforts to create common guidelines for the diverse national and local contexts among the Council of Europe's member states. Recommendations are implemented according to the member states' own context of political decision-making and therefore have different interpretations and varying influence in the individual countries. The values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law stand as general pillars for the work of the Council of Europe. Markedly, the promotion of aspects such as sustainable employment and active citizenship also has an important influence on how the Council of Europe conceptualizes its views on education and religion (Schreiner 2011, 27–28; 2014, 5–6).

The Council of Europe's recommendation on the dimension of religious and non-religious convictions within intercultural education (2008b) articulates the objectives of an intercultural approach. Among these is the development of a tolerant attitude and respect for the right to hold a particular belief or attitude. Vital to this is "the freedom of conscience and thought and the freedom to have a religion or not to have one, and the freedom to practice one's religion, to give it up or change it if one so wished" (Council of Europe 2008b, 3). Furthermore,

education needs to ensure that teaching about the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions is consistent with the aims of education for democratic citizenship, human rights and respect for equal dignity of all individuals. This implies a need to take into consideration that students actively reshape and may change their identities, and that religious or non-religious identities are not necessarily pre-defined by family or community. The recommendation also argues that education needs to nurture sensitivity to and knowledge of the diversity of religious and non-religious conviction. This includes developing skills of critical evaluation and reflection and fostering abilities to analyse and interpret impartially knowledge and information relating to the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions. Last but not least, a main objective of education is to combat prejudice and stereotypes, which also includes promoting communication and dialogue between people from different cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds (Council of Europe 2008b, 3–4).

Central to new critical and reflective approaches to religious education is that they, similarly to the above recommendation of the Council of Europe, aim at taking plurality into account so that instruction integrates students' individual cultural backgrounds into education and becomes culturally responsive. Education also takes as a starting point that students actively develop their identities and aims at creating dialogue as well as supporting students' capacities for critical thinking. Essential is furthermore that education works to reduce prejudice and promote tolerance and peace, which gives room for plurality to exist without conflict (Jackson 2009b, 22–25; Cush 2007, 225; Gay 2010, 29).

Several pedagogical approaches developed internationally within religious education, such as the integrative, dialogical and contextual approach aim at meeting the challenges of plurality. The interpretative approach generally encourages a flexible understanding of religions and non-religious convictions and avoids placing them in a pre-defined framework. The dialogical approach supports students to respect and engage in dialogue with other individuals having other values and ideas. A contextual approach takes account of local and global learning conditions of education (Jackson 2004c, 42–46; Leganger-Krogstad 2011, 75–77; Council of Europe 2008b, 6). As Jackson argues, these approaches “acknowledge the inevitable influence of plurality upon young people, and help them to engage with it. They do not set out to promote or erode particular beliefs, including those of children in school, but they do acknowledge that students should be given opportunity to study and reflect upon different religions and philosophical viewpoints in a structured way and to apply skills of interpretation and criticism methodically” (Jackson 2004a, 165).

Finnish religious education does not promote a particular pedagogical approach. However, particularly in the perspective of majority Lutheran education, responsiveness to the student's personal world-views and life-

questions has been an essential part of instruction. Instruction has also developed towards a co-operational direction and dialogical methods are used to support the development of personal argumentation and critical thinking (Kallioniemi and Ubani 2012, 182–183). There is little research on minority religious education, but a case study with Islam teachers by Rissanen (2012) shows how teachers within the context of minority religious education can function as mediators for dialogue within the class and school context. The teachers in this study mediated negotiations related to the co-existence of different cultural and religious practices and created a space for “inter-civilizational dialogue” in the classroom. They interpreted Islamic tradition, other traditions and modern liberal values in ways that facilitated coexistence. Teachers represented Islam in a way that eased the tensions within Islam as well as between Islam and Western culture. Rissanen argues that this may be seen as a form of social regulation built into the Finnish system of education, which furthers the development of a Finnish form of Islam. These teachers functioned as mediators between young people, other teachers and parents and promoted intercultural dialogue in the school (Rissanen 2012, 747).

Intercultural education may be used as an argument both for and against separative religious education. Those supporting separative education see it as a way to support children’s religious and cultural identities and as a means to familiarise students with a particular tradition. Education is also seen as ensuring minority rights and supporting the identities of minorities, and in this sense further equality (Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in the Public Schools 2007, 38). Knowledge of one’s “own” religion is often in this view perceived as a prerequisite for understanding other traditions, and can function as a platform for dialogue (Riitaoja, Poulter and Kuusisto 2010, 88). Acquiring knowledge first of one’s “own” religion is commonly argued as important for later gaining understanding of other religions. Komulainen (2013) argues that it is beneficial for the child to acquire an understanding of his or her background and tradition before encountering and engaging into dialogue with other religions and world-views. Furthermore, a “neutral” or “general” perspective on religions can be questioned. A particular perspective is always present and in the separative model of education this perspective is openly expressed as the basis of education (Komulainen 2010, 69; 2013, 76–78).

However, the central criticism against a separative model of education from an intercultural educational point of view is focused on the fact that students are divided into separate groups. “The thought that the way to deal with cultures is to teach each child the culture of “its” group” (Appiah 1994, 12) is questioned. Teaching the child the culture of “its” group implies reinforcing and transmitting identities rather than making a range of identities available to children (Appiah 1994, 12–27). Abdallah-Preteille (2006, 475–477) argues that we should not

think about cultural diversity in terms of categories and characteristics, or labels. Relating to diversity is connected to relating to difference and otherness rather than to a perception of separate cultures or religions. From a non-essentialist view the division into cultural or religious instruction groups stands out as being difficult to argue for, and stands in critical light. Even if religious and non-religious identities often can be relatively stable (See discussions in sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.3, and separative education may be seen to support the curricular aim of supporting students' cultural backgrounds, the general organization of education is difficult to justify from a non-essential point of view. Those who support an integrated subject of religion and/or ethics see it as also promoting equality by being the same for all.

However, ensuring equality within an integrative model may encounter problems. Within countries such as Sweden and Denmark where all students attend the same religion classes the arrangements have created points of criticism and complaint. This has been either because education is seen to include inappropriate content from some point of view or exclude important content that is considered to have crucial importance for students' identities (Himanen 2012, 182-183). With regard to the Swedish integrative model Fleshner (2012, 15) argues, that the discourses present in the religious education classroom does not necessary create understandings of "the other". This questions whether the education can be seen as neutral. According to an ethnographic study in two upper secondary schools Fleshner saw three discourses, that is, the secular, the national Christian and the existential universalistic discourse. These discourses did not necessarily give room for understanding of for example those who are believers of other religions than Christianity. The question of how integrative religious education can be "neutral" or "objective" has been subject to much debate. As Berglund (2013, 180-1) argues, Swedish religious education can from an inside-Sweden perspective be seen as "neutral", but can from an outside perspective be seen as deeply Lutheran. Even if efforts have been made to wash away the "marinade" of Lutheran Christianity the education still has a taste of secular Lutheran culture. The aim of education being neutral and objective seems to be an unrealistic goal as all education is limited by the perspectives chosen and shaped by the surrounding cultural context.

#### **4.1.7 Identity development in minority religious and secular ethics education**

The general aims of the Finnish comprehensive school curriculum reflect a view of students' identities as active and evolving. As Rissanen (2014, 123-124) argues, this view of identity can be seen as liberal. It aims at supporting modern socialization and the development of a personal identity. The Finnish religious

education curriculum has moved from a traditional to a more individual approach. The curriculum articulates the aims of supporting students' identities through "focusing on life's religious and ethical dimension [...] from the standpoint of students' own growth". Similarly, the secular ethics curriculum aims at "developing personal conceptions of the world and philosophies of life" (NCC 2004, 202, 214). This general development within Finnish religious education towards striving to support independent identity development has as Poulter (2013, 137-208) argues been seen since the 80s and has continued over the past few decades to move towards the aim of creating world citizens. The overall aim of religious education in Finland is primarily the enhancement of identity construction, not the transmission of religious identity. This can be seen from the fact that education aims at *learning about* and *from* religion rather than *learning into* religion (Kallioniemi and Ubani 177–188; See section 3.1.3). Therefore personal identity development is generally in focus, and not solely religious identity development (cf. Vermeer 2010, 112).

Despite the development towards the aims of modern socialization, research shows that Finnish religious education includes problematic issues and tensions with regard to how it supports students' identities. Hella and Wright (2009, 53–56) and Rissanen (2014, 124–126) argue that the relationship between confessionalism and liberalism in education is not clear and that the aim of personal development in the Finnish curricula is open to interpretation. This has been highlighted particularly within minority religious education. As discussed in section 3.1.3 on the non-confessionality of Finnish religious education previous studies argue that minority curricula and instruction emphasizes the maintaining and strengthening of religious identity, rather than developing an identity education. Consequently traditional plurality and the existence of different student groups is emphasized in education. The Finnish religious education model recognizes different religious and non-religious identities as a starting point by organizing separate instruction groups, which by itself assumes the presence of traditional plurality. However, the question arises whether the Finnish system addresses both traditional and modern plurality in the educational practice.

The Council of Europe's (2008a, 6) White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue states that it is essential that children's identities are not predefined in education. Children should have the option to adopt different and multiple cultural affiliations. The Finnish religious education system formally takes a non-confessional stance and an individual approach. However, the narrow definition of non-confessionality as education not including religious practice still gives room for confessional elements in education, which for the student may stand in conflict with the freedom to choose one's own culture. As stated in section 3.1.1 on the legislation on "own" religion, critique of the current

legislation also include the fact that the choice of instruction is linked to parental congregational belonging and the child's voice is not necessarily heard when the parent chooses the instruction group. Participation in classes may not adequately reflect the plural identities of students. Furthermore, legislatively the Basic School Act (454/2003) does not give minority and majority students' equal rights to choose between instruction groups. These points of criticism also point to aspects within education that predefine or narrow down students' identities within the education system. Generally, the risk for indoctrination is also a relevant concern for religious education. This means that certain ways of thinking are overemphasized by the educator while others are limited or excluded, and that openness for evaluation of the grounds of education is lacking. The role of the teacher is central in making the child aware of different ways of thinking (Holm 2012, 44; Puolimatka 1996, 109).

Comparison to religious education in other European countries can only be made cautiously as the country specific contexts and the religious landscapes are individual in each country. However, in Belgium where, similarly to Finland, education is separative there is also an emphasis on strengthening students' identities in relation to the religion taught. Education has a confessional character as teachers are appointed by the religious communities. Even if other traditions are increasingly taught, they are seen from the perspective of the "own" religious tradition (Loobuyck and Francken 2011a, 23). The Austrian religious education is also religion-based and run by the churches and religious communities. Curricula differ from each other, for example the Catholic Church aims at strengthening the denominational orientation whereas the Protestant curriculum stresses that religious education should help students find their own identity. In a study on teacher perspectives teachers were found to be comfortable with teaching *in religion*, but teaching *about religion*, including other religions, was also promoted (Schelander 2009, 23–25).

Internationally denominational schools, that is, schools owned by a religious organization, are commonly seen to aim at traditional socialization. However, there are differences among denominational schools, some being focused on teaching about and from rather than teaching in religion and having a more modern perspective on socialization (Avest and Bertram-Troost and Mediema 2011, 90–91; Vermeer 2009, 208). In a study of Muslim schools in Sweden Berglund (2009, 210–212) argues that the Swedish Islamic education could be described as translation of Islam, rather than transmission. Teachers constantly chose the content and negotiated its meaning according to their perception of what was vital for their students to know and suitable for their level of comprehension. The education was in this view not static transmission but transformed through a process of translation in relation to the Swedish cultural context. However, the aims of socialization into tradition were clearly present.



The Finnish secular ethics curriculum does not articulate an aim to strengthen students' identities in a particular direction or according to a specific stance. However, the aim of growth into democratic citizenship and human rights is articulated. As Salmenkivi (2006, 98–100) argues international declarations and documents such as the UN declarations have generally had a central role in the subject of secular ethics. The focus of education is not specified to a particular world-view, and an emphasis lies on taking students' own lives and experiences as a starting point for instruction. The curricular aim is that instruction is to be “guided by a sense of the students' opportunities to grow into free, equal, and critical creators of a good life” (NCC 2004, 214), which accords with a modern view of socialization. Nevertheless, Hella and Wright (2009, 56) argue that the subject of secular ethics still isn't fully non-confessional as it introduces alternative world-views from an explicit humanistic perspective.

In Belgium the subject of non-confessional ethics as an alternative to religious education was similarly to Finland offered as a “neutral” subject. However, the subject raised discussion as having a limited, humanist or atheist, perspective. In the Flanders region of Belgium the subject has since 1993 been confirmed as promoting a humanist world-view. In this region a small number of students have applied for exemption from ethics education on these premises (Loobuyck and Franken 2011a, 20; 2011b, 45–46).

#### **4.1.8 Previous research in minority religious and secular ethics educational practice**

There is little research on how minority religion and secular ethics classes are experienced by students themselves (Sakaranaho 2006, 332; 2008, 176). A previous study by Tamminen (1991) on Finnish religious education at large, that is, including Lutheran religious education as the majority group, shows that the general attitudes of Finnish primary school students toward religious education ranked high in the first years of comprehensive school, but students found it clearly less satisfying in the higher grades. More religiously committed students also liked religious education more than the non-committed students, who found education less likable (Tamminen 1991, 280, 318; Puolimatka and Tirri 2000, 38). A more recent study by Rusama (2002b) included 4000 students' views about Lutheran, Orthodox and secular ethics education. Overall this study argues that students have a positive attitude towards religious education, however they do not see it as a very important subject. Learning about different religions was generally perceived as useful. Girls in all instruction groups had a more positive attitude towards the subject than boys (Rusama 2002b, 11–29). Another large scale study by Räsänen (2006) investigated adult Finns' conceptions of religious education. Religious education was not perceived as a

very interesting subject, but still not disagreeable. The subject was seen as focusing on religious knowledge and centrally involved learning about different world-views. Commonly attitudes towards religious education were neutral. The subject was seen as necessary, even if not popular, and not limiting anyone's freedom. As Räsänen argues, the findings generally gave support for the separative model of education in "own" religion and secular ethics (Räsänen 2006, 100–116).

Few other classes in the Finnish school are in fact as diverse as the minority religion and secular ethics classes. Within the minority classes there are important variations among students with respect to age, religious or non-religious background, as well as Finnish or immigrant background. As education is organised in mixed age classes this implies significant age and developmental differences within the classes. Students within the same religious instruction groups may have quite divergent religious backgrounds and belong to different congregations. Many students in both minority religion and in ethics instruction have an immigrant background (Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 462–464). By "students with immigrant background" this study refers to students who have an immigrant or a refugee background, that is, that either the student or one or both parents have migrated or come to Finland as a refugee or immigrant. According to the National Core Curriculum (NCC 2004, 36) the term immigrant student refers to students who have moved to, or been born in Finland and have an immigrant background. This study adheres to this meaning, however recognizes that defining certain students as immigrants is problematic. There may be students for instance in the religious and secular ethics classes who have lived their whole lives in Finland and identify themselves as "Finnish", and are wrongly "labelled" as immigrants (Dervin 2013, 20–21). Students with immigrant background are generally increasing in numbers within the comprehensive school, which is clearly seen in the minority religious and secular ethics classes. In 2011 14% of the comprehensive school students in the Helsinki metropolitan region had a foreign language as their mother tongue. By 2020 this number is estimated to exceed 20% (Säävälä 2012, 7).

Religious identity has often been emphasized as being particularly important for students with immigrant background (von Brömssen 2003, 75–78; Torstenson-Ed 2006, 39; Talib and Lipponen 2008, 90–92). Religion is generally connected to creating a sense of belonging and community, which may be of importance in migration, when the individual is disconnected from his or her previous family and social networks (Anthias 2011, 205; Putnam 2007, 164). According to von Brömssen (2003) research on the role of religion for minority ethnic and immigrant youth groups in Europe, and particularly Muslim groups, show that religion continues to play a relatively strong role for immigrant youth. Youth have a relatively strong connection to religion but often distance

themselves from the interpretation of the parents, and negotiate between the old and the new. A religious belonging and community can create a sense of security for students in the new country and a way to retain contact with the original cultural background. In some cases the religious congregation in the new country can even strengthen the religious identity. The multiple identities which emerge may create conflicts, but can also be a valuable resource (von Brömssen 2003, 75–78; Campbell 2000, 31).

Finnish comprehensive school curriculum aims at giving the student the possibility to maintain and develop his or her relation to their culture of origin at the same time as he or she is becoming a member of the majority culture. The curriculum articulates that “the instruction helps to support the foundation of the student’s own cultural identity, and his or her part in Finnish society and a globalizing world” (NCC 2004, 12). This is also in line with the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (1999), which emphasizes the aim of preserving the immigrants own language and culture in the process of integration. However, the Finnish comprehensive school curriculum notably doesn’t define “Finnish culture” and what is meant by “students’ own cultural backgrounds” (Sakaranaho 2013, 236). Consequently, the relation between the culture of the individual and the Finnish culture is left open. The organization of religious and secular ethics education according to religious affiliation aims at supporting the individual cultural identities of students. To take the starting point in students’ own cultural identities is commonly seen as positive for identity development. Research has shown that it is important to develop a positive attitude towards one’s cultural background. This can also be seen as a valuable foundation for understanding and respecting other cultures (Benjamin 2011, 121–127; Al-Hazza and Bucher 2008, 210).

A participant observation study by Tuutti and Vainio (2007, 218) among Russian students in Orthodox religious education supported the view that students were content with their minority religion classes. However some students complained about the large mixed age class sizes and the scheduling of classes early or late in the day. Focus lay on their own traditions and ritual elements and prayers were taught in class. This study, as well as a few other studies, indicates that minority religious education can be of particular value for students with immigrant background and be positive in terms of inclusion. Instruction can connect students to their own cultural and religious traditions and be a source of security and familiarity in the school culture (Alitoppa-Niitamo 2002, 283; Sakaranaho 2006, 380; 2007b, 13–14). Tuutti and Vainio (2007, 218–220) mention the small group sizes, familiar teacher contact as well as the mix of students with Finnish and immigrant background in classes as factors which contributed towards inclusion. However, there are notably, immigrant parents who rather choose to socialize their children into the majority

culture. For instance, in a study of Taiwanese mothers in Finland Chang and Holm (2009) argue that the mothers wished to bring their children up as Lutherans rather than Buddhists or Confucians. In this case the separative education system would not be favoured.

Discrimination has not been explicitly researched among students in minority religious and secular ethics education. However discrimination and cultural racism have been shown to be commonly experienced among students within the Finnish school culture in connection to religion and religious belonging (Rastas 2007, 113–118; Souto 2012, 193–198; Halonen 2009, 41–43). This poses questions regarding minority students' inclusion versus exclusion in the school culture, which will be further discussed in section 4.2.

Recently a few studies have been made of religious education in Islam. In a participatory study in one upper secondary school class Rissanen (2014) showed that instead of pursuing individual identity construction the teacher guided the students towards acquiring a deep understanding of the religious tradition. The education aimed at strengthening belonging and identification. The students' right to make individual choices was emphasized, but the teacher guided towards an uncritical identification, and students' life worlds were not recognised. Rissanen argues that religious socialisation was reinforced by peer pressure. Students were familiarized with different religious conventions in the use of language and clothing together with peers. Even if these conventions were not required to be followed, the fact that conventions were followed by some peers made divisions evident within the group (Rissanen 2014, 129–135).

In an interview study with 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders in Islam education Kimanen (2013) investigated students' critical thinking skills. From a critical religious education point of view it is essential to teach children to argue for their own religious views, to assess different religious perspectives and be able to act according to one's views. Students in this study emphasised that the education primarily gave knowledge about Islam. This knowledge strengthened their abilities to argue for their Islamic way of life. Education also increased the understanding of the plurality within Islam and supported the harmony among students and people of different Islamic religious background. Kimanen argues for more critical thinking abilities within religious education, including the central aspects of dialogue, the interpretation of different religious traditions and encountering difference (Kimanen 2013, 26–27).

## **4.2 The inclusion versus exclusion of minority students in the school cultures**

The previous sections have focused on students' identities mainly within the religious and secular ethics classroom. However, central for students is also how

they experience themselves in relation to other peers and the school culture at large. The social context within the school has important impact on students' identities and the school plays an important part for students' identities as a whole. Students try out and develop their identities in relation to others in the school culture and in experiencing difference. The social relations among both students and teachers are essential for how students perceive themselves as members of the class. The school becomes a primary arena for dealing with a whole array of differences, such as religion, gender, social class, and ethnicity. In this process of identity making students construct their identities as much through notions of how others see "us" and "who we are not" as through conceptions of who "we" are (Reay 2009, 277–278).

