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How schools navigate between the demands presented by secularisation and the increasing plurality of religious traditions has become a very topical issue in many European countries, including Finland, in recent decades. The question is both practical and philosophical by nature because the ways in which various beliefs and values are represented in school practices and teaching content profoundly concern the educational mission of the schools. However, despite the topicality of the issue, little attention has been given to teachers' perceptions on whether public schools should, or should not, provide space for various religions and worldviews to become visible within the school life, and how schools should respond in practice to the perceived needs. In order to gain new knowledge on the topic, this study investigated Finnish teachers' and university students' (N=181) perceptions of the representations of religions and worldviews, based on the perspectives of inclusion and exclusion. The statistical analysis revealed three factors titled as 'Religiously responsive approach', 'Secularist approach' and 'Equal visibility

approach'. According to the main findings, current and future educators show various degrees of inter-religious sensitivity but principally supported the equal visibility of various traditions, rather than favouring strongly inclusivist or exclusivist practices.

Introduction

The issue of how different religions and worldviews are approached and represented within education have become increasingly prominent issues in many countries in Europe and North America during the last few decades (e.g. Hill 2017; Miah 2017; Moore, 2015; McGoldrick, 2011; Commission of Religious Education 2018). The topic is urgent also in Finland where, likewise to the policies and legislation of many other countries, the right to both practice religion and the right to abstain from religious practices are constitutional rights. However, the ways in which schools show, support or suppress religious traditions and customs is a topical question in Finland, as well as in many other countries (e.g. McGoldrick 2011; Hemming 2011). A recent example about the tensions related to the topic can be found in North American context of Canada, where the Coalition Avenir Québec has suggested a bill that would ban the use of all religious symbols in the public sector, including schools (Globalnews 14 April 2019). If passed, the bill would have significant implications for the education sector as neither teachers or students would be allowed to wear any religious symbols during school hours. The secularism bill has gained both strong support as well as great opposition (e.g. Chatelaine, 3 April, 2019). Even though similar discussions are not currently going on in Finland, tensions concerning the relationship between religion and school are visible, for example, in press and media discussions about how schools should represent and accommodate different religious and non-religious traditions in their everyday practices as well as in their festival traditions (e.g. Niemi, Kuusisto, and Kallioniemi 2014, Niemi forthcoming).

Although questions of cultural and religious encounters have been central in many societies for a long time, they are fairly new, and require special attention, in countries such as Finland. Because of its geographical location, national history and demographic character, Finland's concern with diversity and cultural plurality has focused primarily on those minority groups and neighbouring countries that have a shared history with it. However, the increase of various types of religious and non-religious communities in the country has been rapid from the 1990s onwards. For example, the amount of registered religious communities doubled from 49 communities in the beginning of the year 2000 and 110 communities in 2015 (Ketola et al. 2016). As an example, the practicing of Islam has increased tremendously in Finland after the waves of immigration that took place first in the 1990s and again in the 2010s, making it the largest non-Christian religion in the country (Martikainen 2015). These changes in the religious landscape are also reflected in the Finnish school context and have brought forward the need to renew educational practices to better suit individuals with various home languages, cultures or worldviews (e.g. Sakaranaho 2018).

As education is one of the primary ways of maintaining and renewing a sense of social cohesion and community within a society, it is crucial to critically discuss the ways in which different religions and worldviews are represented in public education. Questions of religion have become an increasingly topical issue in political debates across Europe. Especially Islam is often portrayed in these discussions as being non-compatible with European traditions and values (Casanova 2009; Eger and Valdez 2014; Miah 2017). The role of religion has also been highlighted in recent discussions about safety and security as several governments have drafted policies for schools to prevent ideological extremism that may lead to violence (Ghosh, Chan, Manuel, & Dilimulati, 2017). While aiming to support the national cohesion, studies have shown that in some instances these types of policies have led to situations where certain groups, especially Muslim students,

have been put under more scrutiny than others and this has led to even more tensions within the community (e.g. Hill, 2017; Miah, 2017). Related to these tensions a recent study from the Finnish context shows that there are strong viewpoints among politically active Finnish youth that associate Islam as a security threat (Niemi, Kallioniemi, and Ghosh, 2019).

These types of tensions highlight the need to address how religions are and should be portrayed in public education. Whereas multiple studies have been conducted about teachers' attitudes towards religion and religious education in various European and North American countries (e.g. Miller & McKenna, 2011; Ziebertz & Riegel, 2009; Ubani, 2018), there is sparse knowledge about teachers' and student teachers' attitudes towards different ideals and practices concerning the representations of religion in public schools in the Finnish context. Particularly important in this context are teachers' experiences as public education is one of the main ways to reproduce and transmit the core values of societies and teachers are the ones who in practice translate and carry out the objectives of the curriculum (e.g. Ubani & Ojala 2018, Niemi, Benjamin, Kuusisto & Gearon 2018).

For gaining new knowledge on this topical issue, the study described in this article investigated Finnish teachers' and university students' (N=181) perceptions of the ways in which religion should and could be represented in public schools. The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of those university students who specialize either in religion or education or both as well as the perspectives of those who work as teachers or guidance counselors. The study answers the research question: 'According to Finnish teachers and teacher students, how should different religions and worldviews be represented in schools?'

Religion and Secularism in the Finnish School System

Historically, Finland, like the other Scandinavian countries, has had a strong Christian tradition and the Evangelical-Lutheran church has played an important part in the formation of the school system (e.g. Taylor, 2009). However, the membership rate of the Evangelical-Lutheran church has declined from 95 percent in 1950 to 71 percent in 2017 whereas the proportion of people not belonging to any religious community has risen from 3 percent to 26 percent. (Official Statistics Finland 2017). However, it needs to be noted that the official affiliation of the person does not necessarily indicate an individual's personal experience of their religion or belief and that not all practising faith groups are official organizations and thus visible in the statistics. For example, it has been estimated that the number of people practising Islam in Finland is many times higher than is shown in the statistics, and is currently around 1,3 percent of the population (Martikainen 2015). The changes in the religious memberships are, nonetheless, noteworthy and they are reflected, in part, in societal changes and the ways in which questions about religion have also gained new forms in the school contexts (e.g. Poulter, Riitaoja, and Kuusisto 2016).

As a consequence of the constitutional freedom of religion, Finland does not have an official established church but, instead, the state (cl)aims to take a neutral or balanced approach towards different worldviews and religions. This also follows many international guidelines, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), that prohibit any discrimination based on the personal characteristics of the individual, such as their religion or belief. These orientations and approaches are also represented in the national guidelines that instruct all Finnish schools (National Board of Education 2014; 2018). According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (FNBE 2014), the starting point for fruitful collaboration with the families of pupils includes the teachers' open-minded and respectful approach towards the different

religions, beliefs and traditions that are practiced by the pupils and their families (p. 15). Likewise, the Curriculum states that schools should be learning communities where the pupils learn about themselves and others by collaborating with people of different cultural backgrounds, religious orientations, home languages or worldviews (FNBE 2014, p. 16).

This type of approach is also brought forward in international guidelines published by, for example, the European Council for the promotion of dialogues between different faiths and worldviews in education (e.g. Jackson 2018; 2016). It is therefore important to address religion from a whole-school perspective that involves all actors and activities of the school life instead of focusing, for example, only on teachers of religion. In addition to the general value basis of the Core Curriculum, religions and worldviews are especially dealt with in the school subject of religious education or in its alternative subject, secular ethics (for more information about religious education in Finland see e.g. Kallioniemi and Ubani 2016). In spite of the fact that pupils take different classes depending on their membership of religious communities, all teaching is defined as being non-confessional and it is thus not allowed to include religious practices, such as praying, in these classes (FNBE 2018).

However, even though religions and worldviews are discussed within particular lessons, there exist many tensions related to the representations of religions within other areas of school practices in Finland, as there is in many other European countries. Examples of these include the use of religious traditions or symbols in whole-school festivities (Niemi, Kuusisto & Kallioniemi, 2014), having religious symbols in classrooms (e.g. McGoldrick, 2011) as well as how schools address problems when the content taught at school contradicts the students' personal morals (e.g. Hill 2017). As the historical Christianity in Finland has been followed, and partly replaced, by an emphasis on secularism, a new normality, defined by Poulter, Riitaoja and Kuusisto (2016) as

'secular Lutheranism', has become a predominant, even hegemonic framework for approaching religion also in the school context.

Interreligious Sensitivity in Educational Settings

The pedagogical approaches emphasized in theories of intercultural education focus on the importance of taking pupils' diverse linguistic, religious and other backgrounds into consideration in teaching and learning activities (Jackson, 2016). Likewise, Rissanen, Kuusisto, and Kuusisto (2016) have pointed out that sensitivity towards the pupils' religious identities forms an important part of teachers' intercultural competence. They have also stressed the importance of training future teachers, regardless for their disciplinary focus area, to be self-reflective and critical regarding the neutrality of their own positions in relation to others and, consequently, to develop empathy towards others (Rissanen, Kuusisto and Kuusisto 2016). Recent study, however, shows that Finnish teachers are not always able to separate religion from other dimensions of identities or practices but, instead, teachers were noted to nationalise and ethnicise Islam as well as "religionise" cultural practices (Ubani 2018). From another perspective, the connection between the Finnish culture and Christian religion is also sometimes used strategically to support certain (Lutheran) practices in the Finnish schools (Niemi, forthcoming).