To belong to a religious or secular ethics instruction group represents a possible source of identification, which can be positive or negative. The group identification can function as a positive source of self and well-being, however if threatened through conflicts between other groups it can equally well be negative (Ysseldyk, Matheson and Anisman 2010, 60–71). Minority children are more aware of the dominant culture, whereas majority children may ignore the minority culture if not exposed to it. To belong to a minority is often connected with having a lower status and a need to conform to the majority. The majority members of a culture are reinforced by the surrounding culture all the time whereas minority members need to make an effort to construct the minority identity. This may imply a need to draw a boundary to the majority (Liebkind 1988, 58–59). In a recent interview study among Finland-Swedish youth Klingenberg (2014, 176) showed that youth with minority religious affiliations or who were non-affiliated showed greater awareness of their identities than majority Lutheran youth. Their understanding of their religious affiliation was more distinct and they had reflected more on how their affiliation related to their personal religious views than did majority youth of Lutheran affiliation. As minority students in the school they were also aware of being different from the majority.

Being part of a minority religious education group separates minority individuals from majority and other minority groups in the school, creating power relations and possible issues of discrimination. Young children may be unable to distinguish between the possible lack of acceptance for their culture and for themselves. As they grow older, they can distinguish between different perspectives and learn that they can differ in their culture from the majority without being "deficient". It can also be more difficult for younger students to negotiate between different views and expectations in the school culture (Phinney and Rotheram 1987, 280; Mawhinney et.al. 2011, 246). Byrne (2012, 317–331) argues from the perspective of the Australian religion-based model that simply making the distinction between separate religious education groups is in

itself segregating, which makes way for conflict and prejudice in the school culture. Stigmatization in connection to students' choices in partaking in religious education may make it difficult for students to fit in to the school community. Separation in this view implies negative categorizations of students, which create conflict and prejudice. However, Banks (2006, 226) argues for the need to make distinctions between separatism and segregation in education. Separatism, as in grouping students, does not necessarily imply experiences of segregation or exclusion.

Students' experiences of inclusion in education are essential for the positive development of their identities. Inclusion can generally be seen as a process of responding positively to student diversity and aiming at reducing exclusion within education (UNESCO, 2009, 8). Arnesen, Mietola, and Lahelma (2007) argue, in line with UNESCO, for the concept of inclusion to refer to the whole school culture, not only special education, as is often the case. Inclusion is closely connected to recognizing differences and pursuing equality within education. The concept of integration has similar meanings to inclusion, but often only refers to immigrant students policies (cf. Holm and Londen 2010, 116–117). As the concept of inclusion has a more wide-ranging meaning than integration it is preferred in this thesis. Inclusion refers here to developing an educational culture where teachers and students as well as other school staff experience themselves as equal and integrated. This contrasts to a process of exclusion, which implies experiences of marginalization within the school culture. The process of creating inclusion, like integration, involves everyone in the school, not only students with an immigrant background. Inclusion in the school implies both preserving students' own culture, be it majority or minority, and becoming part of the school culture. From a critical intercultural perspective inclusion implies active interaction between students as well as teachers and other staff in the school culture, and having social justice as its core (Banks, 2005, 22–25; Holm and Zilliacus 2009, 23). Banks (2006, 20) argues that by including students with diverse backgrounds and creating educational equality, an empowering school culture can be achieved.

Organising religion-based education can be seen as an attempt to take students' cultural and religious backgrounds into account in the school culture, and seeing difference as richness. Via the small group instruction the religious culture is given possibility to have a space of its own in the majority culture. The separative model of education may be seen as accepting and also cultivating religious plurality in society (cf. Modood 2009, 170–172). But there is also the risk that the instruction increases the division between “us” and “them”, that the group divisions and instruction have an isolating effect and that the contact between the students in the different instruction groups is missing or deteriorates. Furthermore, Finnish as well as Nordic education have a tradition

of developing a unitary school with collective equality, thereby offering the same education for all. This tradition is still present, even if a more individualistic view of education is gaining pace (Arnesen and Lundahl 2006, 296–297; Reay 2011, 595–596). The current model of religious education with separate curricula for each religion may not necessarily be seen to support this tradition of solidarity.

An international study among teenagers in Europe shows that no one model of religious education as separate or integrated was favoured among teenagers (Knauth et al. 2008). Whether or not an integrated or a religion-based, separated, education was favoured depended largely on the experience of the teenagers. Their views were clearly informed by the contextual settings in respective country. Interestingly, both proponents for separate and integrated education put forth arguments that the learning groups ensured a free exchange of views and prevented conflicts (Knauth and Körs 2008, 400–401). Teenagers in several countries where an integrated education system was favoured, such as Germany and the Netherlands, often referred to the positive aspects of learning about different religions through peers (Avest et al. 2008, 101; Knauth 2008, 238). However, in another study in Spain where education has recently started to develop towards a religion-based model showed that a majority of teenagers were in favour of students being taught in separate groups, and of learning about their own confession (Veinguer, Lorente and Dietz 2011).

In the debate about Finnish religious education it is often argued that minority group belonging may be emphasized over school belonging and thereby create isolation and fewer opportunities for dialogue (Rautio 2012). The curriculum includes learning about different religions within all instruction groups (NCC 2004, 4), but it is not evident that the integrating effect of this knowledge can be seen in the form of increased dialogue in the school. A general educational aim of the comprehensive schools is to take students' religious identities into consideration and create dialogue within the school culture (Kallioniemi 2008, 105–110; Ubani 2013, 205–208). For example, in Helsinki the local curricular goal is to take into consideration students' religious traditions and rituals in the school if practically possible and as long as they fit within the framework of the national curriculum. Students' religious traditions are also considered in music and sports education and integrated into school festivities (Kuukka 2010).

While previous research in particular religious minority groups argue that minority religion instruction is a positive support particularly for immigrant inclusion (See section 4.1.8), few studies have investigated discrimination connected to participation in a minority religious or secular ethics education class. The structural challenges within minority religious education, such as the lack of textbooks and teaching facilities (See section 3.1.4), may be experienced as discriminatory, i.e. lead to actions that deny the equal treatment of students

as well as teachers within the school culture. Discrimination can be seen as structural when the policies of the educational institution, and the behaviour of teachers and school principals who implement and control these, indirectly have a differential or harmful effect and uphold inequality. Individual discrimination on the other hand constitutes behaviour of individual members in a group which is intended to have a differential and/or harmful effect on members of another group (Pincus 2006, 21–24).

Research within the Finnish school culture indicates that there are challenges in regards to the inclusion of minority religious and secular ethics education in the comprehensive school. In interviews with teachers of Islam Sakaranaho (2006, 404) found that there were teachers who stated that their students felt ashamed to go to classes as they felt different from others in the schools. Here the differentiated classes caused discomfort for students and did not reflect equality and religious freedom in practice. Research on whether ethics students experience discrimination has not been carried out, but discrimination has been publicly discussed particularly regarding Lutheranism dominating the school culture and a tendency among schools to direct ethics students to Lutheran classes (Niinistö 2013). In a recent ethnographic study in grade levels 1–6 in two metropolitan comprehensive schools Riitaoja (2013) argues that secular Lutheran majority culture was the norm in the schools. Secular Lutheran culture did not require consideration, whereas other religious or non-religious backgrounds were seen to demand separate measures. Students of minority religions were not equally considered in the school programmes and festivities. The most common juxtaposition was made between the secular Lutheran and Islam, and Islam was generally not seen as a valuable resource for students but often as a matter of concern. Also other minority religious belongings were commonly perceived as restraints for students, and teachers had difficulties in considering students' different traditions and dressing codes. Furthermore, members of the same religion were often grouped, and assumed as being similar (Riitaoja 2013, 204–229).

Riitaoja (2013, 323–329) also shows that minority religion teachers were often outsiders and transparent in the school culture. The teachers were not seen as equal members of the teaching personnel and were not always in regular contact with the supervising principal. The scheduling of classes was difficult and also put teachers in unequal position and gave no time for meeting up with other teachers. Also difficulties arose in finding classroom spaces, and the lack of space was an apparent problem for the education, and a source of further structural discrimination. Generally there was an articulated need for smaller class-sizes and to take into consideration the mixed age classes and the need for school assistants. The teachers' lack of formal competence was often discussed, however the mixed age classroom created major challenges, which were not



solely met through competence. Riitaoja (2013, 329) concludes that as long as the school subjects of minority religions are not on equal levels with other subjects, and the teachers do not have an equal position among the teaching personnel, it is hard to imagine that students would perceive the teachers in the same way as other teachers in the school.

In regard to how Finnish comprehensive school teachers generally take plurality into account several studies have shown that teachers often have difficulties in addressing plurality in education. Mansikka and Holm (2011) argue in the context of Swedish-speaking teachers in Finland that teachers often had positive attitudes towards cultural diversity on a theoretical level, but in moving towards practical issues and decisions the teachers took a traditional and conservative stance. Similarly, in a survey among teachers in schools with many immigrant students Talib (2005, 109–120) argues that teachers need stronger competencies for intercultural education. Even if diversity was among teachers regarded positively an emphasis on Finnishness and Finnish culture stood out as obstacles for taking all students equally into consideration. In a study by Soilamo (2008, 136) the majority of comprehensive school teachers in the study perceived cultural differences as a problem in school. A third of the teachers perceived religion as creating problems in education. Kuusisto and Lamminmäki-Vartia (2012, 10) showed within the kindergarten context, that staff members had difficulties in encountering religious plurality in a positive and neutral light, and religions were often seen as challenges and constraints to education.

Halonen's study of Muslim students as well as other studies in the Finnish basic school, such as Rastas (2007, 113–118) and Souto (2012, 193–198), show that individual discrimination and racism are commonly experienced by students with minority religious identities. Similarly, international studies show that students' religious identities are a common target for prejudice and intolerance amongst peers, and may create boundaries within the school culture (Moulin 2011, 323). Racism can, as Rastas (2007, 12) points out, be seen as ways of thought, speech or action that refer to assumed or claimed aspects of individuals or groups, either biological or cultural in nature, which are seen as essential and unchangeable. These ways of thought, speech or action create power relations and subordination such as for example in the relations between students. Finnish research from 2003 on student attitudes in their final grade of comprehensive school education has revealed that the negative attitudes of girls and boys towards different ethnic groups have steadily increased since a similar survey conducted in 1990. Half of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade boys and a fifth of the girls expressed intolerant or racist attitudes (Virrankoski 2005, 305). Recently Holm (2012) studied the ethical, intercultural and interreligious sensitivity among Finnish youth. The abilities of youth to notice and experience cultural and

religious difference was shown to differ among gender, and girls estimated their intercultural and interreligious sensitivity as higher than did the boys. Also academically above-average students estimated their intercultural sensitivity as higher than did their peers of average ability (Holm 2012, 11–112).

The general lack of knowledge of students' identities in minority religious and secular ethics as well as the common occurrence of discrimination within the comprehensive school and education give reason to further investigation. This is pursued in this thesis by undertaking two empirical studies. These aim at answering the research question of this thesis, namely, how the education supports students' identities and inclusion in the comprehensive school grades 1–6. In the next, the methodological framework and research procedures connected to these studies will be presented.

## **5 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this chapter the social constructivist philosophical base and the qualitative approach of the study are first discussed. Thereafter the research design is presented. This is followed by a presentation of the research procedures undertaken, including the choice of methods, participants, data gathering processes, and the analysis of the collected material in both the participant observation and the interview study. Ethical considerations of the study are finally elaborated.

### **5.1 Philosophical base**

This thesis has its philosophical base in a constructivist view of social reality. In a social constructivist view human beings construct their views of reality, their identities, including their religious identities as active participants in a cultural context. On an ontological level we can speak of many constructs or representations of reality. As a research paradigm, social constructionism contrasts to a positivist or post-positivist paradigm. It opposes a strong realism which states that there can be an unmediated, direct mirroring of what is “out there”, of one reality. Knowledge is in a constructivist view intrinsically based on perceiving human beings as constructors of knowledge rather than mirrors or capturers of reality. Human beings are seen as observers and participants who actively create and transform their realities as members of a particular culture and in relation to each other. Knowledge construction is therefore an ongoing and dynamic process which is reproduced by people acting on their individual interpretations. A central aim of the research is to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the construction of their perceived social reality (Hatch 2002, 11–20; Schwandt 2000, 189–211; Lincoln and Guba 2000, 163–186).

The field of interest in this thesis is as Lincoln and Guba (2000, 176–7) describes, “that subjective and inter-subjective social knowledge and the active construction and co-creation of such knowledge”. The meaning construction of individuals rather than the existence of phenomena is the subject of inquiry. A universal and idealist form of constructivism sees everything, and all knowledge, as socially constructed. This thesis takes a moderate, critical realist position, which emphasizes the socially-constructed nature of knowledge, however not claiming that all objects of knowledge are nothing more than social constructions. Knowledge and social phenomena are socially constructed, but this does not exclude the influence of external phenomena. Knowledge inherently draws upon non-social materials and are constrained and enabled by

their properties (Schwartz 2000, 197–202; Sayer 1997, 466–468; Poulter 2013, 27; Phillips 1995, 11–12).

Within social constructivism the socio-cultural dimension is central. In this view the social relations within a particular society cannot be experienced outside its cultural and ideological categories. We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices and languages. The mediating influence of language in knowledge production is important in that it creates the conceptual frameworks and categories by which we apprehend the world and shape our behavior and knowledge. Knowledge is intrinsically created through language (Hatch 2002, 15; Schwandt 2000, 197–198; Hall 1997, 15–25). An essentialist view, which perceives social reality, including concepts such as identity and culture as fixed and homogenous, is in this view opposed. Instead diversity and the dynamic nature of human experience is underlined (Abdallah-Preteuille 2006, 475–479; Sayer 1997, 481–482; Reich 2007, 7–19).

In a constructivist research paradigm there are no truly objective observations, only observations situated in a social world. Any observation is filtered through the lenses of cultural aspects, such as language, gender, social class, race, ethnicity and religion. All research consequently draws from a perspective as well as a normative stance (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 9, 19; Schwandt 2000, 197–198). As Schwandt (2000, 198) argues “the researcher cannot be disinterested and exclusive of affective and embodied aspects of human experience as it is always in some sense ideological, political and permeated with values. Similarly, Longino (2013, 7–12) argues that the social can be seen as constitutive to all scientific knowledge and that researchers are historically, geographically and socially situated. Epistemologically the constructivist paradigm implies a level of subjectivity as well as relativity in all knowledge and research. There is no ultimate knowledge or truth as knowledge has a subjective ingredient and is also constantly developed within the changing social context (Schwandt 2000, 198; Reich 2007, 13). Different and also incommensurate belief systems exist. This relativism inherent in the constructivist view is frequently subject to criticism (cf. Phillips 1995, 11–12; Sayer 1997, 466–469). The constructivist answer to how we can define truth or validity of a claim is not absolute, but rather derived from social convention, negotiation and community consensus within meaning making activity. Research is in a constructivist view pursued by trying to make informed and sophisticated constructions through attending to the methodological criteria and tradition of scientific research. The validity of research within the constructivist perspective is judged through terms such as trustworthiness and authenticity rather than positivist oriented terms such as validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lincoln and Guba 2000, 167–170, 177–183; Hatch 2002, 16).

## 5.2 Qualitative approach

From this constructivist foundation the study attempts to answer its research questions through a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is characteristic of studying things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, and to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. The research tries to capture the research participants' voices during data gathering and make these visible in analysis and reporting. Qualitative methods do not stand for one single method but consist of a set of different interpretative practices, such as participant observation and interviews. The goal of the research is to gain understanding and structure, as opposed to prediction and causal explanation. The term "qualitative" implies a focus on *how* social reality is created and given meaning within a particular cultural context (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 3–8; Lincoln and Guba 2000, 166).

Interpretation stands out as a central element of qualitative inquiry. As Hatch (2002, 180) argues, interpretation is about giving meaning to observations, and making sense of social situations by generating explanations about what is going on within them. It's about making inferences, developing insights, attaching significance, refining understandings and drawing conclusions. Interpretation is a productive process that tries to uncover the multiple meanings of an event, object, experience or text. This is made in the inquiry through the inter-play of literature review, empirical study, and the researcher as an active participant.

Hatch (2002, 6–11) gives a number of further characteristics, which distinguish qualitative work and are central to this thesis: The research design is emergent and open to adaptation as understanding deepens or research situations change. The design develops as fieldwork and analysis unfold and initial research questions can be refined. The inquiry is also characterized by seeking wholeness and complexity in that social contexts are examined without breaking them down into isolated and disconnected variables. Data is rather gathered on multiple aspects of the setting and during an extended period of time in order to construct a comprehensive picture. Furthermore, inductive analysis plays a central role in this qualitative inquiry in moving from specifics to analytic generalizations and seeking patterns and relationships in the phenomenon under study. Finally, the qualitative inquiry includes a subjective aspect in both data collection and analysis, which creates a need for reflexivity. I as a researcher have an essential role in the inquiry as a research instrument in trying to make sense and develop critical understanding of actions, intentions and understandings. I am therefore part of the world under study and need to reflect on the connections between me and the study.

### **5.3 Research design**

The starting point of this thesis is in fall 2009, when the research plan and preliminary research questions were constructed. The research design was emergent in character as the refinement of sub-questions and methods, as well as the literature review, continued during the different stages of the study. The research question, namely, *How does education in minority religions and secular ethics support students' identities and inclusion in comprehensive school grades 1–6?*, was investigated through two field studies targeting four sub-questions. The investigations resulted in four independent publications. Table 1 presents the core elements of the research design.

**Table 1.** Research design.

Research question: How does education in minority religions and secular ethics support students' identities and inclusion in comprehensive school grades 1-6?				
2009 – Research plan and literature review				
Data collection	Method / Participants	Data-analysis	Sub-question	Findings reported in
Field study 1: 1.10.09– 31.5.10	Participant observation/ 15 student, 7 teacher and 1 principal informants	Data-analysis 1: Thematic analysis	1.1 How do students experience instruction in their own minority religious education and secular ethics, and how do they perceive themselves as part of the overall school culture?	Article I: Zilliacus, H. and Holm, G. 2013. 'We have our own religion': a student perspective on minority religion and ethics instruction in Finland. <i>British Journal of Religious Education</i> 35(3), 282–296.
Field study 2: 1.3.2011– 30.9.2011	Interviews/ 31 teacher and 3 teacher coordinator informants	Data-analysis 2–4: Thematic analysis	1.2 How do minority religion and secular ethics teachers view the task of supporting and including plurality within the classroom?	Article II: Zilliacus, H. 2013a. Addressing religious plurality: a teacher perspective on minority religion and secular ethics education. <i>Intercultural Education</i> 24(6), 507–520.
			1.3 How do minority religion teachers and teacher coordinators view the inclusion of minority religious education in the school culture?	Article III: Zilliacus, H. 2013b. The inclusion of minority religious education in the Finnish comprehensive school: a teacher and teacher coordinator perspective, <i>Nordidactica</i> 2, 93–114.
			1.4 How do teachers of minority religions view the significance of education in supporting students' identities?	Article IV: Zilliacus, H. and A. Kallioniemi. (Forthcoming). Supporting minority belonging: Finnish minority religious education teacher perspectives on the significance of religious education. <i>Religion &amp; Education</i> .

The data gathering process consisted of two field studies. The first field study was carried out in 2009–10 during a period of seven months. The first data gathering targeted principally sub-question 1.1. *How do students experience instruction in their own minority religious education and secular ethics, and how do they perceive themselves as part of the overall school culture?* This study was explorative in character. The field study was made in four minority religious and one secular ethics classes in one comprehensive school (grades 1–6) in the metropolitan area. The method used was participant observation. The data consisted of 29 classroom observations with 15 students and 5 teachers in four different minority religious and secular ethics classes. Also included in the data were 40 semi-structured interviews, including follow-up interviews, with 13 students, 7 teachers and 1 principal. The data analysis method was thematic data-analysis, with emphasis on inductive analysis. The focus of analysis was on classroom observations and child interviews, which formed the basis for answering the targeted sub-questions. The findings were reported in the publication Zilliacus and Holm (2013).

The second field study was developed on the basis of the participant observation study. The study targeted three sub-questions: 1.2 *How do minority religion and secular ethics teachers view the task of supporting and including plurality within the classroom?* 1.3 *How do teachers and teacher coordinators view the inclusion of minority religious education in the school culture?* And 1.4 *How do teachers of minority religions view the significance of education in supporting students' identities?* The field study consisted of interviews with minority religion and secular ethics teachers in the comprehensive school grades 1–6 in the metropolitan area. Also included were teacher coordinators of minority religious education. The study was carried out during seven months in year 2011, and consisted of semi-structured interviews. Teacher interview material from the first field study was also used as part of this data. All in all 31 teachers and 3 teacher coordinators participated. The data was analyzed through thematic data-analysis, and was made in several stages, targeting first sub-questions 1.2 and 1.3, and subsequently sub-question 1.4. The findings were reported in the publications Zilliacus (2013a), Zilliacus (2013b), and Zilliacus and Kallioniemi (forthcoming).