Related to the ways in which cultural and religious diversities are taken into consideration in educational aims and practices, a historical development from assimilationist to responsive ways of teaching can be identified to have taken place from the early 2000s onwards (see e.g. Niemi and Hahl 2018). Whereas teaching practices emphasizing assimilation start from the perspective that minority groups should undergo changes and adopt the values and behaviours of the dominant cultural tradition, a culturally responsive form of teaching starts from the opposite direction and aims to attend to the needs of all students, including the aspects of values and beliefs. In recent

years, attention has increasingly also been given to the importance of recognizing the complexities of people's identities, including those of a religious or cultural character, as people belonging to the same social group may experience them differently (see e.g. Taylor and Usborne 2010).

This main division between assimilationist and responsive teaching can also be applied in discussions concerning the ways in which education should take religious diversities into consideration. From an assimilationist viewpoint, the more religious minorities abstain from their religiously-based practices in the school context, the better integrated they are in the 'secular-Lutheran' Finland (see also Poulter, Riitaoja and Kuusisto 2016; Rissanen forthcoming). On the contrary, a responsive approach highlights the need to cater for different practices and respond to needs stemming from religions and worldviews in an understanding and inclusive manner. However, related to this, a question concerning the legitimation of claims presented in the name of religion and equality of treatment come to the fore. Here the role of governance, the implementation of the states' rules and hierarchies into the educational settings, is central (Ubani 2018).

Previous studies from the Finnish context suggest that religion in schools may be sensitive topic for education professionals. Some problems have been highlighted in the qualitative study by Ubani (2018) that noticed that the prevalent approach of the teachers in a Finnish school was paternising towards minorities as the school professionals tended to solve religious issues without collaboration or consultation with the parents. Likewise, in their study on Finnish teachers' attitudes towards Muslim pupils and their integration, Rissanen, Kuusisto and Tirri (2015) conclude that Finnish teachers are opposed to visible religiosity, especially Islam. However, the findings from Kimanen's (2018) study, suggest that teachers considered exclusivist religious views as problematic but otherwise regarded religious diversity as a natural part of cultural diversity. It is also possible that

some of the differences are due to differences in research methods as anonymous surveys may allow the expression of negative attitudes more easily than interviews.

Related to the ways in which religious diversity is governed in democratic states Bader (2007) promotes a mediating approach between the two urges of excluding religion in the public space and creating 'neo-corporatism' or 'pillarization' where religious communities create their own societies existing in the surrounding society (state). In this mediating approach, which Bader (2007) refers to as an 'associative democracy', the state should guarantee the freedom of religion to all individuals as well as to provide maximum accommodation to religious practices. However, the accommodations should be done within a framework that promotes all individuals' basic rights (paying special attention to vulnerable groups like children, women and dissenters). From this perspective, public support and funding to religious communities should be combined with public scrutiny. Using Muslims' claims for accommodation in education in Western countries as an example, Bader (2007) states that schools should, at the minimum level, accommodate religious food and dress codes, holidays and prayer rooms, but possibly also provide gender-specific physical education as it would not violate the basic rights of others.

From another perspective, Carens (2000) has suggested that there are two conceptions of social justice; the first, neutrality or 'hands-off' approach, refers to a situation in which the state does not support or undermine any conceptions of the good (including culture and identity), and - the second - an 'evenhandedness' approach in which the state aims to balance competing claims for recognition by weighting these in a manner that can be considered as appropriate within the specific circumstances. A similar type of characterisation of approaches can be identified in the ways in which Pierik and van der Burg (2014) introduce the concepts of exclusive and inclusive neutrality. According to them, neutrality, from an exclusive standpoint, is attained only if religious expressions are altogether withdrawn from the public space (Pierik and van der Burg

2014). Following from this, all controversies related to religions are kept in the private sphere of life and both the state and people belonging to minority religions or worldviews can avoid the moral pressure coming from religious majorities (Pierik and van der Burg 2014). On the contrary, neutrality from an inclusivist perspective would include the taking of diverse religious beliefs and practices into account even if it would mean providing them with public support (Pierik and van der Burg 2014).

It is, however, important to note that, despite their names, neither of these approaches are truly 'neutral' as the assumption of neutrality is always based on values (see e.g. Bergdahl and Langmann 2018). Therefore, the aims to reach neutrality can be interpreted as attempts to either establish or create a shared understanding about certain values and forms of behaviour that are accepted by various parties while still recognizing that values, at their core, can never be 'neutral' (e.g. Bergdahl and Langmann 2018). The research design applied to study teachers and teacher students' viewpoints about religious practices in school is presented next.