## **5.4 Research procedures**

In the following the research procedures are introduced. First the research procedures of the participant observation study are presented, followed by the interview study.



## 5.5 Participant observation study

The choice of participant observation as research method for the first field study provided the opportunity to collect material directly from the school context. The use of participant observation also supported the exploratory phase of the thesis project. The method gave the opportunity to gain insight and first hand experiences in the school culture. Through the combination of both observation and interviewing increasing complexity and richness was pursued in the data collection. The research method was also chosen as a way to include student perspectives (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 5; Hatch 2002, 72; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 4).

The method of participant observation covers a mixture of observation and interviewing. Research takes place in the natural setting, in the field, rather than in studying conditions created by the researcher. Characteristic of this method is that the researcher participates in the field during an extended period of time making observations and asking questions through both informal and formal interviews (Delamont 2007, 206). Patton (2002, 262) describes the method of participant observation as being in or around an on-going social setting for the purpose of making a qualitative analysis. As in this study focus is generally on a few cases to facilitate in-depth study and a holistic perspective. Participant observation, ethnography, and fieldwork are closely related terms, and often used synonymously within qualitative research. Hatch (2002, 72) argues for a difference between participant observation and ethnography in that participant observation involves all the field methods of ethnography but has a narrower focus than full ethnography. Ethnography generally emphasizes the importance of studying whole cultural systems (Tedlock 2000, 465). In this study a choice was made to do a participant observation in the classroom during selected lessons and not the school culture at large. The observation of students' experiences in the entire school culture such as in the school yard and breaks were left outside the realm of the study.

The purpose of the observation data is to describe the setting observed, the people who participated in it, and the meanings that were observed. The observations pay attention to the setting and physical environment as well as the social interaction and communication. The interviews part of the observation study were planned to include informal interviews as well as half-structured formal interviews. Interview guides for students and teacher interviews were created as a starting point for the semi-structured interviews (See appendix 3). In the development of the interview guide I made efforts to take into consideration students' age and conceptual and language skills.

The term participant observation is used to describe the fact that I as the researcher act as a participant at some level. In this study I did not aim at complete immersion into the setting as a full participant, but aimed at taking a

moderate participating role. A combination of moderate involvement and detachment was attempted in order to develop an insider view of what is happening and at the same time describe and interpret the setting for outsiders. I was to participate in the role of a researcher visiting the class and did not take a covert role as a teacher or teacher assistant (Hatch 2002, 72–77; Tedlock 2000, 465). The study was planned as lasting for up to 7 months during winter and spring in school year 2009–10, but the exact duration was not defined. I was in the key role to judge when sufficient data to answer the research question had been collected and the purpose of the study was fulfilled. I aimed at an experience of saturation when the observations would start to replicate and new themes or perspectives would not emerge. The length of the study was also dependent on my resources as well as the willingness of participants to continue partaking in the study (Patton 1990, 214, 265; Delamont 2007, 211).

The use of observation allowed me to try to see things that may be taken for granted by the participants, and that would not come to surface through other methods. Doing observations presented a good option in situations when interviews may be difficult to engage in with children. Furthermore, the observations could include sensitive information, which informants may be reluctant to discuss in interviews. However, a general limitation of the method of participant observation lies in that social aspects may limit or distort the field of study. The influence of me as the observer in the social setting is always present as participant observation always includes elements of interaction between researcher and participants. The behaviour of participants in both observation and interviews may for instance change in becoming shy, nervous or particularly excited, or the role of the researcher may be unclear and create uneasiness. Behaviour may also be influenced by the participants' expectations of what I as the researcher have in focus. As a consequence participants may behave in an atypical fashion. Other general limitations in doing observations include that my observations may focus on limited external behaviours and leave things unobserved in the classroom or school. In interview situations there may furthermore be a number of reasons of bias, as for example recall errors and self-serving responses of the interviewees. I tried to diminish the distorting influence of me as a researcher by trying to create an open and relaxed atmosphere, inviting participants to make contact with me and ask questions, and generally be reflexive about my role in the research process (Patton 1990, 202–7, 244–5; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 3).

### **5.5.1 Research with children**

Doing participant observation with children creates both possibilities and challenges. The ethical considerations are important and discussed in further detail in section 5.7. The method of participant observation gives the opportunity

to investigate child perspectives in the school context and get close to them as well their teachers. This also gives flexibility as to when and how observations and interviews are made. By visiting the classroom during a longer period a familiarity can be achieved, which is important in child research. Through this familiarity a sense of trust and rapport are aimed for in the relation to the participants (Thomas and O’Kane 1998, 337–341; Elbers 2004, 202–209).

Observing education in a classroom is flexible in that it does not put great constraints on the participants in regard to travelling to the research site or making other extracurricular arrangements. However, a critical aspect in having children as participants in a classroom setting concerns their position in the research situation. The school is a particular culture with clear division between the adult and child world. I as the researcher represent an authority simply in being another adult in the classroom and school, and I am thereby easily connected to a teacher and a dominant role in class. The student may feel strange in the situation but cannot easily exit or end a classroom situation. This is particularly apparent in small classes with only a few students. The power relation between me as the observing or interviewing researcher and child participant is significant. Even if consent was asked for from both parents and the students on beforehand, there was a need to be sensitive to the asymmetrical relation (Christensen and Prout 2002, 481–485).

Of importance in research with children is also that the research atmosphere is constructive and that children can experience the research as fun and interesting, and not as intruding or pushing them into a particular behavior. As Karlsson (2010, 132) argues, in the world of the child play, humor, and imagination are characteristic and also reflect on the way children communicate. For both authenticity and ethical concerns I as the researcher need to back off, if students express unwillingness to be part of the research situation or do not experience it as benefiting them in any way. An inhibiting power relation may hinder children from being authentic and open, and they may give expected responses or not engage at all (Boocock and Scott 2005, 39–45). I therefore tried to create a relation of respect and empathy towards the participants, making efforts to be open to communication with students and make them interested in taking part in the study.

The child’s perspective is different from the adult’s, and thereby not easily interpreted by an adult. Children have their own views and priorities, which also may lead interviews to unforeseen directions. The difference in the cognitive, emotional and moral development among child participants creates challenges in both observations and interviews. Cognitive stage theories emphasize such developments in pre-adolescence as moving towards increased independent and conceptual thinking and a more distinct sense of self (Sterkens 2006, 31–63). In this study children’s ages in the instruction groups varied from 7–13 years of age

which meant considerable developmental and conceptual differences among students. As Freeman and Mathison (2009, 7) note, despite developmental differences, all children need to be viewed as autonomous and complete individuals with a perspective of their own rather than as partially developed. The research needs to try to be open to the child's agenda, see the child as socially competent, and find questions and interpretations that spring from children's view points and concerns (Thomas and O'Kaine 1998, 341–342; Strandell 2010, 93).

Alongside observations and informal interviews formal semi-structured interviews were included in the field study to provide a more confidential space for children to talk about their experiences. Similarly to Hay and Nye (1998, 85–87) the individual interview was chosen as it offered a possibility for children to talk about matters, including their religion and world-view, which they might feel restrained to share with peers. However, the individual interview requires a good rapport with the researcher. It is also important that the child understands the interview situation. As Elbers (2004, 207–212) argues, children can be seen to have different perspectives than adults in an interview situation in that the child's answers are closely grounded in the assumptions and expectations about the objective of conversations. The child often focuses literally on a question and does not necessarily recognize a wider theme (Karlsson 2010, 128). Interviewing and conversation with children demand that children have understanding of the rules and conventions appropriate to the interview situation. It was therefore important to try to clarify the purpose of the interview and its central content. Asking open ended questions, using clear language, and letting the child take the lead whenever possible was also an important aim in order to strengthen the interview situations (Freeman and Mathison 2009, 90–96).

### **5.5.2 Participants and entering the field**

The field study began by obtaining a research permit for a Swedish-speaking comprehensive school in the metropolitan area. This was made after a preliminary consultation with the principal of the school. The choice of school was made on two grounds. Firstly, I searched for a school which offered a number of different religious education alternatives as well as secular ethics classes so that a diversity of classes and informants in one school context were included. A variation in the sample of participants was thereby aimed for. Secondly, I made a choice of seeking a Swedish-speaking school, as this is my mother tongue. This aspect of convenience sampling was made to facilitate the fieldwork (Hatch 2002, 98–9). The school was situated in a middle-class area. It offered four different minority religion classes as well as secular ethics. The students ranged from grade levels 1–6 (7–13 years). These grade levels were taught together in mixed age classes. The school included older students in

grades 7–9, but a choice was made to focus on 1–6 grades to limit the age differences among the participants.

As the research permit had been obtained I made a first visit to the school and met up with the supervising teacher and the principal and introduced the data collection to them. The teachers of minority religious education and secular ethics were then contacted by e-mail and asked about their willingness to participate (See appendix 2). The letters included a 2-page description of the study and its objectives. All four minority religious education teachers and the secular ethics teacher were willing to participate. Later on I also asked the supervising teacher, principal and support teacher for students with multicultural background for their consent to be interviewed, which they all gave. The school personnel were positive regarding the research and several teachers expressed the need for research on religious education in their school.

Subsequently, a written request for parental consent was sent through the local manager to all parents with students in minority religious education or secular ethics classes (See appendix 1). The contact letters included a letter of consent in Swedish, Finnish and English and a 2-page description of the study. Out of 21 parents 15 gave consent for their child's participation. The students were from grades 1–6 (7–13 years) and participated in instruction groups of 2–7 students in Orthodox religion (4), Islam (3), Catholic religion (1), Judaism (2) and secular ethics (5). Of these participants, seven had non-Finnish backgrounds from Kosovo–Albania, Hungary and Russia. They had all lived in Finland for several years. Care was taken from my side that those six children in instruction classes who did not have the consent of their parents to participate in the research would not be subject to study. This meant that I would not observe and make field notes nor interview these children.

After obtaining the parental consent the students were asked if they were willing to participate. In meeting students for the first time I explained that I was in their class because I was interested in their religious education or secular ethics classes, and how they experienced them. I also told them that I would visit their class a number of times and later on do interviews with them if that was okay for them. After introducing the study all students were asked individually whether they wanted to participate in the study. I explained that their participation in the study was voluntary and anyone wishing to discontinue was free to do so at any time. At this stage one student with consent from his parents did not wish to be interviewed, even if it was okay for him to be observed in class. Later on another student did not come to the interview we had scheduled, and let me know that he did not wish to participate in the interview. The total number of student interviewees was therefore 13, as two of the participants did not wish to be interviewed. By mistake the number of student interviewees was stated as 16 in the publication of Article I. However, the correct number was 13.

Apart from the two students who did not wish to participate in the interview all other students continued as participants in both interviews and observations throughout the data collection period.

### **5.5.3 Data collection process and the researcher's position in the field**

The first visits in the school were important in building trust and rapport with both students and teachers, and getting to know the school setting. The religious education and secular ethics classes were held in various spaces, including two classrooms, a crafts classroom, and two group-activity rooms. One of the classes worked in different classrooms depending on where there was free space. The classrooms therefore varied, which also influenced how the classes worked. I generally experienced myself as welcomed in the school, and the teachers were cooperative about the research throughout the study. Of the teachers four out of the five teacher participants were clearly open and positive to observations being made in class. Only one teacher showed a little more restraints to the classroom observations, but this teacher also agreed to the observations being made. As for the students' initial reactions, particularly young students showed curiosity and excitement in having a visitor in the class, and often came up to me to make contact. Older students were more reserved and did not as quickly take verbal contact with me. The research situation was new to many of the students, and particularly the youngest had never been in a research situation or been interviewed before.

The first classroom observations took place in October 2009. Starting from October I made classroom observations in the school mainly on Thursdays and Fridays when religious education and secular ethics classes were scheduled. I paid attention to the setting and physical environment and the social interaction and communication before, after and during lessons. This included both verbal and nonverbal communication. Field notes were written during or right after observations, and they had an open-ended narrative character. Recordings were only used in formal interviews. Lessons were 45 minute long, however, some classes were double lessons, and usually kept without a break. These lessons were sometimes somewhat shortened by the teacher as several teachers experienced that double lessons were two long for younger students. The sick-leave of one teacher resulted in that all classes of this teacher were cancelled during more than a month's time in November. As only one out of three students in Catholicism participated in the study, a choice was made to observe the class only one time. The number of observed lessons in each class also varied somewhat partly due to that some classes were double lessons. I made efforts not to observe those children who did not participate in the study. These children did not express concern or dismay about the observations being made in class. A

few students expressed wanting to participate despite their parents' lack of consent, however they were not included as participants.

The variation in the physical setting in the classrooms as well as the different group sizes influenced my position as researcher in the classroom. Physically I was situated in various positions either among the students in class at a student desk at the side of the class, or together with the teacher and students in a group formation. In aiming at moderate participation, I continued throughout the field study to create rapport and be open to the students' questions and comments. I did not actively partake in the class by taking initiatives to contact or comments, or by taking a teacher role. I strived to make field notes also during the class. My presence was apparent throughout the study, but after the first visits, students did not seem visibly distracted by my presence or communicate that I was disturbing their class. Students seemed at large to get used to my presence, and many of the students also warmly welcomed me in class.

The first semi-structured interviews with students were made in November. Interviews partly aimed to provide a check on what had been observed, and conversely interviews were compared with observation data. The pre-developed interview guide was used as a starting point (See appendix 3). Interviews were conducted in the class room and in a small individual counseling room. Student interviews were typically 15–20 min long. Interviews with students were in most cases made either during or right after the religious education or secular ethics lesson. In some cases the interview took place after school hours, and I tried to be flexible in finding times which suited the students well. The interview situation was new and foreign to many students. As the interviews were recorded, some of the younger participants wondered what the recorder was, and I explained and showed how it functioned. All students agreed to be recorded. Drawing was used as a parallel activity as a support in one interview situation with a first grader. All participants were interviewed once by January. The collected material up to this date was transcribed in February. On the basis of a preliminary analysis a second and in a few cases a third follow-up interview was conducted between March and May.

Even if the students at large became used to my presence in the classroom, the presence of me as an adult and observer was clear. This was particularly apparent in the very small classes of only a few students. For the younger students my researcher role appeared somewhat unfamiliar. This gave rise to curiosity, but also sensitivity and queries as to what the observation situation and particularly the interviews were about. As my objectives were quite wide and abstract, I felt that students sometimes wished for more concrete goals. As a researcher, I was clearly a visitor and adult in the classes, particularly in those consisting only of a few students. Hence, there was also a power relation present in the adult-child relation. It was challenging to reach the child perspective

particularly in the interviews as many students did not have a strong conceptual ability to engage into discussion. This was particularly the case with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders. Even if I sensed some familiarity with the students through the preceding classroom observations the interview situation seemed unfamiliar for several students. Some of the students opened up freely in the interview situation, whereas others were reserved. However, as the study proceeded the participants got more acquainted and familiar with the research situation. Also, my own interview and observation routine got stronger as the field study proceeded.

Teachers were interviewed once during the field study period in 30–80 min-long semi-structured interviews (See appendix 3). Interviews were also made with the supervising teacher and the principal, who were co-interviewed, as well as with a supporting teacher for students with immigrant background. In the teacher interviews one teacher had immigrant background and language difficulties, which clearly affected communication during the interview.

As the field study came to an end in May the data gathered consisted of 29 classroom observations, informal interviews, as well as 40 semi-structured interviews. The recorded interview material amounted to 10 hours. Below is an overview of the collected material:

- 29 classroom observations including 15 student informants and 5 teacher informants. Observations were made in 10 lessons in Orthodox religion, 7 lessons in Judaism, 8 lessons in Islam, 3 lessons in secular ethics, and 1 lesson in Catholicism.
- 33 semi-structured student interviews including 1–2 follow-up interviews with 13 students (4 in Orthodox religion, 3 in Islam, 3 in secular ethics, 2 in Judaism, 1 in Catholicism). The average interview length was 15–20 min.
- 7 semi-structured teacher and principal interviews, including minority religious education and secular ethics teachers, a support teacher, a supervising teacher, and the principal. The interview length was 30–80 min.

#### **5.5.4 Analysis of observation and interview material**

As Hammersely and Atkinson (2007, 158) note, the analysis of data in ethnographic and participant observation studies begins informally throughout the fieldwork in the ideas, hunches and decisions that are made in data-collection. Analysis was therefore importantly made in the process of interpretation and through the interplay between data and ideas throughout the research process. The experiences in the field helped me as the researcher to



create a sense of focus and know what to follow in the data. The role of induction was important in trying to be open to the perspectives of students and to themes emerging in the field. The interview guide was only taken as starting point for the analysis. A first preliminary analysis of the data collected during the first months of the field study was made in February 2010. At this stage all participants had been interviewed once. By transcribing the interviews up to then and making a first analysis, follow-up interviews were planned. The subsequent interviews and complete observation material was transcribed in June 2010.

The first phase of the thematic analysis focused on identifying and categorizing the primary patterns in the data consisting of classroom observations, student interviews, teacher interviews and interviews with other staff. This was followed by successive rereading of the observation material. The reading of the observation narratives focused on looking at aspects such as chronology, settings, participants, activities and key events in the classroom (Patton 1990, 376–7). The students' interviews were analyzed individually as cases, and then cross case analyzes were made between instruction groups as well as according to the themes in the interview guide. Lastly, the interviews with teachers and other personnel were analyzed. The subsequent analysis specifically focused on classroom observations and student interviews. This choice was made to bring forth the student perspective, which did not emerge strongly in the reading of teacher and principal interviews. Consequently, the interviews with teachers and personnel had a limited role in the analysis.

The targeted sub-question and focus of the study where at this stage specified. The preliminary sub-questions under focus were: 1) How do the students in primary school experience minority instruction, and 2) In which ways does the instruction contribute to students' identity construction and integration in the school? The sub-question was now explicitly rephrased to cover a student perspective: *How do students experience instruction in their own minority religious education and secular ethics, and how do they perceive themselves as part of the overall school culture?*

In the second phase of the analysis the observations and student interviews were reread in detail to identify emerging themes. Through emphasizing induction I searched for patterns of meaning in the data. Comments to the data were written alongside the transcribed material, and excerpts of the interview data were identified according to emerging themes. General statements about the students' perspectives were aimed for through the process of identifying patterns and regularities in the data. The analysis included method triangulation as the checking and inferences drawn from observation data sources were compared with interview data (Hammersely and Atkinson 2007, 183). The material was also read by the co-writer of the targeted article. The emerging

themes arouse inductively as well as from the interview guidelines. In line with Patton (1990, 403–4) focus was on arranging and formulating the analysis through internal homogeneity. This implies that the data included within a theme holds together in a meaningful way. Also, external homogeneity was aimed for in that there were clear and bold differences between the emerging themes. The emerging themes were moreover examined according to their relevance and credibility for the objectives of the study.

The analysis brought forth four main themes, including sub-themes. The main themes included students' views about working in small groups, students' perceptions of religion and ethics as class subjects, students' experiences of group-belonging, and students' experiences of otherness in the minority class. In the final phase of the analysis the findings were organized so that the themes and sub-themes were displayed according to both their relevance and significance. The findings were reported in Article I (Zilliacus and Holm 2013).

## **5.6 Interview study**

Following the participant observation study an interview study was undertaken. This second data collection aimed at an insider perspective of the educational context through the voices of teachers and teacher coordinators. The choice of taking a teacher and teacher coordinator perspective was made in order to gain further contextual understanding of the comprehensive school education (grades 1–6) in the metropolitan area. The perspective was limited to minority religious education teachers, secular ethics teacher, and teacher coordinator views, and did not include the perspectives of other teachers or of principals in the school cultures. Students' perspectives were likewise not directly pursued, but were aimed for through teachers' second hand experiences. The interview as method stood out as a way of studying a larger number of teachers, and as a tool to investigate in-depth a number of different themes related to education, its participants and the organization of education. As the interview gave space to dwell into topics more extensively it presented itself as an opportunity for participants to try to locate the education in a wider context (Hatch 2002, 91).

The interviews were semi-structured, and the interview guides were developed on the basis of the participant observation study (See appendix 5). The individual interview time was not set, but planned to take around 45–60 min. In doing an interview study the research moved away from the natural settings of the educational practice. However, the interviews were primarily to take place before or after lessons in the school context so that teachers would feel connected to their natural settings. By conducting individual interviews the study aimed for flexibility in the interview situations and the possibility to take into consideration the interviewee as an individual. This method was chosen

rather than focus group interviews as many teachers were not familiar with each other and may not have felt free to open up to more sensitive topics in a group interview (Fontana and Frey 2000, 651–2). The aim of the semi-structured interview was to create a dialogue with the interviewees, and an understanding of their experience, opinions and ideas. The interviews were based on asking questions but also following up on various topics that may arise and allowing interviewees the space to talk. As in the participant observation study I strived to use open ended questions, clear, neutral language, and keeping focus on the objectives of the study. I as the researcher was principally in charge of the situation, and leading the interview. I determined the interview topics, questions and decided, which answers to follow up. Even if a dialogue was sought there is always a power asymmetry in the interview situation. To minimize an experience of dominance and awkwardness in the interview situation I strove to create an atmosphere of equality and cooperation, and make an effort to communicate the meaningfulness of the study also for the participants. As in the participant observation study the pre-set questions, my perspective as a researcher and the interaction between me and the interviewee would have an impact on how the interview took form. In this dynamics both my and the interviewees identities were at play, and aspects such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion and mother tongue would reflect into the interview situation (Hatch 2002, 94–5, 106–7; Kvale and Brinkman 2009, 33–4; Rapley 2000, 22–5, 651–2).

### **5.6.1 Participants and entering the field**

When the research permits had been obtained from all three metropolitan municipalities the minority religious education and secular ethics teachers as well as the teacher coordinators were contacted for interviews. The metropolitan area had been chosen as this area offered a variety of religious education classes and a high number of different religious education teachers. This would create variation in the obtained sample (Hatch 2002, 98). I was given contact information for all 58 peripatetic teachers of minority religious education in the school year 2010–2011. To contact class teachers who worked as minority religious education in single schools, I received a list of 20 schools in one municipality. In one of the municipalities the principal's approval of the research was required, and these principals were to begin with contacted for their approval. The teachers were first contacted by e-mail with information about the research, its general objectives, and confidentiality (see appendix 4). Teachers were then contacted by phone and I explained the research in more detail, where after we set up a possible time for the interview. Three teachers asked for more extensive information about the interview content, and to them a list of basic themes for the interviews were sent by e-mail. All in all 37 religious education teachers were contacted. Of these 19 participated in the study, 12 did not want to

participate, 4 could not be reached, and 2 did not arrive to the interview scheduled. The majority of those who did not want to participate were teachers in one municipality where teachers had previously had negative experiences of a research project.

The secular ethics teachers were all class teachers and were contacted through their principals as I also needed the approval from their supervisor. Reaching these teachers was a challenge as a number of principals did not give out the teachers' contact information, but only informed me that they have forwarded my e-mail and teachers will contact me if they wish to. Of the 19 schools contacted by e-mail and/or telephone, all in all 7 teachers participated in the study, 2 teachers let me know that they did not want to participate, and 10 teachers could not be reached.

All in all, 31 teacher participants took part in the interview study. These were teachers of Orthodox (5), Catholic (5), Jewish (2), Islamic (7), Buddhist (2), Bahá'í (1), and Krishna Consciousness (1) religious education, and secular ethics (8). Of these interviews 5 were made earlier in 2010 as part of the participant observation study. A variation in the sample, which had been aimed for had thereby been achieved. According to the numbers given by municipalities the participants represented all forms of instruction offered in the metropolitan area, and approximately 40% of all the minority religion teachers in the school year 2010–11. In table 2 the numbers of participating religious education teachers in the interview study compared to the numbers of peripatetic teachers employed in the metropolitan area municipalities in 2010–2011:

**Table 2.** The number of participating religious education teachers and peripatetic religious education teachers employed in school year 2010–2011.

	Religious education teacher participants	Peripatetic religious education teachers employed in the metropolitan municipalities 2010–2011 *
Teacher of Islam	7	27
Teacher of Orthodox religion	5	15
Teacher of Catholicism	5	10
Teacher of Judaism	2	2
Teacher of Buddhism	2	2
Teacher of Krishna Consciousness	1	1
Teacher of Bahá'í	1	1
<b>Number of peripatetic religious education teachers</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>58</b>
* The data was given by the coordinating teachers and is based on peripatetic religion teachers. In some schools the class teacher functioned as teacher of Orthodox religion or Catholicism, which are not included in these numbers. In the largest municipality this amounted to 20 teachers all in all. The religious education teacher participants included one class teacher who taught Orthodox religion.		

A comparison of the 8 participating secular ethics teachers to the total number of secular ethics teachers in the year 2010–2011 could not be made as the exact number of functioning secular ethics teachers was not available in the municipalities. It could be estimated to several hundred teachers as most schools offered one or two secular ethics classes and the number of students taking secular ethics generally exceeded 7% in the region (Statistics Finland, 2010).

The male participants in the acquired sample of 31 teachers were somewhat outnumbered by the female, who amounted to 60 % of the participants. The participating minority religion teachers worked as peripatetic teachers in up to 17 different schools, apart from one teacher who functioned as a class teacher and taught only in one school. All participating secular ethics teachers were class teachers, and only taught in their own school. Seven of the participants worked only part-time. Only 11 out of the 23 participating religion teachers were certified teachers. Most of the non-certified teachers currently studied to gain full qualifications. Nine of the 23 religious education teachers had immigrant background as first-generation migrants to Finland, whereas all secular ethics teachers had a Finnish background.

In addition to the above teacher participants three teacher coordinators were contacted by e-mail and telephone, and accepted to participate in the study. The teacher coordinators interviewed represented three out of the four current teacher coordinators in the metropolitan area. All three teacher coordinators were female. Each teacher coordinator had 15–20% of their work allocated to administrating and supporting minority religious education within their municipality. Two of the participating teacher coordinators had a master's degree in theology and the third had a master's degree in education. Depending on the municipality, the teacher coordinators had somewhat varying functions, which also reflected in their professional names as either consultants (In Finnish: *konsultoiva opettaja* or *opetuskonsultti*) or educational planner (In Finnish: *opetustoimen suunnittelija*). In two municipalities the teacher coordinator functioned mainly as an administrative support, whereas in one municipality the teacher coordinator also offered teachers more didactic support. Also, there were differences in that for example in one municipality the teacher coordinator functioned as teacher supervisor, whereas in another municipality the supervising role had been given to a principal in one school.

### **5.6.2 The interview data gathering process**

The majority of religion teachers and teacher coordinators were interviewed during spring 2011. The secular ethics teachers were mainly interviewed in the autumn of 2011. Most of the interviews were conducted in the school setting in a classroom, so that teachers would feel as close as possible to their school context and could easily arrive to the interview. A few interviews were made in connection to the staff room as well as in a cafe, which created some disturbance noise, which affected the recording quality. Four interviews were made at the University of Helsinki in connection to my work office. The teacher coordinators were interviewed in their municipal offices. The interviews included three general themes focused on inclusion and identity, namely, the status and organization of the subject, the position of minority teachers, and the position of minority students in the school cultures. These themes were generated through theory and during the participant observation study.

The interview commenced by me asking permission to record and re-explain issues of confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary throughout the study and care would be taken to ensure their confidentiality in the research reports. All interviewees gave permission to the recording. The semi-structured interviews were recorded, and informal interviews were written down after the interview. A few interviewees showed some nervousness in relation to the recording. In a few cases the informal interview after the interview showed less inhibition and more openness than the formal interview. A time frame was given of approx. 45–60

minutes. Participants were often concerned about the length of the interview as they needed to hurry to their next class. The atmosphere seemed generally relaxed and I tried to create trust and rapport in the interview situation so that the interviewee felt comfortable. One interviewee was somewhat critical towards research in general. However, the informants commonly showed a willingness to take part in the research and to thereby also support the development of minority religious and secular ethics education.

The interviews were on average 40 minutes long. The interviews with religion teachers were on average 50 minutes long whereas interviews with secular ethics teachers were somewhat shorter. This was mainly due to secular ethics teachers working as class teachers, and not having quite the same issues as peripatetic teachers as they only teach one or two classes. Interviews with coordinating teachers were around 60 minutes long. In the interviews I took the pre-developed interview guide as a basis and strived to use open-ended questions and a familiar language. During the interview I introduced different topics for discussion and made follow-up questions and generally tried to ensure flexibility. I also tried to be respectful and neutral and avoid judging responses. The same questions were not always asked in the same order or in the same way in each interaction, which enabled me to gather contrasting and complementary talk on the same theme (Hatch 2002, 101–3, 106–7).

Language difficulties were clearly present in several of the teachers' interviews, which constrained communication during interviews at times and created limitations in the interpretations of the transcribed material. My own mother tongue is Swedish, and my Finnish language ability is not as strong as my mother tongue. I sometimes mentioned Finnish being my second language, which several informants related positively to in relating to their own language abilities. In the dialogue between me and the participant cultural aspects such as age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and religion influenced the research situation. As Rapley (2008, 29–30) argues interviewees and interviewers don't speak as individuals, but through different cultural categorizations. Particularly in relation to the religion teacher participants it was clear that several identities intersected in the interview. Sometimes the interviewees spoke as representatives of their profession as teachers, whereas at other times as members of broader religious communities or congregations, or alternatively as private persons. In the interview study the minority perspective on education was clear from the information given to participants in beforehand. This seemed to encourage the participants to open up and freely discuss education and their minority perspective.

By the end of the data gathering period the interview material included 26.5 hours of recorded interviews and approximately 3.5 hours of informal interviews, adding up to approximately 30 hours of collected material. The material consisted of the following:

- 31 religion and secular ethics teacher semi-structured interviews. The average interview length was 40 min.
- 3 teacher coordinator semi-structured interviews. The average interview length was 60 minutes.

### **5.6.3 Analysis of interview material**

Similarly to the preceding participant observation study the data analysis started already in the process of interviewing through interpreting and making choices during the data collection phase. The analysis was therefore importantly developed through the interplay between data and interpretation throughout the research process. Transcriptions of interviews were made during the period of data collection and were made verbatim, partly by me as well as by commission. All transcriptions were completed by October 2011, when the main phase of data-analysis began.

In the first phase of analysis I focused on identifying and categorizing the primary patterns and key-words, and thereafter proceeded to seeking emerging themes in the data (Patton 1990, 381; Rapley 2007, 26). Themes were searched for through successive rereading of the material. First the interviews were analyzed individually as cases, and then cross case analyses were made between instruction groups as well as according to the semi-structured interview guide. The analysis generated all in all 49 emergent themes. Comments to the data were written alongside the transcribed material, and excerpts of the interview data were gathered according to emerging themes in Excel data files. The analysis aimed to report fully and fairly all participant voices and seek balance in the presentation of findings. The process of analysis was nonlinear and the emergence of findings from the collected material followed partly intuitive thought processes. Themes emerged inductively from within the interview data, as well as deductively from the pre-formulated interview guides. The interview guides focused on two general themes, namely, students' identities in minority instruction and the inclusion of the education, teachers and students in the school culture. The following two phases of analysis would focus separately on these two general themes.

The second phase of analysis focused to begin with on the following preliminary sub-question: How do teachers view and support the identity construction of students in minority instruction groups? This analysis notably did not include teacher coordinator perspectives. The general themes in the



interview guide concerning students' identities in the classroom were in central focus. The analysis led to the refocusing of the sub-question, which was now specified to cover an intercultural perspective on how teachers support plurality in the classroom. The sub-question was therefore rephrased to sub-question 1.2: *How do minority religion and secular ethics teachers view the task of supporting and including plurality within the classroom?* The process of analysis was inductive to a large extent and included working back and forth to verify the meaningfulness and accuracy of the emerging themes and refining themes through constant comparison. The themes were examined according to their relevance and credibility for the objectives (Boeije 2002, 391; Reich 2007, 7–19). The analysis aimed at arranging the themes through their internal and external homogeneity (Patton 2000, 403–4; See section 5.5.4). Four general themes emerged, which formed the structure of the findings, namely, the challenges of classroom diversity, the teachers' efforts in trying to take all students into account, the teachers' views on working for tolerance within groups, and the presence of confessionality in instruction. The findings of this analysis were reported in Article II (Zilliacus 2013a).

The third phase of analysis focused to begin with on the following preliminary sub-question: “How do teachers and teacher coordinators view the organizing and integration of education in minority religions and secular ethics in the school culture? The interview guide included three general themes on inclusion, which were central to this analysis, namely the status and organization of the subject, the integration of minority teachers, and the integration of minority students and instruction groups in the school cultures. As the analysis proceeded it became clear that including the views of secular ethics teachers would not be possible within the realm of one article. As the views of secular ethics teachers on inclusion were quite different from the minority religion teachers, a decision was made to leave the data collected from secular ethics teachers out of this study. The sub-question was rephrased accordingly to sub-question 1.3: *How do minority religion teachers and teacher coordinators view the inclusion of minority religious education in the school culture?* The thematic data analysis took the three general themes of the semi-structured interviews as a basis and searched for patterns within the data. The analysis was more typological than in the previous phase of analysis in that the overall data was divided according to the predetermined typologies, and advanced through marking entries that relate to the typologies (Hatch 2002, 152–79). I settled for organizing the findings into three sections in accordance with the main themes present in the interview guide as these gave a comprehensive view of the data. The findings were reported in Article III (Zilliacus 2013b).

After concluding the above phases of analysis, the data still included material and perspectives, which potentially could further illuminate the main research

question. Therefore a fourth sub-question was pursued. This analysis focused to begin with on the same preliminary sub-question as the above second phase of analysis, that is, “How do teachers view and support the identity construction of students in minority instruction groups?” The subsequent analysis aimed at deepening the investigation of this question. The sub-question was specified to sub-question 1.4: *How do teachers of minority religions view the significance of education in supporting students’ identities?* In focus were teachers’ perspectives on students’ identities in the minority instruction. Due to the extent of the material secular ethics teacher interviews were also left out in this analysis, as well as teacher coordinator interviews, which did not specifically focus on this theme. At this stage the full data was re-analyzed. Emerging themes were grouped and further refined through comparison with themes that had emerged in the previous data analysis. First six general themes and a larger number of sub-themes were inductively derived. Thereafter the full data was reanalyzed through these themes, and then restructured into three main themes. The three main themes included: The minority class as a source of belonging and a safe space, strengthening one’s “own” religious identity and belonging, and strengthening minority culture and societal integration. The findings were reported in Article IV (Zilliacus and Kallioniemi forthcoming).

## **5.7 Ethical Considerations**

Doing research involves an obligation to pursue ethical practice towards all parties directly or indirectly involved in the research process. Ethical concerns arouse throughout this thesis, starting from the design of the study, to the collection of materials as well as in the analysis and reporting. The general values which characterize good scientific research, such as independence, honesty, meticulousness and precision have been pursued as a base of the research practice (Kuula 2006, 34–35). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, 68–76) consider four general ethical fields, which are central to consider within social research: Informed consent, confidentiality, consequences and the role of the researcher. These fields will be considered below.

Informed consent was pursued by applying for research permits for each data collection from the municipalities in question. The participants consent was thereafter sought so that it was given in an unconstrained way, and so that the participants made their decision on the basis of comprehensive information about the research and with the freedom to withdraw at any time (Hammersley and Atkins 2007, 210). As described in section 5.5.2 regarding the choice of participants in the participant observation study, parental consent was asked from all parents with students in minority religious education or secular ethics classes. All contact letters to parents included a 2-page description of the study,

and a letter of consent in Swedish, Finnish or English. Consent was also asked from teachers of minority religious education and secular ethics, the local manager, principal and support teacher for multicultural students.

Informed consent was a particular concern with child participants. As Thomas and O’Kane (1998, 339) argue the principle of consent depends on both active agreement on the part of the child, and passive agreement on the part of the caretakers. The child should have as much choice as possible over how they participate in research. In meeting students for the first time all students were asked individually whether they wanted to participate, and I said that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. I tried to make sure not to push any child to engage, and gave all children the option not to engage in an interview if they did not want to. In regards to those children whose parents did not give consent for their children to participate care was taken not to make observations of these students in the classroom nor interview them. The teachers’ willingness to partake in the participant observation was also an important consideration.

As described in the choice of participants in the interview study in section 5.6.2, informed consent was in the second data collection asked of teachers of minority religions and ethics as well as teacher coordinators and supervising principals. Information about the content and goals of the research and the research being voluntary throughout the study was given to all parties involved by e-mail and/or telephone and additional information before interviews. As mentioned a number of teachers in one municipality who had had negative experiences of a previous research project, did not give their consent. Teachers within this municipality showed particular concern about the research ensuring confidentiality.

Confidentiality was pursued in that private data identifying the participant would not be revealed in the research process and reporting. To ensure as much as possible the privacy of each participant their names and contact information were only used in the purpose of making contact. All collected material was treated confidentially and handled with respect for the informants’ integrity. Information that seemed sensitive and private was left out. To ensure that subjects were unidentified in the reporting the quotes were in a few cases reformulated so that the person’s identity would not be revealed. In the data collection with children I made effort to explain how the research works and assure that I would not reveal private matters that they told me to other people. I tried in my rapport to create trust by acting overtly as a researcher, make the children feel accepted and show respect for their autonomy (Karlsson 2012, 50–51). In the reporting I made sure that all involved identities were secured. Pseudonyms were used of children in the transcribing process and school names were not published (Article I). Efforts to ensure the confidentiality of teachers

and teacher coordinators were also made. As the number of existing minority religion teachers was limited, I made efforts to ensure the confidentiality of teachers by leaving out information in the articles that might reveal their identities. In the articles the informants were referred to by numbers (Article III) or by subject taught and numbers (Article II and IV). The names of schools or municipalities were neither revealed. The choice to state the subject taught in the two of the publications was made on the grounds that it gave further information about the educational context and the participants' voices. I assessed that this did not reveal sensitive information.

As for the consequences of research, these can be beneficial or harmful. Kuula (58–65) argues that a primary ethical concern is not to harm, either physically or mentally, the participants or the group under study. Among the harmful consequences of research lies the issue of exploitation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 209). In doing research in the school setting and with children and teachers there is concern that no party feels exploited, either through lack of privacy or in a research situation. The study has tried to take measures to ensure that participants have not felt exploited, so that the participants and schools may be open to research projects also in the future. My independence as a researcher in relation to the participants and the funding has also been important for integrity. Ties to either group may have led me to ignore some findings and emphasize other, and were therefore avoided (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 74–76). The personal closeness of the observation and interview relationship put demands on the tact of me as the researcher regarding how far to go in inquiries. Ethical issues easily arouse in the interview situation because of the asymmetrical relation between me and the informant (See sections 5.5.3 and 5.6). The consequences of the observation and interview situation undoubtedly involved instances of stress and anxiety for some participants. In a few cases a participant expressed regret for having shared a personal view. The particular information recorded was therefore not included in the analysis.

Participating in a research study demands efforts and engagement from participants, and therefore also create expectations on the results. As Kuula (2006, 58–65) argues, the purposefulness and beneficial consequences of a study is a central ethical concern. The purposefulness and benefit of the research ultimately lies in the hoped for benefits as in the understanding and improvement of education. This may ultimately be beneficial for the participants and for the larger groups they represent (Christensen and Prout 2002, 490; Roberts 2008, 264–5). During data collection I made effort to ensure that the research situation was a beneficial and a positive experience for the participants who gave time and effort and shared their personal experiences with me. With child participants I aimed to make the field study an interesting experience for the children, also involving some new learning experiences and a possibility for

children to express their views about education (Karlsson 2010, 134). The beneficial consequences for teacher and teacher coordinators lay also as in giving an opportunity to reflect on the profession and education, and make an input for future education.



## 6 FINDINGS

Two field studies have been undertaken to answer the overall research question of the thesis, that is, “how does education in minority religions and secular ethics support students’ identities and inclusion in comprehensive school grades 1–6 (age 7–13) in the Helsinki metropolitan area in Finland? The investigation included four articles, each targeting one sub-question. The articles addressed the research question by investigating students’ identities and inclusion within the classroom as well as in the school cultures. The study has aimed at creating a contextual understanding by including different perspectives including those of students, teachers as well as teacher coordinators.

The first article focused on students’ experiences of participating in the education as well as their experiences of inclusion in the school culture. The subsequent three articles investigated teacher and teacher coordinator perspectives on the education. The second article focused on students’ identities in the instruction groups and investigated both minority religion and secular ethics teachers’ views on supporting and including students’ plural identities in the classroom. The third article focused on minority religion teachers’ and teacher coordinators’ views on the inclusion of minority students in the school cultures and aimed at contextual understanding of how the education and its students were part of the school culture. The fourth article, similarly to the second article, focused on students’ identities in the instruction and investigated minority religion teachers’ views of the significance of education for the students’ identities. The findings of each article will be presented below, followed by a summary in section 6.5.

### 6.1 Article I: Student experiences of participation in education

The first article “‘We have our own religion’: a student perspective on minority religion and ethics instruction in Finland” (Zilliacus and Holm 2013), focused on research sub-question 1.1: *How do students experience instruction in their own minority religious education and secular ethics, and how do they perceive themselves as part of the overall school culture?* The participant observation study in five instruction groups in one comprehensive school in grade levels 1–6 showed that overall the students were positive about instruction and having their own religion or secular ethics class. The findings focused on students’ views about working in small groups, their perceptions of religion and secular ethics as a school subject, their sense of group-belonging, and their relations to majority students.

Across groups, the educational context came into the forefront of students' experiences. This context primarily included the small group size, age integration, close teacher contact and practical concerns such as the scheduling of classes. Generally the context of small-group instruction turned out to be central for students in all instructional groups, at all ages and for both students with immigrant and Finnish background. It was also notable among some children in religious classes that apart from the small-group context, the language of the religious tradition also emerged as a significant element in their views on their subject. Furthermore, the significance of the familiar religious and cultural background in the minority instruction groups stood out among several children with immigrant background. This supports previous research, which argue that religious education is an important source for student integration (cf. Alitoppa-Niitamo 2002, 281; Sakaranaho 2006, 380; 2007b, 13–14; Tuutti and Vainio 2007, 218–220).

The students' main negative experiences in connection to instruction concerned the slow pace and repetition in age integrated instruction. Problems in the organization of instruction shown in previous research (cf. Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 460–465), were also experienced, particularly among 1st and 2nd graders regarding clashing timetables and classroom changes. Notably, when the instruction groups consisted of only one or two students per class, several children complained that they felt alone and isolated. In this case the small-group context appeared to lose its central benefits for classroom interaction and a sense of community.

The students in religion classes in this study generally saw religion as just another subject in the curriculum, as did those in ethics. This was in contrast to the views of some religion teachers who saw their subject as ultimately representing a way of life for their students. In the religion classes it was clear that several of the students were not familiar with their religion beforehand. This was, however, in contrast to instruction where religious affiliation was often taken for granted. As noted, the Finnish curricula as well as previous research in minority religion instruction emphasize the strengthening and maintaining of religious identity rather than creating and developing religious identity (Pyysiäinen 2000, 76–83; Lyhykäinen, 2009, 203; Kastila 2009, 34–62; NCCO 2006, 7–49). When considering that many students are new to the subject, and do not necessarily have a religious identity as a foundation, it is problematic that instruction does not always address the children's actual identities.

Overall, the findings show that students in both religion and ethics had difficulties in expressing what their subject was about and answering fellow students' questions about their classes. As previous studies argue the ability to conceptualize the subject taught stands out as important for supporting students' identities (Ubani and Tirri 2006, 368). The confusion and lack of knowledge



about other religious groups in the school also appeared as an obstacle for children in establishing and communicating their identities with other students. The findings in this study generally show that participating in minority religion classes seemed to support the students' identities within instruction groups, but not visibly in the school at large. Children in religion groups expressed a clear distinction between us and them in relation to the majority Lutheran students as well as a need to be like others. This was not noticeable among students in ethics classes, who did not show a negative sense of difference in relation to their fellow students. The integrating value of the minority group education referred to in previous research, was therefore visible within groups, but feelings of otherness were clearly problematic for some in relation to other students in the school.

The students' feelings of otherness were not always directly connected to religion. Instead, practical issues such as clashing timetables and difficulties in describing the content of classes to fellow students were central in their feelings of being different. Neither students nor teachers expressed a sense that there was explicit prejudice and discrimination based on religion in the school. This contrasts positively with previous research such as Rastas (2007, 113–118) and Moulin (2011, 323), which commonly provides evidence of overt discrimination in the school culture. Nevertheless, feelings of isolation and secretiveness about telling other students about participation and instruction did exist, which still clearly indicate underlying prejudice in the school culture.

In general, minority students in this study found having their own group to be a positive experience. However, students' negative sense of difference in relation to other students clearly needs attention as identity strengthening is a fundamental aim of instruction. To lessen experiences of otherness and prejudice, openness and dialogue within the school stand out as crucial. Also practical issues in the organization of education need to be taken increasingly into consideration. Furthermore, minority religion students' identification with and practice in their "own" religion cannot be taken for granted in the school or in instruction. In conclusion, to ensure the benefits of a differentiated instruction system with its small classes, increasing attention needs to be paid to the challenges students experience in these diverse classrooms as well as in the school at large.

## **6.2 Article II: Supporting students' plural identities in the classroom**

The second article "Addressing religious plurality: a teacher perspective on minority religion and secular ethics education" (Zilliaccus 2013a), focused on sub-question 1.2: *How do minority religion and secular ethics teachers view the task of supporting and including plurality within the classroom?* In the analysis

of the interview study the following general themes emerged: the challenges of classroom diversity, trying to take all students into account, integrating students' backgrounds, creating dialogue versus teaching knowledge, promoting tolerance within instruction groups, and the presence of confessionalism in the education. The findings show, in several respects, that the teachers perceived themselves as making significant efforts to take cultural and age diversity into account. Teachers commonly said that they tried to include plurality by seeing students' religious and cultural backgrounds as an asset for instruction and student integration. Many teachers perceived their role as bridge builders, interpreting and explaining different traditions and promoting tolerance both within the classroom and in relation to society. Often, a caring and familiar atmosphere was seen as important elements of instruction.

However, the findings also clearly show that teachers experienced culturally diverse classrooms as very challenging. At times, teachers had severe difficulties in achieving curricular goals, particularly in large mixed age classes exceeding 20 students. Teachers complained that not all the students' needs could be attended to and that their capacities as a teacher were insufficient. Full teacher qualifications and increased teacher training particularly focused on intercultural education and multiage classrooms would therefore be essential to support teachers in their pedagogical skills. The strong need for increasing teacher qualifications has also been argued for in previous research (Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 464–46; Salmenkivi 2007, 88–89).

At the school level it would be vital to keep mixed age classes under 20 students per class. Very small classes of 1–3 students posed other challenges, especially when it came to being able to use different methods of instruction and promote the inclusion of students. A proposal to raise the minimum number of students required for organizing classes was presented by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2010. This effort was rejected and criticized by referring to student rights. However, the findings of this study indicate that students would often benefit from partaking in classes with at least five students.

Furthermore, the findings show that even if the religion teachers in this study recognized religious plurality among their students, many teachers adhered to a traditional perspective. This appeared both in making assumptions about students' religious identities and in giving weight to religious practices at home and to students' family background. Even if instruction did not include religious practice, the teacher's role as an authority and a person who encouraged religious practice was sometimes strong and personal. Also, student and parental expectations with respect to learning only one's "own" religion put pressure on teachers to focus on only one tradition. Students were consequently not always seen by teachers as actively shaping and changing their religious identities, but rather as being tied to a fixed and assumed affiliation.

These findings suggest that students' voices are not always heard in the current system, which has also been argued from a legislative point of view as not being equally considered in the choice of instruction group (Koikkalainen 2010, 66–67). The presence of confessional elements appeared as an obstacle for addressing all students equally. Teachers viewed students with a weak religious affiliation as being more at risk of falling between the cracks, sometimes resulting in changing classes. This also supports the finding of the first article indicating that instruction often took students' religious affiliation for granted. The Council of Europe's (2008) White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue states that it is essential that children's identities are not predefined in education. Children should have the option to adopt different and multiple cultural affiliations. The Finnish religious education system formally takes a non-confessional stance and emphasizes learning about and from religion. However, the Finnish narrow definition of non-confessionality, as education not including religious practice, still gives room for confessional elements in education, which for the student may ultimately stand in conflict with the freedom to choose one's own culture (Council of Europe 2008a).

Finland stands uncomfortably between two positions, by neither identifying with the multifaith education such as in Sweden or in fully state-funded community schools in the UK, nor being confessional, as for instance in most German States (Länder) (Sakaranaho 2006, 347). For the Finnish system to remain viable in an increasingly plural school culture, it is essential that education and teacher training be developed in such a way that both modern and traditional plurality among students occupy an equal position in education. In conclusion, the concept of receiving education in one's "own" religion too often misrepresents the students' identities as clearly defined and static. Renaming education as "religion-specific" (in Finnish: *uskontokohtainen*) rather than education in one's "own" religion, would strengthen the non-confessional character of education. This would be a step forward in strengthening the students' identities as open and evolving in relation to education.

### **6.3 Article III: The inclusion of minority religious education students in the school culture**

The third article "The inclusion of minority religious education in the Finnish comprehensive school: a teacher and teacher coordinator perspective" (Zilliacus 2013b), focused on sub-question 1.3: *How do teachers and teacher coordinators view the inclusion of minority religious education in the school culture?* The research question of this study was wide and encompassing minority religious education in general. Student inclusion was therefore investigated through the

wider context of education, and the analysis focused on the position of the subject, the teachers and the students in the school cultures.

The findings of the interview study undertaken show that the minority religion teacher and teacher coordinators views on the position of minority religious education in the school culture frequently emphasized how the subject, its teachers, and its students, were becoming more accepted and integrated into the school culture. Teachers expressed satisfaction both about the legislative rights of this education as well as the support given by coordinators, principals, and the community of minority religious education teachers. These were seen as important strengths in the current system.

However, despite the fact that many teachers felt that minority religious education was gaining a stronger and more equal position, aspects of exclusion were clearly present. In line with previous research (cf. Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 460–465), the analysis shows how the presence of important structural issues can hinder inclusion, i.e. the lack of teacher competence and textbooks, difficulties in scheduling and grouping students, and inadequate classrooms. The lack of teacher qualifications and textbooks is a serious concern in respect to the current system of religious education. Bearing in mind that the current curricula date already from 2006, the availability of appropriate textbooks for all instruction groups would be important to achieve. This structural discrimination raises the question whether minority religious education has the resources to meet its curricular goals and reach the same level as the majority Lutheran instruction and other comprehensive school subjects. As the number of students from different denominational backgrounds will continue to increase, the viability of the current system can be questioned (see also Kallioniemi 2013a). To ensure the quality of minority religious education, substantial efforts and resources are currently needed both within teacher education and the organization of education.

The findings also show that minority teachers often felt they were not being included in the school cultures. Minority religious education teachers' sense of being merely guests in schools and not being part of the school culture, made many of them feel excluded. Overall, teachers engaged relatively little in dialogue within the school cultures. Partly this was due to their tight work schedules. Cooperation between teachers and instruction groups was scarce, even if the need for dialogue and communication among both teachers and students was pronounced. In contrast to most teachers, as Rissanen (2012) also argues, some Islam teachers engaged in active dialogue with schools and parents, and functioned as interpreters of their religion and culture. However, the overall lack of communication among teaching staff shows a need to increase dialogue within the school cultures and make minority teachers more closely connected to schools.

The findings furthermore show that many teachers and coordinators emphasized that positive attitudes towards minority students and teachers did exist in schools, and that discrimination was not a common occurrence. Students' religious belonging and traditions were generally felt to be taken into consideration in schools, though there was a certain degree of intolerance about Islam. This contrasts with previous studies on Finnish school culture, which show discrimination and racism as common occurrences. However, as Souto (2010, 199–201) argues, teachers may not be able to recognise the discrimination that is taking place in the school community.

Although teachers commonly reported that individual discrimination was rare, discrimination and prejudice were perceived as a severe problem in individual schools. In several cases the confessional affiliation of the teacher emerged as a source of discrimination and conflict. The issue of the teacher being religiously affiliated was important for both parents and religion teachers themselves, even if it was not required as a qualification. In one Islam class there had been criticism of a teacher being female, as well as in other classes of two teachers not being Muslim. In the cases of the non-Muslim teachers severe criticism had occurred and as a consequence many parents had taken their children out of the class and applied for home education in the subject. Furthermore, a number of teachers felt that some students experienced discrimination and isolation due to being members of minority religious education classes. This finding is in line with the findings in the first article on student perspectives, which showed feelings of otherness and isolation despite students generally being content about having their own religious education class. The presence of experiences of discrimination within the current system of religious education needs to be taken seriously and addressed within education and in school cultures at large.

In some teachers' views a preference for separation and an urge to protect the "own" religion was seen. Minority religious education classes were not seen as excluding or segregating, but rather as simply separating to ensure a focus on the specific religious tradition. At times minority religious education teachers appeared to take students' identification with their "own" religion for granted and to assume a sense of difference and otherness in the school culture. This may not be beneficial for the students' sense of belonging in the school culture. From a multicultural point of view it appears critical that the opportunities for dialogue between religious education classes emerged as only occasional. The need for dialogue within religious education is internationally perceived as a central aim of education (Jackson 2004b, 10). Dialogue has often been argued to be supported by having religious education as a single subject such as in the other Nordic countries. To strengthen dialogue within the current system there seems to be a need to articulate the aims of a dialogue between classes and

religions in schools at the curricular level. The presence of conflicts and discrimination in the schools calls for initiatives which open up the classroom and create dialogue. Teachers in this study did not always have the capacity to sort out problems in the school when an instance of discrimination or conflict took place in the class or school. It would be essential that teachers should have more competence and support to confront conflicts and not let situations involving discrimination go by.

In closing, many teachers and coordinators within this study expressed satisfaction with the current system of religious education and the position of minority religious education. However, teachers also pointed to serious issues of structural and individual discrimination within the school culture and a lack of dialogue. An increasingly plural school and society has put growing pressure on the Finnish system of religious education. There are important challenges to be met with regard to both the organization of education and teacher education. This creates a serious concern for the inclusion of minority religious education and its students in the comprehensive school and may determine whether the current system of separate classes has a future. For the future of minority religious education as an integral part of the comprehensive school substantial resources and efforts will be required.

#### **6.4 Article IV: Supporting minority belonging**

The fourth article “Supporting minority belonging: Finnish minority religious education teacher perspectives on the significance of religious education” (Zilliacus and Kallioniemi forthcoming), focused on sub-question 1.4: *How do teachers of minority religions view the significance of education in supporting students’ identities?* The findings show that in the perspectives of minority teachers the minority religious education can represent an important source of identity for its students. However, the views of the teachers often reflected a perspective of traditional socialization into the “own” religion. The perceived significances of religious education lay in supporting minority belonging in three main areas, namely, through the minority class community, by strengthening one’s “own” religious identity as well as supporting societal integration. These categories and their main contents are summarized in the table 3.

**Table 3.** Teachers' views on how students' identities are supported in minority religious education

Categories	Main content
<b>1. The minority class as a source of belonging and a safe space</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- giving one further source of identification</li> <li>- creating a sense of community and familiarity</li> <li>- creating a safe space</li> </ul>
<b>2. Strengthening one's "own" religious identity and belonging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- supporting knowledge about one's "own" religion</li> <li>- supporting the development of tolerance</li> <li>- supporting home education</li> <li>- encouraging religious practice outside class</li> <li>- encouraging belonging to the religious community</li> </ul>
<b>3. Strengthening minority culture and societal integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- supporting societal integration</li> <li>- strengthening minority belonging</li> </ul>

First, the teachers viewed the minority class as a source of belonging and a safe space. The teachers recognized as a starting point that students had a variety of senses of belonging to the instruction group as well as diverse backgrounds. The teachers commonly felt that the minority class was valuable in that it gave students one further source of identification. Identification with the minority group was in the teachers' views created through the interplay between different cultural aspects present among the students as well as the teacher, importantly through age, gender, immigrant background, and religious and cultural background. Teachers often experienced the minority class as creating a sense of community and familiarity. The class appeared according to teachers to manifest and reinforce a minority identity. Teachers commonly expressed the view that participation in the class functioned as a possibility for students not to feel and be "different". Despite the challenges of teaching in age integrated classes teachers considered that the mixed age groups often created a positive sense of familiarity. Many of the teachers were familiar with students' families, which they met regularly through the religious community. In these cases group belonging was created through several connections. Furthermore, teachers often emphasized their attempts to create a safe space in class. They commonly pointed out that the minority group was a relaxed place where students could feel safe to express themselves and "be themselves". This familiar atmosphere was encouraged by the fact that group sizes were often small.

Second, from the teachers' perspectives a vital part of education lay in supporting students' identities with regard to their "own" religion. This was primarily achieved through gaining knowledge about one's "own" religion. Overall the teachers viewed education as primarily knowledge-oriented and focused on the "own" religion. The teachers also often expressed the significance of education as supporting the development of tolerance towards other religions

and world-views. According to some teachers' views students needed to understand and strengthen their own identities first, and thereafter the understanding and tolerance of other religions can be achieved. Tolerance was particularly emphasized by the teachers in connection with supporting one's own minority identity, and coping with religious prejudice and discrimination in the school culture and in society. Frequently the teachers argued that the instruction supported home education and the education was commonly seen as a supplement to home education. Several teachers expressed the view that home education was most fundamental with regard to the overall impact of education. Furthermore, even if teachers were explicit about education not including religious practice, their teaching often involved encouraging religious practice outside the class. Teachers often articulated their efforts in giving students advice on religious practice and ethical behavior. A number of teachers also strove to strengthen students' belonging by encouraging belonging to the religious community. The teachers commonly saw themselves as representing the religious community and functioning as a link to the congregation.

Third, the teachers regarded the education as significant in supporting societal integration and minority belonging. Minority religious education was perceived as an opportunity for immigrant students both to become part of Finnish society and to strengthen their cultural identity. Several teachers argued that the current system reinforced religious minority belonging as part of the comprehensive school, and that the religion classes functioned as a link to the students' home countries. Of the 23 teachers 9 had an immigrant background, which was perceived to be an important asset in supporting students' integration. Among Islam teachers, integration was particularly emphasized as central to religious education and as supporting all Muslim students regardless of immigrant background. Often Islam teachers stated that they supported students being Muslim and at the same time belonging to Finnish society. The aim of creating respect and being tolerant with regard to Finnish culture and cultures other than Muslim culture was present in several teachers' views. The teachers commonly accentuated the borders between Finnish and Muslim culture, highlighting the differences. Strengthening cultural differences therefore often seemed to come hand in hand with supporting minority belonging.

By encouraging belonging in class and in relation to the religious communities the current model of religious education gives substantial support to the social aspect of religious identity (Abby 2001). The minority position in school seemed to create in itself a need to emphasize a sense of group belonging, which was encouraged by teachers. Furthermore, many of the teachers showed deep involvement and motivation to advance students' minority identities and sense of community. The explicit articulation of strengthening rather than developing religious identity, stated in a few of the minority curricula, was



reflected generally in minority religious education teachers' views. The teachers emphasized that religious education was knowledge orientated and did not include religious practice. However, confessional elements and an urge for traditional socialization into a specific religion were visible. This was tangibly shown by teachers who saw education as a supplement to home education, and encouraged belonging to the religious community as well as religious practice outside the class. Also, the fact that teachers predominantly saw their role as representatives of the religious community created a confessional connection.

According to the findings in this study Finnish minority religious education leans towards traditional socialization, and the transmission of faith, rather than modern socialization, and supporting individuation. The Finnish system of religious education is based on the concept of the student's "own" religion. However, on closer inspection this concept is not clear and simple. What does the choice of instruction group really say about the student's own religion? Or does the "own" religion reflect the religion of the student's family? The findings of this study support previous research that argues that Finnish religious education is linked to the religious communities. This leads to problematic issues on whether the family's religious culture represents the same kind of interpretations of the religion as the religious communities do. From the perspective of modern socialization the concept of one's "own" religion, should in fact refer to one's "personal" rather than one's "given" religion, wherever applicable.

In pursuing a religious education that supports both modern and traditional plurality in education many challenges lie ahead. A first concern is how the separative system can take into consideration the plural identities of students, and address them equally in class. For those students with a strong religious identity in the religion and religious community minority religious education may represent a valuable support. Difficulties arise when students do not adhere to the religion, have mixed belongings, or wish to try out other identities. A second concern lies in how the current model can allow room for students' own choice and autonomy if only a few alternatives are given. Simply by stating that students are free to choose and practice their religion or not, does not create sufficient room for freedom of choice. In addition, when considering that pre-adolescents often have limited capacities for critical thinking, the current system would appear to be restricted in not giving students an array of different alternatives to reflect upon. A third concern lies in the ways in which separated groups may emphasize the differences rather than similarities with other students and out-group members. The urge to strengthen one's minority identity appeared in some teachers' views to emphasize differences. In a critical view reinforcing difference may not necessarily support students' identities and integration, but can strengthen stereotypes and essentialist views of culture and

identity (Lavanchy, Gajardo and Dervin 2011, 4–10). A final important concern rests in teacher competence. The prevailing lack of qualified teachers of minority religious education is critical for the quality of education. To develop minority religious education substantial inputs are clearly needed to give teachers the capacities to take on the above challenges.

The current system of education appears strong with regard to supporting belonging within a given tradition. However, Finland's plural society puts in question the adequacy of a separative model. It is vital for the future of religious education, whether the current model prevails or not, that the general curricular aims connected to supporting modern socialization should clearly reflect all areas of religious education, also minority religious education. These aims need to clarify the question of identity development so that students are not seen to have fixed identities, and also offer a wider curricular content which opens up a dialogue between different traditions and views.

## **6.5 Summary of findings**

The findings of the individual articles are summarized below according to general themes. The themes below include aspects which emerged as both supportive and challenging within the education. First themes related to the supporting of students' identities are summarized. These include first four themes connected both to minority religious and secular ethics education and then four themes specifically connected to religious education. Thereafter three themes related to the inclusion of students in the school cultures are presented. Each theme focuses first on the findings from a teacher and teacher coordinator perspective, and then relates these findings to student perspectives. Perspectives on secular ethics education were included in the first two articles. However, they were not part of the third and fourth article, which results in a stronger focus on minority religious education.

The findings on how students' identities are supported within the education focus on the following general themes in both religious and secular ethics education: *Supporting classroom diversity, the challenge of structural discrimination, creating a sense of belonging and community, and the inclusion of students with immigrant backgrounds.*

### ***Supporting classroom diversity***

The diverse backgrounds and ages in the mixed age classes were a central concern for teachers and essential for how students were considered in education. Minority religion and secular ethics teachers expressed in general, that they tried to take students' diverse ages and backgrounds into consideration. In some religion teachers' views the teacher functioned as an

“interpretative bridge” between different cultural and religious backgrounds, and worked hard on merging different views and compromising to succeed in teaching the religion in such a way that all students could relate to it. The task of promoting tolerance was by teachers also seen as important both within the classroom and in relation to society. These efforts are in line with intercultural approaches, which try to address plurality within education (cf. Jackson 2009b, 22–25). However, commonly teachers expressed having difficulties handling the mixed age classes, particularly large classes exceeding 20 students. This is in line with previous research such as Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi (2009, 463–464) who have argued that the diversity in the classroom creates challenges for teachers. Some teachers had difficulties in achieving the curricular goals due to the very demanding class structure. Also very small classes of only 1–3 students could according to teachers create feelings of isolation among individual students, and lacked dynamics within the instruction for the use of different methods of instruction. The study on student perspectives also supports the view that participating in very small groups can create feelings of loneliness and isolation among students.

### ***The challenge of structural discrimination***

Structural discrimination emerged as a major general challenge in the education, even if many teachers and coordinators expressed that the position of minority religious and secular ethics education had been strengthened in the school cultures. Teachers and teacher coordinators pointed to serious issues of structural discrimination in the lack of textbooks, in some cases the large mixed age classes, the inadequate classrooms, difficulties in scheduling and grouping students, and importantly the lack of teacher education and formal qualifications. Previous research has also pointed to these issues in the organization of the education both in the Finnish context and in similar separative models in Belgium (cf. Sakaranaho and Salmenkivi 2009, 460–465; Loobuyck and Franken 2011, 45–46). The prevailing lack of teacher qualifications and textbooks is a serious concern in respect to the quality of education, even if some developments have since the conducting of the present field studies been made in respect to textbooks (See 3.1.5). The structural discrimination raises the question whether minority religious education has the resources to meet its curricular goals and reach the same level as the majority Luther instruction and other comprehensive school subjects. The study on student perspectives also highlighted how the organization and scheduling of classes had impact on students’ views of the education.

### ***Creating a sense of belonging and community***

A sense of belonging was by teachers seen as central for how education supported students' identities within the classroom. Both religion and secular ethics teachers made efforts to create a sense of belonging and community within their classes and to create an open and safe learning environment where students could express themselves freely. In many teachers' views the minority group functioned for students as one source of identification among others, and thereby recognised students plural identities (cf. Benjamin 2013, 121–122). Often a caring and familial atmosphere was an important element of instruction. The minority groups frequently being small in size supported the development of a sense of community. Secular ethics teachers in particular emphasized that instruction took as the starting point students' own experiences, which often functioned as the main focus of instruction and a starting point for dialogue and communication in the class. The secular ethics classes focused strongly on communicative skills and reflection rather than knowledge and facts. Consequently, there seemed to be a stronger emphasis on social and communicative skills in the secular ethics class than the religion classes. The study on student perspectives showed that students were generally positive about having their own group and some students also expressed being proud about being part of their "own" group. These findings support that education can be positive for students' sense of belonging and in this way strengthen their identities.

### ***The inclusion of students with immigrant backgrounds***

Teacher and coordinators argued that the education strongly supported students' inclusion by strengthening their religious and cultural belongings within the Finnish society. Often the teachers' own immigrant background was seen as an asset in this process. The education functioned in this view as an important stepping stone for students with immigrant background by strengthening their minority identities. The teachers' views are in line with previous research showing that religion often has a significant role among students with immigrant background (cf von Brömssen 2003, 75–78; Torstenson-Ed 2006, 39). The importance of minority religious education for societal integration has also previously been argued for within the Finnish context (Alitoppa-Niitamo 2002, 281; Sakaranaho 2006, 380; 2007b, 13–14; Tuutti and Vainio (2007, 218–220). However, even if teachers emphasized minority students' inclusion within the classroom, they did not strongly articulate the need to work for students' inclusion in the school culture. Moreover, some teachers accentuated cultural differences, which may strengthen the differences between minority and majority Lutheran students rather than the similarities. This may also give hand

to groupism, that is, the assumption that religious, or immigrant, identity is derived simply from being member of the minority group (Anthias 2009, 9–10).

The findings on how students' identities are supported specifically in religious education include the following general themes: *Strengthening students' "own" religious identity, supporting religious belonging and practice, and addressing all students equally.*

### ***Strengthening students' "own" religious identity***

The main focus of religious education was to learn about religion by gaining knowledge about the "own" religion. Teachers emphasized to varying extent also learning about other religions and world-views. The religion teachers pointed to the fundamental value of instruction being focused on students' "own" religion. In teachers' views the religion could function as an important source of identity (cf. Kuusisto 2011, 7; Østberg 2003, 176–177). In a similar vein to Komulainen (2013, 76–78) the teachers often argued that neutrality is not only impossible but also not desirable. The instruction was not to include religious practice. However, teachers' views centrally involved strengthening students' identities in relation to the "own" religion, as well as an urge for traditional socialization *into* religion. The teachers recognised that students had a varied sense of belonging to the "own" religion and they also stated clearly that students were free to choose or not to choose the religion. However, simply by stating that students are free to choose and practice the religion, or not, does not seem to create sufficient room for freedom of choice. Teachers often adhered to a traditional perspective on students' identities as fixed to the parental belonging. Students' religious identities were thereby taken for granted, and in line with Liebkind (1988, 66–67), seen as ascribed. Rather than seeing students as actively reshaping and changing their identities (cf. Council of Europe 2008b, 3–4; von Brömssen 2003, 57–61), their identities were often perceived as tied to an assumed affiliation. Students 7–13 years old students may be strongly influenced by their parental tradition as the family generally stands as an important factor in religious socialization (cf. Kuusisto 2011, 61). However, this may not be the case for all, and the influence from the surrounding culture and school may also be important. The participant observation study also indicated that that students' religious belonging was often taken for granted by teachers. The tendency to essential views of identities contrasts with seeing identities as active and evolving as it is articulated in the general aims of the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCC 2004, 202). These findings are in line with previous research on the minority religious education curricula being oriented towards strengthening religious identity, and support the view that the line

between confessional and non-confessional education is unclear (cf. Hella and Wright 2009, 53–56; Rissanen (2014, 124–126).

### ***Supporting religious belonging and practice***

Commonly religion teachers expressed that the education supported students' belonging to the "own" religion and religious community. Confessional elements were often visible in that teachers saw education as a supplement to home education, and encouraged belonging to the religious community as well as religious practice outside the class. The Finnish narrow definition of non-confessionality still gives room for confessional elements in education, which for the student may ultimately stand in conflict with the freedom to choose one's own culture (Council of Europe 2008a, 6). Even if instruction did not include religious practice, the teacher's role as an authority and a person who encouraged religious practice was sometimes strong and personal. The fact that teachers predominantly saw their role as representatives of the religious community also created a confessional connection. The teachers commonly saw their close connection to the religious community as important for the credibility of education. In line with Vermeer (2010; 106–116), the education stands out in several respects as closely connected to a traditional socialization.

### ***Addressing all students equally***

As some teachers viewed religious belonging and practice as important for the education, this had as a consequence that students with weak religious affiliation seemed at risk of falling between the cracks, having a lower status in class, and sometimes resulting in changing classes. The close contact to religious practice and the community appeared as an obstacle for addressing all students equally. For students with a strong religious identity in the religion education may represent a valuable support. Difficulties arise when students do not adhere to the religion, have mixed belongings or wish to try out other identities. According to the findings Finnish minority religious education leans towards traditional socialization rather than modern socialization. In this view education may strengthen essential views of identity (Hall 1996b, 579–604; von Brömssen, 2003, 60–62). A concern is how the separative system can take into consideration the plural identities of students, and address them equally in class. The Finnish system of religious education is based on the concept of the student's "own" religion. However, on closer inspection this concept is not altogether clear as to what it says about the students' identities. From the perspective of modern socialization the concept of one's "own" religion, should in fact refer to one's "personal" rather than one's "given" religion, wherever applicable.

The findings on how education supports students' inclusion and include the following general themes: Minority students' position in the school cultures, issues of individual discrimination and prejudice, and the lack of dialogue in the school cultures.

### ***Minority students' position in the school cultures***

Teachers and teacher coordinators experienced a development for the better, that the minority religion subject, its students and teachers were becoming more accepted and included into the school culture. From a teacher perspective the contact between the community of minority religion teachers and the teacher coordinators as well as principals, had strengthened the position of education in the school cultures. Despite this development many minority religious education teachers still felt that they were not part of the school culture, and many of them felt excluded. This finding is supported in another recent study by Riitaoja (2013, 323–329). Feelings of difference were according to teachers also common between minority and Lutheran majority students. According to teachers minority students often wanted to conform to the majority. The urge to strengthen the minority identity appeared in some teachers' views to emphasize that their students were different from other students in the school. Generally minority religious education classes were not seen by teachers as excluding or segregating by themselves, but rather as simply separating to ensure a focus on the specific religious tradition (cf. Banks 2010, 116–117). Teachers focused on supporting students' minority identities actively within the group, but not as clearly in the school at large. The study on student perspectives showed that minority religion students did experience feelings of isolation and experiences of being different from majority students. However, these experiences secular ethics students did not have.

### ***Issues of individual discrimination and prejudice***

Teachers principally underlined that discrimination and prejudice was not a wide-ranging problem in the schools. This finding contrasts positively to previous research, which has shown that discrimination and prejudice is a common problem in the comprehensive school (Rastas 2007, 113–118; Souto 2012, 193–198; Halonen 2009, 41–43; Virrankoski 2005, 305). The fact that many teachers wanted to emphasize the absence of discrimination in the school culture, may somewhat have reflected a wish for the future development of the school culture to advance towards non-discrimination and to work against common assumptions of discrimination being a problem in relation to religion and minority students. Moreover, teachers may also not always recognize discrimination that is taking place in the school community (cf. Souto 2010,

199–201). Teachers did perceive that individual discrimination and prejudice was a problem both within and outside the classroom in some schools. In these cases the teachers did not always have the capacity and time to sort out conflicts when an instance of discrimination or conflict took place in the class or school. The study on student perspectives did not show clear instances of discrimination. However, students were secretive and silent about participating in minority religion classes. This stands out as an important problem, which needs to be addressed. The urge not to talk about participating in the minority religion classes indicated that students were worried about being excluded or students being prejudice against them.

### ***The lack of dialogue in the school cultures***

Dialogue and supporting the development of tolerance was an important part of instruction within the classrooms but took seldom place between students in religion and secular ethics classes and in the school cultures at large. According to teachers there was only occasional dialogue between the different religion and secular ethics classes. Among a few religion teachers there appeared to be an urge to protect the “own” religion, and focus on the “own” religion. The lack of dialogue in the education was connected to religion teachers being quite isolated from other teaching personnel, and their work schedules not giving time to engage in other school activities. Teachers experienced it as very positive for students when occasional dialogue took place in the school and between classes. Some Islam teachers in contrast to most teachers engaged in active dialogue with both minority and majority students as well as other teachers and parents, and functioned as interpreters of their religion and culture. These findings are similar to that of Rissanen (2012, 747), who showed how Islam teachers functioned as mediators for dialogue within the class and the school. The increasing presence of Islam in the school and the clear cultural differences that it represented compared to majority Lutheran culture created a need for knowledge about Islam in the school community. In addition, the media focus on Muslims and the rise of Islamophobia may also have increased the attention paid to Islam instruction groups and the motivation to integrate Islam teachers and students in the schools.

It appeared critical that the opportunities for dialogue between religious education classes emerged as only occasional. From an intercultural educational perspective, which emphasizes the role of dialogue between students, the education appeared as having a limited scope (cf. Jackson 2004b, 10; Council of Europe 2008b, 3–4). The study on student perspectives also showed that several students had difficulties in communicating and explaining what the religion and secular ethics education was about and that there was a lack of knowledge about other instruction groups in the school. To support students’ identities and



strengthen dialogue within the current system there is a need to articulate dialogue between classes and religions in schools also at the curricular level.

In closing, the findings within this thesis illuminate how students' identities are embedded in the educational context. This context includes both supportive and challenging aspects. The supportive aspects include the sense of belonging and community in the group, the inclusion of students with immigrant backgrounds, as well as the support of students' diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. The latter support given to students' backgrounds is importantly dependent on the size and structure of the mixed age class and teacher capacities to take all students into account. The presence of structural discrimination, the students' experiences of being separate and isolated in relation to majority students, instances of discrimination as well as the lack of dialogue within the school cultures stand out as central challenges with the education.

Furthermore, the way that education supports students' religious identities includes problematic issues. The current system of education appears strong in regard to supporting students' identities within a given tradition. However, it does not always take into account the modern plurality and the students' individual identities within the classroom. As a consequence not all students have an equal position in the classes. In teacher views students' identities were frequently seen as bound to an assumed tradition and socializing into the religious tradition was clearly present. This puts into question the adequacy of the current model of religious education and its educational practice. It is vital for the future of religious education, that the general curricular aims connected to seeing students' identities as active and open to change and individual development should clearly reflect in all areas of religious education. Central for the education and curricular aims is the need to clarify the relation of students' identities to the religion and religious belonging.



## **7 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND EVALUATION OF THE STUDY**

This chapter will discuss the trustworthiness of this thesis, followed by an evaluation of its limitations and contributions. Different criteria exist for evaluating the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research and are dependent on the chosen research paradigm (Tracy 2010; Denzin 2009, 140). In a constructivist perspective, concepts related to trustworthiness such as credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability are commonly argued as lying at the heart of issues conventionally seen as representing the validity and reliability of research (Seale 1999, 466–469; Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 22; Shenton 2004, 64–72). It is often argued that qualitative inquiry does not fit well with the quantitative oriented concepts of validity and reliability, which generally refer to whether the study truly measures that which it has been intended to measure (validity) and how consistent and accurate the results are over time (reliability) (Golafshani 2003, 588–599). As qualitative research does not strive for measurement and explanation, the issues related to trustworthiness are different. This is partly due to the central role of the researcher as the research instrument, which makes questions of validity and reliability overlap. The terms credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability are used here to discuss the central criteria at stake.

### **7.1 Credibility of the methods used and the researcher's role**

Central to the credibility of the study is to create trust in the findings. In a constructivist perspective this is aimed for by generating understanding rather than making truth claims of the phenomenon under study (Shenton 2004, 64–69; Petty, Thomson and Stew 2012, 382–383). To achieve credibility Patton (2002, 552–584) argues for the following three issues to be addressed: The credibility of the research paradigm, the research methods and the researcher. The credibility of the research paradigm lies as a foundation of the inquiry. The constructivist paradigm and qualitative approach of this thesis have been presented in sections 5.1 and 5.2 and aim at building soundness to the presuppositions of this thesis.

The credibility of the methods used implies that the study is made through the trustworthy use of the research methods, and that the research is communicative, and presented in a systematic and transparent way Patton (2002, 552–584). The methodological framework of this thesis aims to illuminate the trustworthiness of methods used. Credibility in the use of

methods has been aimed for in the logics of the emergent design. The prolonged engagement and triangulation of methods in the first field study was important for achieving credibility in the study (Krefting 1991, 217). The choice to pursue an interview study after the participant observation study was made in comparison to other research alternatives. An alternative would have been to pursue a second participant observation study in another school and thereby aim at deepening first-hand insight of student perspectives. By choosing to focus on teacher and teacher coordinators interviews their perspectives on the educational context were prioritized (See section 5.6). The interview study represented a research method, which I as the researcher felt most experienced with. An interview study also gave the opportunity to acquire a larger sample of perspectives to support transferability, and did not require a second long-term involvement by one school.

Credibility and authenticity were aimed for in both field studies by trying to ensure the participants' willingness to be involved and being sensitive to participants' possible wishes to withdraw. The recording of interviews was made to ensure credibility in the analysis. However, the presence of a recorder influenced the interview situation (See sections 5.5.3 and 5.6.2), as it created some nervousness and awkwardness in the interview situation. The recorded interview situation may have urged participants to give somewhat anticipated answers to questions. However, the open-ended interview format and informal interviews aimed to increase credibility of participants. Also the observations in the participatory study functioned as a way to check the trustworthiness of the interview by comparing the observation made to the interview content.

The participant observation study gave the opportunity to gain first-hand insight into the school cultures to support credibility. The individual interviews undertaken as part of the participant observation study also offered students as well as teachers a possibility to talk about matters that they would have felt restrained to share in group or in class. However, as discussed previously (See sections 5.5. and 5.6), the general limitation lay in the researcher's role and influence on the social setting and participants' expectations. Particularly the power relation between the adult researcher and the children, the students' varying conceptual abilities, as well as the students' lack of experience with the research situation influenced the research situation. Even if a familiar and flexible rapport was aimed for to understand the children's perspectives, the challenge for the researcher to gain this understanding of a child's perspective was present. The clear divisions between the adult and child world in the school culture made this challenge particularly strong. However, as Karlsson (2010, 132) argues, the difficulties in reaching another perspective is generally present in research, and not only specific to research with children. It is commonly

present in the challenge to step into another person's role such as a different gender, age or culture.

Similarly to the participant observation study the perspective of the researcher and the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee influenced how the interview study proceeded. To minimize an experience of dominance and awkwardness in the interview situation I tried to create an atmosphere of equality and cooperation, and make an effort to communicate the meaningfulness of the study to the participants. As stated (See 5.6.2), the participants generally discussed openly the education and their minority perspective. The participants' own interest to advance education may have made their responses sometimes self-serving and affected the transparency of their responses. Also, sensitive issues may not have been easily expressed in the interview situation. The language difficulties clearly present in several of the teachers' interviews also constrained communication during interviews and created limitations in interpretation. The open ended interview tried to ensure that I could check participant views and address issues from different perspectives to spot possible unclear issues or partiality. Member checking as in testing the credibility of the interview data together with the participants was made on one occasion. In the writing of the third article one of the teacher coordinators requested to read and give feedback on the article manuscript. This request was made to ensure confidentiality, but also gave general feedback on the data.

The participant observation study and the interview study were chosen to complement each other. As three out of four studies were chosen to be made in teacher and teacher coordinator perspective focus predominantly lay on their perspectives on the education and their students. The interview study notably included teachers' and teacher coordinators' second-hand views of students' identities and inclusion in the education and did not give first-hand views from the students. Also, the teacher perspectives expressed their views about the education and its aims, but did not give first-hand insight into the educational practice.

The credibility of me as the researcher also needs to be addressed. This includes what I bring to the qualitative study in the form of qualifications, experience and perspective (Patton 2002, 552–584). For attending to these issues the overall aim of reflexivity has a central role. As Hammersley and Atkins (2007, 14–16) state this involves both reflecting on my role and position in the academic field, as well as the research process and the foundations of the study. Reflexivity aims at unfolding the self-evident categories within the research and recognises that the researcher is part of the world studied. The main quest is not to try to avoid all bias and all possible presuppositions, but to see how the research has developed and to reflect on that, which seems problematic.

When participating in a research project all participants, including myself, construct our understandings in dialogue with each other. Our communication depends on the intersections of cultural aspects such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, age and religion. My own perspective as a researcher naturally sets limits to the investigation. This perspective can be illuminated through my personal history and through the academic field where I am situated. This has been of significance for the research paradigm chosen and how the study evolved. Central to this positioning was my background in education and multicultural education studies. My first year of doctoral studies was focused on intercultural and multicultural research introduced by Professor Gunilla Holm, and resulted in a joint article (Holm and Zilliacus 2009). This theoretical perspective became central for the development of my research project. It drew my attention to the aspect of religion as an often overlooked aspect within multicultural and intercultural education, and opened my interest towards the Finnish system of religious education as well as to pluralism in religious education. Subsequent seminars led by Professor Arto Kallioniemi and Professor Martin Ubani within religious education were important for the further development of my research. Furthermore, the feedback given by advisors and peers at doctoral seminars and through international conference presentations were significant for how the research developed and gained reflexivity.

A central aspect of my role as a researcher concerns whether I have an insider or an outsider perspective with regard to my field of study, i.e. the context of minority religious and secular ethics education (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 85–87; Webster and John 2010, 182–187). My own religious identity stems from a secular Lutheran background. During my school years I participated in both Lutheran religious education and secular ethics education, and have since had an interest in different religions and pluralism. My belief in the fundamental role of the religious and spiritual dimension of life stands out as an important for my motivation and outlook with respect to the research subject in general. However, as a researcher I came from outside the school culture, and did not represent the minority religious communities in question, which gave me the position of having a rather strong outsider role in the school cultures. In the field work and analysis I tried to gain knowledge of the specific minority religious and secular ethics contexts and attempted to avoid stereotypes, as well as be aware of the power relation between myself as a member of the majority society and the minority cultures I am investigating. In this pursuit the explorative phase of the participant observation study was important for gaining a stronger insider view into the field.

By not having a strong adherence to one particular religion, and not being a member of any of the religious communities in question, I did not feel explicit partiality towards any group of students or teachers. My outsider role as a

researcher with a Lutheran majority background gave opportunities for the informants to explain their positions in more detail than they would have done to an insider. A certain distance also seemed to be beneficial for me in separating my experience from that of the informants and not over-identifying with them. This gave space for reflexivity, which supported my ability to interpret the findings across student and teacher groups (Krefting 1991, 218). However, by having an outsider role, there may also have been aspects that I did not see and ask about, and it may have resulted in participants not sharing all their insider views. This outsider role was naturally also reflected in the analyses. As my background and my academic perspective was embedded in a secular Lutheran background, questions regarding notions such as non-confessionality and individual identity came to be central. These themes may not necessarily have had the same significance from a distinct minority religious perspective.

Having an ethnic background as a Swedish-speaking Finn gave me an insider language identity in the Swedish-speaking school in the participant observation study. This was beneficial for creating rapport with students and teachers. Finnish being my second language made me somewhat dependent on the interview guide in the beginning of the data collection phase in the interview study. However, my language minority status seemed in several cases to have a positive influence on the teachers' openness to express themselves freely as many of the teacher interviewees also had Finnish as their second language (See section 5.6.2).

## **7.2 Transferability**

Apart from credibility, the criteria of dependability, confirmability and transferability are central to the trustworthiness of the study. They are also partly dependent upon each other (Shenton 2004, 64–72; Petty, Thomson and Stew 2012, 381). Dependability, or reliability, assesses whether the research process is consistent (Watkins 2012, 156). As the researcher perspective is built into the qualitative study, the criteria of dependability cannot be fully tried out as the study never can be fully replicated. To ensure dependability the detailed reporting aims to enable future investigators to go over the study. Dependability was also aimed for through the use of overlapping methods in the participant observation part and by comparing findings in the participant observation and interview study. The analysis has pursued to report fairly all participant voices and seek balance, logical relationships and rich descriptions in the presentation of findings.

The third criteria of confirmability, expresses that there is an adequate amount of distance, or neutrality, between the researcher and the subject of study (Watkins 2012, 157). This has been aimed for by trying to demonstrate in

the reporting that the findings emerge from the data and not my own subjective predispositions or preferences. My position as an insider or outsider in the research has been discussed above in section 7.1. As for my position in the field during the participant observation study, an adequate distance was pursued during the data gathering through a combination of moderate involvement and detachment (Section 5.5).

The final criteria of transferability (or generalization), is contingent on the above criteria and often questioned in qualitative studies. This is due to the nature of the qualitative approach being focused on meaning and understanding within particular contexts. Also the small samples in question as well as social phenomena being generally variable and context-bound does not give room for very significant empirical generalizations. However, attempts to generalize are still present in qualitative research, already in the process of induction. Modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar but not identical conditions may be pursued. The detailed and thick description is provided for the reader to decide whether the findings justifiably can be applied to another setting and compared to similar research projects (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 261–3; Larsson 2009, 11–21; Shenton 2004, 69–71; Patty, Thomson and Stew 2012).

The sampling made in this thesis has tried to enable transferability to similar educational contexts. In the participant observation study I aimed at a purposeful sampling by picking a school context with a number of religious education and secular ethics classes. Offering a number of different classes is common for schools in the Finnish metropolitan area and in large cities. This context therefore aimed at typicality (Larsson 2009, 11–20). Maximum variation has also been aimed for to enable transferability by trying to include a number of perspectives and qualitatively different cases in different instruction groups (Schofield 1990, 210). The participant observation study was notably limited to a sample of 15 students and 7 teachers and 1 principal informants in one school in the metropolitan area, in the grade levels 1–6, which set important limits for transferability. Limiting aspects to transferability to other school contexts may be seen in the existing variations in regard to the number and sizes of religious and secular ethics classes offered in different areas of Finland and the individual differences among school cultures. This thesis focuses on the metropolitan area, which differs from many parts of Finland where the religious education options are fewer and majority Lutheran religious education has a more dominant role. As for transferring the findings to the upper level comprehensive school (grades 7–9) this may also be done cautiously, as the school contexts and students' identities differ. However, many teachers participating in this thesis also worked in these grades, and generally expressed there being similarities between the lower and upper level educational contexts.



The interview study also aimed at maximum variation in the sample by investigating the perspectives of all different religious and secular ethics education teachers offered in the metropolitan area. The number of the teachers and teacher coordinators involved in the study represented an important sample of existing religion teachers and teacher coordinators (see Table 2 section 5.6.1). This gives potential for transferability of findings. However, the secular ethics teacher sample was comparably smaller in relation to the total number of existing teachers, which make these findings less transferable.

### **7.3 Limitations of the study**

The above methodological considerations have highlighted general limitations of the thesis, which stem from the methodological choices. These limitations importantly included the researcher's role and influence on the social setting and the limitations of the research methods and the choice of participants. Particular limitations were noted in the challenge for the researcher to reach a child's perspective and to take into consideration the power relation between the adult researcher and the child. Also, language difficulties among the participants were a challenge in regard to the credibility of the study.

The research question of this thesis on how students identities are supported and included in the education, stands out as research problem with a wide scope, which cannot be given a complete answer, but is always dependent on the methodological limitations and the central role of my own perspective as a researcher. In this thesis the first participant observation study had an exploratory character, through which the sub-questions have been developed in combination with ongoing literature review. This was also decisive for how the research question was answered. In answering the research question in regard to students in secular ethics education the study came to be restricted to the two sub-questions 1.1 and 1.2 (Article I and II). This makes the findings limited in regards to including perspectives on students' identities and inclusion in secular ethics education. In targeting sub-questions 1.3 and 1.4 (Articles III and IV) the collected material on secular ethics education could not be included within the realm of the articles. Due to the limited resources of the researcher a fifth sub-question and article focusing on secular ethics education could not be included as part of this thesis. However, a study on teacher views on students' identities in secular ethics education is planned to be made in the future.

### **7.4 Contributions of the study**

This thesis provides new knowledge about the Finnish separative system of education, which can be useful for researchers, educational practitioners as well

as administrators. The thesis contributes in further illuminating minority religious and secular ethics education in the Finnish context of religious education and also puts the Finnish system of education in international perspective. The study is relevant for international research within religious education in pluralistic settings or minority groups in education. The relevance of the study may also be of particular interest in countries such as Belgium, Austria and Germany, which have separative models of religious education.

The thesis theoretically adds to research in the field of religious education by analyzing education through an intercultural perspective and giving insight into the education from a contextual point of view. Theoretically the thesis contributes by bringing questions of students' plural identities into focus, and by looking at separative religious education through the lenses of modern and traditional plurality in the education.

Specifically the thesis contributes with knowledge about students' identities and inclusion from student, teacher as well as teacher coordinator perspective. This is made both through the use of participant observation and interviews. The thesis brings new insights into the educational practice and includes teacher perspectives from all forms of minority religious education as well as secular ethics education offered currently in the Helsinki metropolitan area.

A central input is that the thesis has the student in focus and problematizes how education is experienced by them. Furthermore it brings new knowledge about how the minority student is included in the school culture at large, which has not been investigated previously. Alongside the investigation of students' identities in the education the thesis also to some extent illuminates the position and engagement of minority religious education teachers in the education. In regard to the teachers the thesis shows how education is supported through the community of minority religion teachers and the supportive systems of coordinating personnel.

Finally, the thesis brings new perspectives on teachers' views on the significance and aims of minority religious education. The study gives new knowledge about how students' identities are taken into consideration in the classroom. These perspectives also contribute to the discussion of the non-confessionality of education. Through the different perspectives of students, teachers and teacher coordinators the thesis illuminates central themes on how students' identities are supported within the educational context. It also brings into focus the central challenges inherent in minority religious and secular ethics education, which future education needs to meet. Also, the thesis contributes in problematizing the concept of education in the "own" religion and how education takes into consideration the plural identities of students. These findings give at hand a number of educational implications for the future development of education.

## 8 DISCUSSION

During the course of this study the present system of religious education has been increasingly subject to public and academic discussion. Religious education has been subject to numerous newspaper, TV-debates, and several public seminars, also one public seminar recently organized in the Finnish Parliament (Finnish Parliament 2013). The lively discussion is partly connected to the current curricular reform, which is to be completed by 2016. In this reform the general separative organization of religious and secular ethics education will remain unchanged, at least in the comprehensive school, and the curricula will be based on the current Basic School Act (§13 454/2003) (National Board of Education 2014; Iivonen 2013). However, in spring 2014 the Government decided in the budgetary framework for 2015–2019 to cut costs by increasing the minimum number of students required for the provision of religious education from 3 to 10. This change will have an important effect on minority religious education in future years, and puts in question the students' equal rights to religious and secular ethics education. The change does not include Lutheran and Orthodox religious education nor secular ethics, and does therefore not affect all forms of religious education equally. Particularly the small classes in religions such as Catholicism, Buddhism, Baha'i and Krishna will be strongly affected and the number of classes reduced (Pyhäranta 2014).

The debate on how religious education is to be organized in the future is ongoing. The recent initiative of Kulosaari Secondary School in the metropolitan area to develop semi-integrated religious and secular ethics education has been highly debated. This school tries-out joint classes for religious and secular ethics groups in grades 7 and 8 for such content that is according to curricula common for all instruction groups. This initiative has been criticized in regards to the rights of religion and secular ethics students to their own instruction. The atheist organization Länsi-Uudenmaan ateistit ry made a complaint to Southern Finland Regional State Administrative Agencies regarding the legal right to organize education partly as joint classes. However, the classes were not by the Agencies seen as violating the law. The semi-integrated classes have therefore been continued in Kulosaari Secondary School and also other schools in the metropolitan area have shown interest in implementing the model (Halla 2013; Kuokkanen 2014) The semi-integrated education model is also followed up in a current research project (Poulter et al. 2014).

Kallioniemi (2013a) argues that Finnish religious education has reached a crisis point. This point of crisis has emerged importantly through the increasing diversity in the Finnish society and schools as well as the emergence of new

trends internationally in regard to the aims and functions of religious education. As Loobuyck and al. (2011, 9) argue religious education is a hot topic in many European countries where the religious landscapes have substantively changed. Within this discussion there is an observable move in many countries from education *in* religion to education *about* religion, and particularly about *religions* in plural. As Himanen (2012) argues, the current political and ideological trend emphasizes that all citizens should be open to religious and philosophical plurality. Religious education is perceived to have great value as it can contribute to social cohesion and the development of those abilities that students need as citizens living in a multicultural society (Himanen 2012, 183–4, 213). Countries with non-confessional approaches have commonly moved in the direction of a knowledge-based school subject. Also the Council of Europe argues for religious education to give students impartial information about beliefs, values and practices of different religions and beliefs, in a way that encourages independent and critical thinking (Himanen 2012, 184, 197–202; Council of Europe 2008a). These perspectives emphasize that the central aim of religious education is to give a broad based general education, which encompasses a plurality of religions and beliefs. Kallioniemi (2013a) argues that the current model of education in Finland cannot adequately reach these aims and instead he argues for the development of an integrative model of education.

However, the present model of education has strong support within Finnish society, particularly among religious and secular groups. Within the public debate the present separative model is commonly seen as satisfactory as it supports positive religious freedom and the right of the child to education in religion. The present system is also seen as satisfactory in that it recognizes minorities within the society and includes minorities within the public school system. A fundamental value is often seen in supporting students' "own" religious identity. This is perceived as a gateway to gaining understanding of other beliefs and world-views and creates resistance towards integrative models of education (cf. Bolotowsky et al. 2014). The arguments for and against different models of education are complex and politically embedded. This thesis does not give answers in regard to comparing alternative models of education. However, the findings do give further understanding about students' identities and their inclusion in current educational practice, and the specific challenges which lie ahead.

Among the supportive aspects connected to students' identities in minority religious and secular ethics education, which this thesis highlights, include the support of students' cultural and religious backgrounds and the inclusion of students with immigrant backgrounds. Furthermore a sense of belonging and community in the group and seeing the instruction group as a safe and open place have been at the forefront particularly in teacher experiences within this

thesis. These aspects stand out as valuable elements in supporting students' identities and inclusion. However, the support given to students' backgrounds has been shown to be importantly dependent on the size and structure of the mixed age class and the teachers' perspectives on students' identities. Three main challenges stand out for the future development of minority religious education: The practical organization of classes and the presence of structural discrimination, the experiences of exclusion among some minority religion students, as well as the students' relation to education in the "own" religion. These challenges stand out as relevant for separative models of religious education in general.

First, the challenge in the practical organization of classes and the presence of structural discrimination needs to be addressed. This thesis shows how both teachers and teacher coordinators within the metropolitan area have made efforts to organise religious education satisfactorily and work for the education to gain an equal position in the school cultures. However, important structural issues were still clearly present in both religion and secular ethics classes in regards to teacher qualification, textbooks, class-sizes and class spaces. Recent experiences from single schools also show the prevailing difficulties in the organization of education (Jalonen 2013). The lack of qualified teachers is a fundamental concern for the quality of education and puts pressure on the development of teacher education. These challenges are particularly pressing in the light of the increasing diverse school culture. As the number of students from different denominational backgrounds will continue to increase, the viability of the current system is in question. The increasing number of religious communities as well as the increasing internal heterogeneity within the religious communities put high demands on the future organization of education so that it is able to include a large number of different instruction groups (Sakaranaho 2013, 243). The increasing number of non-affiliated students also calls for organizing secular ethics at a larger scale than before. For minority religious and secular ethics education and its students to be an integral part of the comprehensive school substantial resources and efforts are therefore required. The present organization of education aims at supporting students' identities and takes into account minority identities within the school. However, resources are needed to put minority religious and secular ethics education on level with Lutheran religious education and other comprehensive school subjects, and ensure that students are not in practice discriminated against by participating in the minority class.

Second, the challenge of possible experiences of exclusion and discrimination among students as well as teachers needs to be taken seriously. The findings show that some students' experienced themselves being separate and isolated in relation to majority students. Students were also not open about their classes in

the school and there seemed to be fears of being excluded. According to teachers some students were discriminated against, even if direct discrimination was not expressed among students in this study. As previously argued, peer relations are of vital importance for students' identities and the sense of self is centrally developed through others (Reay 2009, 277–278). This has also recently been emphasized by Klingenberg (2014, 190–191) in regard to religious identity development. Openness and dialogue within the instruction class and in relation to other students is essential for developing peer relations. The findings show a lack of dialogue within the school cultures, among both students and teachers, which can create feelings of exclusion as well as discrimination. The positive contribution that the education can have in supporting inclusion within the instruction group stands in contrast to the isolating effects that it may have for some students in the school culture. In the current curriculum reform for 2016 a stronger emphasis on education in other religions will be introduced already in the first grade levels in the new religion curricula (Liiten 2014). Increasing knowledge about different traditions would also be beneficial for the development of inclusion in the school. The organization of joint classes such as for example those in the Kulosaari Secondary School mentioned above also stand out as a tool to further include all students in the school.

Third, the challenge in regard to students' relation to education in the “own” religion calls for clarification. The conceptual issues related to the use of the term “own” religion have been emphasized in this thesis and recently also highlighted by Pihlström (2013, 83–84) who argues that the term easily presupposes that the student has a clear and chosen religious identity in the family. The term also compartmentalizes the individual, which does not encourage dialogue and mutual recognition between individuals. The findings in this thesis show that the way that minority religious education supports students' religious identities includes problematic issues. According to the views of teachers of minority religions the current system of education appears strong in regard to supporting students' identities within a given tradition. However, it does not always take into account the modern plurality and the students' individual identities within the classroom. As a consequence not all students have an equal position in the classes. This puts into question how the education can support all minority students' identities within the current educational practice. It is essential for the future of religious education, whether the current model prevails or not, that the curricular aims and educational practice articulates students' identities as open to change and individual development. Thereby students' identities would not be essentialized and assumed to be fixed to a certain belonging, even if the family background may be of great importance. This could also be supported in the legislation about the organization of classes. Sakaranaho (2013, 248) argues in connection to the

child's freedom to choose instruction group that religion classes should be open to free choice. Choice of religion class would, similarly to language, be open, and not connected to religious affiliation as it is now. This would also ensure stronger negative freedom of religion, also for Lutheran students, who currently cannot choose other religion or secular ethics classes than the Lutheran.

The issue of students' position in religious education is connected to the aims of minority religious education. Supporting the development of students' identities is an integral part of education alongside the knowledge oriented goals. Religious education takes its starting point in the "own" religious tradition. As the scope of education is focused mainly on the "own" religion, this is taken as the main framework. As Hella & Wright (2009, 56) argue adopting a certain framework creates a degree of confessionality in itself, and may therefore strengthen a particular religious belonging. This seems to some degree inevitable in the current model of education. However, the presence of confessional elements such as encouraging religious practice outside class and belonging to the religious community, which this thesis has shown, stand out as actively socializing students in one direction. According to the teacher views in this thesis the current system of education commonly encourages students to a certain belonging and thereby emphasizes education *in* religion, which is not in line with the general curricular aims of the comprehensive school. The pursuit of strengthening students' religious identities in a particular direction needs to be changed into a pursuit of individual and autonomous identity development, which is not predefined to a particular religious tradition.

In accordance with a modern view of socialization the education needs to be open to plurality among students and in society. In the plural society which Finland has become children are surrounded by a multitude of traditions and world-views. The notion of the "own" needs to represent a plurality of traditions rather than only one "own" or parental tradition. In this view gaining understanding of the "own" represents a larger religious and non-religious landscape than only the parental tradition. This may be achieved to some extent within the current separative system. However, in the long run the need to take plurality into account seems to pave the way for an integrated subject of religion and ethics, which can include a larger number of perspectives. As the situation is now, Finland stands uncomfortably between two positions, by neither identifying with integrative education nor being clearly confessional (Sakaranaho 2006, 347). This creates obscurity and leaves room for interpretation as well as confusion among both teachers and ultimately among students. For the Finnish system to remain viable in an increasingly plural school culture, it is essential that religious education and teacher training is developed so that students' are perceived in a non-essential way as actively changing and developing their identities.

## 8.1 Educational implications

The central purpose of this thesis is to give new insights for the development of education. A number of implications for education have emerged. The findings generally call for substantial inputs and resources needed for minority religious and secular ethics education, which can be summarized in three general educational implications:

A first general implication is that structural issues need to be attended to for putting education at level with majority Lutheran education and other comprehensive school subjects. These issues encompass a number of areas in the education, which are essential for how education supports students' identities. The central implications for education are summarized below:

- A primary need to further develop teacher education and ensure that minority religion and secular teachers have formal qualifications. This requires resources, but stands as a prerequisite for achieving equal standards and equality in education. The teacher education of minority religious teachers has been developed since 2007, and provided teacher education for a small number of teachers in Islam and Buddhism religious education. Single teachers in Jewish and Krishna Consciousness education have also earned formal qualification (Sakaranaho 2013, 242). However, the need for more qualified teachers is still important.
- There is a need for textbook development so that all instruction classes have complete textbook series. For Islamic religious education the new textbook series introduced in 2011 for grade levels 1–6 (Aboulfaouz et al. 2011), stands as an important contribution. However, for instance there are no textbooks for Buddhism and Krishna Consciousness religious education classes.
- The practical organization of classes needs to be further developed on the school and municipal level. Classrooms need to be available and the development of scheduling needs to ensure that the minority instruction groups are fully included in the school culture and are treated equally to other subjects in the school.
- The class-sizes need to be measured with consideration of mixed age classes. At the school level it would be vital to keep mixed age classes under 20 students per class as teachers in this study expressed having severe difficulties in achieving curricular goals in large mixed age classes.



- Very small classes of 1–3 students need to be avoided as these were shown to create feelings of isolation among individual students, and the groups lacked dynamics within the instruction for the use of different methods of instruction. The findings of this thesis indicate that from the point of view of the classroom dynamics the student would often benefit from partaking in classes with at least 5 students. The recent governmental decision to increase the minimum number of students required for the provision of education from 3 to 10, ensures larger classes. However, this decision also drastically reduces the number of students entitled to minority religious education (Pyhäranta 2014).

A second general implication is that the findings call for initiatives to increase dialogue and combat individual discrimination in the education. The central implications are summarized below:

- There is a need to encourage more dialogue between instruction classes and the school culture at large. This may be accomplished through common projects, festivities or school events, but also through organizing joint classes, which support students in experiencing a sense of inclusion and openness in regard to the religious and secular ethics education class. A need for increased awareness and communication about the different classes coexisting in the school would be a way to lessen feelings of “us” and “them”.
- The findings imply a need for more knowledge about other religions and world-views also in the grade levels 1–6. This would strengthen students in their knowledge about the plurality in the school and society at large. The current curriculum reform for 2016 plans to introduce other religions to a larger extent in the first grade levels, which is an important step in this direction (Liiten 2014).
- The teachers reports of discrimination in the school cultures calls for increased attentiveness towards discrimination within and outside the classroom. It is central to the well-being of the school culture that students and teachers are not being discriminated against in the minority class. Individual experiences of discrimination in the minority class are not to be taken for granted by minority teachers or other teaching personnel. Instead these experiences are to be taken seriously, and measures are to be taken to come to grip with the cause of discrimination.
- There is a need to advance teacher training particularly focused on intercultural education and mixed age classrooms. This is important to support teachers in their pedagogical skills.

- Teachers' work as interpreters of religions and cultures within the school cultures needs to be recognized in the comprehensive school. The findings also support the need to recognize the valuable impact that teachers with immigrant background have for the development of intercultural education and the inclusion of immigrant students in schools. The general need to include more teachers with immigrant background in the comprehensive school has been stated in several educational policy documents (cf. Holm & Londen 2010, 114).

A third general implication is that the students' identities within religious education need to be specified. The central implications are the following:

- It is essential for the future of religious education that the curricular aims and educational practice articulate students' identities as not being bound to a particular tradition, but as being open to change and individual development. This implies that education actively strives to be non-essentializing in regard to students' religious identities as well as to other identities such as immigrant identity. This could also be further supported in the legislation by making the choice of instruction group open to the child's choice as Sakaranaho (2013, 248) has also recently suggested. Choice of religion class would, similarly to language classes, be open, and not directly connected to parental religious affiliation as it is now. This would also ensure stronger negative freedom of religion not to choose a particular class.
- The pursuit of strengthening students' religious identities needs to reflect a pursuit of individual and autonomous identity development, which is not predefined or fixed to a particular religious tradition seen as their "own". The presence of confessional elements such as encouraging religious practice outside class or the belonging to a religious community stand out as actively socializing students in one direction, and should not to be encouraged. Instead the education needs to develop further the education in the direction of learning *about* and *from* religion rather than *in* religion.
- In accordance with a modern view of socialization the education needs to be open to diversity among students and in society. In the plural society in Finland children are surrounded by a multitude of traditions and world-views. The notion of the "own" religion needs to represent a plurality of traditions rather than only one "own" or parental tradition. In this view gaining understanding of the "own" religion represents a larger religious and non-religious landscape than only the parental tradition.

In closing, the above educational implications illuminate the need to develop minority religious and secular ethics education. These inputs are vital for the future development of the Finnish model of religious education. To ensure the benefits of a separative model of education it is essential that all instruction groups reach the same quality of education, and that no students are discriminated by participating in a minority instruction group. Furthermore, identity development within religious education needs to be seen as an ongoing process where religious identities are not seen as predefined. This would be a step forward in taking into consideration students' plural identities and inclusion in the school cultures and society at large.



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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1.

### Field study 1: Contact letter and request for consent to parents

#### Subject: Consent for educational research

To the parents of \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Harriet Zilliacus and I am a Ph.D. student at the Department of Education at University of Helsinki. My thesis concerns the meanings and impact of religious education, particularly for students with a multicultural background. Students of multicultural background refers here to students who either themselves or whose one or both parents have moved to Finland permanently or for a longer time period. The aim of the research is to advance knowledge about students with multicultural background and their integration, and to contribute to developing the religious education in Finland. The main funders of the research are Helsinki City, Nylands Nations fonder and Svenska kulturfonden.

The division of [name of the educational division of the municipality] has granted a research permit for this research for the time period 14.9.2009-1.6.2010. The research methods are classroom observation and interview. I would like to observe 2-3 [name of the religious/ secular ethics] classes in the autumn and spring term and do 2-4 individual interviews. The observations will take place during normal class hours and the interviews will be made immediately after school. In addition to the research permit I need **your written consent**, that your child may take part in the research. All observations and interviews will be confidential, which implies that the name of your child will not appear in the research report. The school and students will be given other names so that they cannot be identified, and possible sensitive material will be re-written so that individuals remain unidentified. Interview records and personal data will be destroyed after the research has been completed. The remaining research material will be transferred to the Finnish Social Science Data Archive, which makes it possible to use the material in future research. Student participation is voluntary which means that a student has the right to disrupt his or her participation at any time during the course of the

study. I hope you will give your consent to your child taking part, and that the participation will be a positive experience for your child!

Please contact me, if you have further questions! I include a form for your consent and a short summary of the research project.

Best regards,

Harriet Zilliacus, M.Ed., Ph.D. student  
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Helsinki University  
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\* \* \*

#### Consent for participation in educational research

- I give my consent to my child's participation in Ph.D. student Harriet Zilliacus' research.
- I do not give my consent to my child's participation in the research.

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's name; \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to the school secretary or class teacher.

## **Appendix 2.**

### **Field study 1: Contact letter to teachers**

Dear teacher,

My name is Harriet Zilliacus and I am a Ph.D. student at the Department of Education at the University of Helsinki. I am doing research within multicultural education and my doctoral thesis concerns religious and secular ethics education for students with multicultural backgrounds. I have just received a research permit to do part of my field study in [the name of the school] (in grades 1–6) during this school year.

I hope you are positive to this research being undertaken in your school and that I may do classroom observations in your classes. My research methods are classroom observation and interviews, which will be primarily made with students but also with teachers. I include in this e-mail as an attachment a brief summary of my study, and a copy of a letter addressed to parents for their consent for their children to participate in the research.

I would, if possible, like to begin my field study as soon as I have received the parents' consent for the research in week 40. I received the following time schedules for your classes from the school secretary, and would like to check with you that these times are correct [...].

I look forward to getting to know the school and hope to hear from you soon!

Best regards,

Harriet Zilliacus  
Harriet Zilliacus, M.Ed., Dr. Stud.  
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## **Appendix 3.**

### **Field study 1: Interview guides for student and teacher interviews**

#### **Interview guide for student interviews**

Introduction: In this interview I will start by asking a few questions about who you are and how you like school, and then we will talk about what you think about your religious/secular ethics classes. Please tell me if there is anything you do not understand or anything you wonder about during this interview.

#### 1. Background questions

- Name
- Age
- Class
- Religious education/secular ethics group
- Home language
- Country of birth/nationality

#### 2. Introduction questions

- Can you tell me something about your class?
- What school subjects do you like in school?
- What do you do in the breaks?

#### 3. Tell me about your religious/secular ethics classes.

- What do you think about the classes?
- What do you learn in the classes?
- Now you have been learning about [...]. How has this been?
- What else have you been learning?
- Can you tell me something that you have liked in class?
- Has there been anything you have not liked in the class?
- Do you have a book for this class? How do you like the book?
- What kind of homework do you get?
- What is your teacher like? How would you describe him/her?
- Do you think that religion/secular ethics is an easy or a difficult subject? How is this, can you give an example?
- Have you made some visits [to a church, mosque or other places] with the class?

4. How is it for you to be in an "own" separate group?

- Have you always had religious/secular ethics education as now, in your own group?
- How do you like there being students from different classes in the group?
- Have you become friends with the others in the group? Do you keep together in school?
- Do your friends in your class know that you are [name of religious affiliation or the civil register]. What do they think about it?
- Have you learned about other religions, that your peers belong to?
- Do you find that you learn about religion in school the same way as at home /and in your religious community?
- Does your religion have different rules for boys and girls? Can you give an example?
- Do you learn about these different rules in the religion class?
- Older children (in grade 5–6): Would you rather learn about different religions so that all students are in the same class, or as now have religion in your own religion?
- What do you think is important to learn in the religion/secular ethics classes?
- Is there anything you think should be different in religion/secular ethics classes ?

5. Can you tell me something about your own and your families religion (/ about not belonging to a religion or Church) “

- What does this mean for you and your family to be a [name of religious/nonreligious affiliation]?
- Does all your family members belong to the same religion?
- Can you tell me something about what you believe in/your religion]
- Do you often think about the fact that you are [name of religious non-/belonging]?

6. What does the word “religion” make you think of? Can you give a few examples?

- What does the word “God”/ ”Allah” make you think of? Can you give a few examples?
- Do you talk about religion at home?
- Who has taught you about religion? (the family, friends, the religious community, school)
- Do you go to a Sunday school or other club part of [the name of the religious community]

- Do you and your family have some traditions or parties that are part of your religion? Tell me something about them.
  - Do you have friends who also are [name of religious affiliation]/who do not belong to a religion
  - Do you have relatives who also are [name of religious affiliation/]/who do not belong to a religion
  - Immigrant students: Is it different for you to be [name of religious affiliation] here in Finland than in your home country?
  - Is religion an important part of your and your family's life?
7. How do you think your own and others' faith and beliefs go together?
- Do you think that people of different religions can live peacefully together and get along?
  - Do you think that is difficult to have a different faith/beliefs than most others in the school?
  - Do you in some way feel different?
  - Is your religion different from your school friends and if so, in what way?
  - How do you know what religion your friends have?
  - Has there been times when you have felt outside because a) you are [name of religious affiliation] /because you do not belonging to a religion]? / b) because you are an immigrant?
  - What kind of faith does your closest friends have?
  - Do you talk about religion at times with your friends? If yes, what do you usually talk about?
  - Do you sometimes avoid talking about religion? Why?
  - What kind of experience do you have of other friends' religion? Can you remember a particular situation?

Thank you for the interview!

## **Interview guide for teacher interviews**

### **1. Background questions**

- Name
- Religious education/ secular ethics group
- Religious/Nonreligious affiliation
- Country of birth
- Nationality
- Home language

### **2. Teacher background**

- Can you tell me about your background to become a teacher of religion/secular ethics?
- What is your previous work experience?

### **3. Teaching minority religion/secular ethics classes**

- Can you tell me about your classes – how would you describe them?
- What are the religion/secular ethics classes about?
- How do you structure the classes?
- What kind of methods do you use?
- Do you have textbooks or other materials?
- Do you give homework?
- How well do you think the curriculum provides starting points for the education?
- Do students learn about other religions in class? If so, from what grade level?
- What kind of challenges do you see in minority religious/secular ethics education
- How have the schedules worked out?
- What are the advantages in the minority religious/secular ethics education?

### **4. Student groups**

- How would you describe your student groups? (Today and previous groups)
- What kind of importance do you see the lessons as having for students?
- How do children in your view experience the separate instruction group?
- Is there a sense of community in the group?
- Do you find that there are variations among the students regarding their interest?

- Is this depending on their background within the family and religious community?
- How do you as a teacher experience that there are students from different class levels in the group?
- Have you experienced that the children have been bullied because they participate in the minority instruction group?
- Do you think that it is difficult for students to have a different faith/belief than most others in the school?
- Do you think that they feel in some way different or outside?
- Do students in your experience commonly talk about different religion and worldviews among their peers?
- Are there differences between boys and girls in the classes in regards to their interest in the subject?
- Are there gender differences taught in the education itself?
- Religion teachers: What role does learning about the religious language have in the religious education?
- Secular ethics: How do you perceive that religious minority students integrate in the secular ethics instruction group?
- What role do you see minority religious/secular ethics education as having in integrating students into Finnish society?
- How can education support the cultural backgrounds and religious identities of students?

##### 5. Future of education

- How do you see the future of minority religious/secular ethics education?
- Would you rather see that students would learn about different religions all in the same class, or as now in their own religion or secular ethics?
- How many hours of religion/secular ethics would in your opinion be optimal?
- What kind of importance do you see religious education as having in the future in society?



## **Appendix 4.**

### **Field study 2: Contact letter to teachers**

#### **Contact e-mail letter to teachers**

Dear teacher,

I have received your contact information from teacher coordinator [name of coordinator]. I am doing research for my doctoral thesis, which focuses on minority religious and secular ethics education in the comprehensive school grades 1-6. Last winter I investigated students' experiences of education in five different religious and secular ethics classes in one comprehensive school in the metropolitan area. Now, in the continuing of my research I investigate minority education from the perspectives of teachers and teacher coordinators. In this study, the main research themes are the group dynamics within the classrooms as well as the integration of minority students in the school culture.

I hope to interview as many teachers as possible within the municipal areas of [name of municipality]. I hope you would also like to be interviewed. I will contact you by phone next week to make a possible appointment for the interview. If you wish to, you are also welcome to send me by e-mail a few times, which would be convenient for you for an interview within the next couple of weeks. I can come to your school where you are at the time. You need to book atleast 45 minutes for the interview.

The research interviews are confidential and all participants' identities will be protected. Pseudonyms are used for both individuals and schools names. I would be pleased to send you more information about the study if you wish so.

Spring greetings,

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## **Appendix 5.**

### **Field study 2: Interview guides for teachers and teacher coordinators**

#### **Interview guide for teacher interviews**

##### 1. Background information.

- What is your educational background?(class teacher, subject teacher, other university degree, other relevant training or education)
- Do you have formal qualification as a minority religious/secular ethics teacher?
- What teaching experience do you have? Generally and within religious/secular ethics education.
- In which schools and in how many classes do you teach this academic year?
- What is your nationality?
- Do you have an immigrant background?
- Do you belong to a congregation or the civil register?
- What kind of a relation do you have to your own religious community/congregation

Theme 1: The integration of education, teachers and students in the school culture

##### 2. The organisation and status of education

- In what teaching facilities does your education take place?
- How do the schedules of the education work? Are your classes scheduled at the same time as Lutheran education?
- Do you have students who transfer from another school in the area to attend the classes?
- What sizes are the instruction groups and which grade levels are included in them?
- What textbooks and materials do you use in the education?
- What kinds of teaching methods do you use? (Is the classroom space, the class size or lack of teaching technologies an obstacle for using different teaching methods?)
- Does the subject have the same position and status as other subjects in the schools? Among teaching personnel? Among students? (How is it perceived as different?)

- Does minority religious/secular ethics education get visibility in the school, for instance through the day's openings or in connection to festivities?
- Have you had projects in the schools, which have aimed at developing minority religious/secular ethics education?

### 3. The integration of teachers in the school cultures

- Do you feel as part of the teacher community?
- Do you take part in teacher meetings in the schools?
- Are you involved in other activities in the schools aside from the minority religious/secular ethics classes?
- Are you often contacted in connection to students' religions and religious traditions?
- Do you cooperate with other religious/secular ethics teachers? What is this cooperation like?
- Can you tell me something about your relationship with the school principals?
- What is your relation to other teachers like?
- What kind of relation do you have to the coordinating teacher?
- Do you experience discrimination in the school? (In relation to your work or in general)
- Can you get a substitute, if you are on sick-leave?
- How do you perceive your own teacher competence and possible needs of teacher training?
- What significance does your own immigrant background have in your teaching?
- Is the teachers' own religious affiliation in your opinion important for the education?

### 4. The integration of students and student groups in the school/s

- How do you think that your students like the minority religious/secular ethics classes?
- Do you feel that your students are proud of their own religion and class?
- Do you think that they feel different in relation to other students?
- Are students in your view open about their religion/worldview among other students and teachers?
- How do the schedules and class changeovers work for your students?
- How is diversity accepted in the schools? Is it seen as a richness or an obstacle?

- Do you think that other teachers and the principals understand students who have another world-view and have other values than the traditionally “Finnish”?
- What kind of experiences do you have in regard to how students’ religions are taken into consideration in the schools?
- Have students’ diets or fasting created problems in the schools?
- Do your students commonly take part in festivities in the schools?
- Do Muslim students have a space for prayer in the schools?
- Has there been discussion about wearing a veil in the schools? Or about the presence of other religious symbols and traditions?
- Does for example the gymnastics teacher accept that a Muslim student does not swim with the others?
- Is there understanding within the schools that there may be students who travel for religious reasons during the school term?
- Have you heard or personally experienced that your own students have been discriminated in the school? How have you acted in these cases?
- How do you support students’ minority position in the school and in society at large?
- Have you had students who have changed instruction groups? Why?

## Theme 2: The identities of students in minority religious/secular ethics classes

### 5. The dynamics of the instruction group

- What are in your view the central challenges within the instruction groups? (What do you see as challenging for the students?)
- How would you describe the strengths of the instruction groups?
- What kind of preferences do students have in regards to religious/secular ethics education? What are they interested in?
- Do students have questions about other religions and the other religious and secular ethics classes?
- How active are the students in class in your opinion?
- How do you take into account the students’ different backgrounds in the education?
- Do students with Finnish and immigrant background have different needs?
- Do you find that there are differences between girls and boys in the classes?
- Do you see differences in regard to social class and ethnicity?
- What kind of age-related differences do you find among students?
- How do students work as a group?
- Do there appear groupings within the class?

#### 6. The students in the education

- What kind of significance do you see religious/secular ethics education as having for the identity development of your students?
- Do you think that your students have an own religious identity from the start?
- Do you experience that there are differences in students' identities in regards to those who have an immigrant background and those who do not?
- How significant a role do students' own questions about religion and world-views have in the education?
- Do the students express differing, and also critical opinions?
- What kind of significance does the students' engagement in the own religious congregation have for the education?
- Are there students in your instruction groups for whom the religious identity is problematic or questioned? (For instance as a result of feelings of difference, bullying, racism)
- Does a student who has a weak or multi-religious identity need particular attention or support?

#### 7. The teacher's role in supporting the students' identities

- If you compare your religious/secular ethics classes to other classes of religious education or secular ethics in the schools, what kind of differences do you see?
- What is the significance of the curriculum in your education? Do you think that the curriculum functions well?
- What are your thoughts about confessionality or non-confessionality of education?
- Is it possible to draw a line between education that includes religious practice and that which does not?
- Does it have significance whether a teacher belongs to a congregation or the civil register?
- What kind of significance do other religions play in your instruction?

#### 8. The future of religious/secular ethics education

- What do you think about the future of religious/secular ethics education
- Are you satisfied with the current system of education?
- Do you find that a common subject of religion and ethics would be an option?
- What do you think about the alternative of a parallel subject of ethics as an option?

## **Interview guide for teacher coordinator interviews**

### **1. Background information**

- What is your educational background?
- When have you taken the position as teacher coordinator?
- Can you describe your job description as a teacher coordinator?

### **2. The time schedules and the coordination of the peripatetic teachers' work**

- What is the number of minority teachers in your municipality?
- How many of these teachers have an immigrant background?
- How many instruction groups exist, and how many groups do teachers have?
- What are the sizes of the instruction groups?
- How do the schedules work? (For teachers/for students)
- How have the teaching facilities for the education been arranged in the schools?
- Are there students who come from other schools in the area to participate in classes?
- Are the groups, which include first to ninth graders? Do you have groups, which have been divided into only one or two grade levels, such as first to third graders and fourth to sixth graders?
- Are you involved in the purchase of textbooks?
- Are the costs of organizing minority religious education paid for centrally by the municipality or by schools themselves?
- Are parents given information about the religious and secular ethics education alternatives from the municipality or from the schools?

### **3. The integration of teachers in the school community**

- Can you describe what your cooperation with the schools is like?
- Are you in close contact with the school principals?
- Do the religious and secular ethics subjects in your opinion have the same position and status as other subjects in school? (For instance among rectors and teachers)
- How do you perceive the teachers' need for teacher training and formal qualification?
- Can minority teachers get a substitute teacher, if needed?
- Does your job description include professional guidance, supervising or teacher training?
- Have you experienced that teachers have been discriminated in the schools?

- Have you (within the municipality or in cooperation with other municipalities) had any particular projects or in other ways have sought to develop minority religious education?

#### 4. The integration of the students and student groups in the schools

- Are you often contacted regarding students' religions?
- Do you think that difference is accepted in the schools? (Is difference seen as a richness or an obstacle?)
- What kind of experiences do you have in the schools in regards to taking students religious backgrounds into account?
- Have the students' diets and fasting created problems?
- How about festivities in the school?
- Have there been discussions about space for prayer in the school?
- Has the use of veil been a source of discussion? How about other religious symbols or traditions?
- Has swimming in regards to Muslim students created discussion?
- Do students within the municipality have the right to two free days in connection to a religious festivity?
- Does the fact that some students may travel for religious reason during the school term create discussion?
- Has discrimination of students come to your knowledge?
- Have there been students who have changed groups? Why?
- Have you received feedback from parents regarding the education?
- Have there been questions from the parents regarding non-confessionality of education?

#### 5. Generally about the system of education in religious and secular ethics.

- When you compare how the different instruction groups function, what kind of differences do you see? What kind of similarities do you see?
- Are you satisfied with the current system of education and its coordination?
- What do you see as the strengths of the current system?
- What do you see as most important to develop in the future?