Research Design

Data and Participants

The study was carried out in the form of a quantitative survey questionnaire during spring 2018. The participants (*N*=181), taking part in three professional training courses focusing on inter-religious and intercultural education. The survey was conducted in the beginning of the courses so that the responses reflect the participants' viewpoints prior to the training. The first group of respondents consisted of university students of theology and education who were participating in a university course focusing on inter-worldview issues in school contexts. Not all of the participating theology students were studying in the teacher education programmes but they were asked to consider themselves as future educators in the survey. The second group of participants consisted of university students

studying in the field of guidance and counselling and who were participating in a course focusing on multicultural and multi-worldview counselling. The third group consisted of teachers, student counsellors, and headteachers who were attending two training days focusing on intercultural and inter-worldview education. This third group of participants had been invited based on their responsibilities in the field of pedagogical development, rather than on their personal interests. Participation in the study was voluntary but the courses and training days devoted time to answer the survey. Having all the voluntary course participants as respondents, regardless of their job description, was considered important, in order to gain a sample that includes both people specialized in religions and those who are not.

The participants were categorized according to their work experience rather than merely looking at their status (working/student) because some of the students already had work or training experience in teaching. The majority of the participants, around 73 percent had more than one year of work experience and, correspondingly, around 27 percent had less than one year of teaching or guidance counselling experience. The gender distribution was uneven as 85 percent of the participants were female, around four percent were male and one percent defined themselves as 'other' or preferred not to say. The majority (96.1 percent) of the participants spoke Finnish as their first language. The year of birth was also inquired but due to technical issues, the data received was partly false and could not be used.

Instruments Used

In order to capture the teachers' and university students' perceptions on how different religions and worldviews should be represented in Finnish schools, the study used items that had been used in previous international studies investigating the role of religion in schools. Measures were mostly adopted from the surveys used in the international project,

'Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries (REDCo)' (Weisse 2010) and 'Encountering Diversity in Education (EDEN)' projects (Kallioniemi, Schihalejev, Kuusisto and Poulter 2018), as these projects had also been carried out in studies focusing on students' experiences of religion in the Finnish school contexts. The scales adopted from previous studies were in parts modified to meet the aims of this study. Most importantly, the wording in each item was consistently changed from their original wording 'can' (e.g. Students can wear small religious symbols in school) into 'should (be allowed to)' (e.g. Students should be allowed to wear small religious symbols in school [e.g. small crosses].) in order to make clear that the survey aimed at measuring participants' perceptions on how things should be in schools, instead of gaining descriptive information about the current situation. The items were also changed into a form that concerned both religious and non-religious worldview diversity, where applicable, instead of only focusing on aspects of religions. The existing instruments were also supplemented with items that were designed specifically for the purposes of this study (e.g. 'If dividing girls and boys into separate groups enables several pupils to participate in educational activities (e.g. swimming), schools should be allowed to carry out such division'). Because the courses in which the data were collected were carried out in Finnish the survey items were first translated from English into Finnish and back to English for the reporting of the study.

Based on the findings of previous studies and theoretical approaches (see e.g. Casanova 2009; Miah, 2017; Pierik and van den Burg 2014), we hypothesised that it would be possible to identify both inclusivist and exclusivist approaches towards religions and worldviews in public schools. Therefore, we used instruments that aimed to measure a) an inclusivist orientation that is favourable and supportive towards the representation of various types of religions and worldviews within schools and b) an

exclusivist orientation that is favourable towards having schools as secular places where the influences and representations of religions are kept at a minimum level. Following from these ideas of inclusivist and exclusivist approaches, the two measurable dimensions were entitled '*Religiously responsive approach*' and '*Secularist approach*'.

The first dimension, '*Religiously responsive approach',* focused on measuring the level of activity and flexibility that the schools should carry out in order to support the inclusion of different types of religious habits and customs. Example items measuring the ways in which schools should support the students' religious diversity and the needs related to this included, 'Schools should provide facilities for students to pray or quieten during school days and 'School should, if possible, seek different ways to follow the curriculum with those students who have religion-based restrictions (e.g. singing, drawing)'. In contrast, the second dimension, '*Secularist approach*', aimed to capture the ways in which schools should not take the students' different religious and worldviews into consideration. Example items include, 'The narratives used as part of the educational content in subject teaching should not contain references to religious experiences' and 'Schools should favour religiously neutral seasonal greetings like 'Happy holidays' instead of 'Merry Christmas'. The full instrument used is available in appendix 1. All statements in the survey were answered with a 5-point Likert scale in which 1 referred to strongly disagree and 5 to strongly agree. In order to test the hypothesis about the two distinct approaches and the items used to measure them, we used a principal-axis factor analysis that is described in the following.

Analysis Procedures

Descriptive statistical analyses were performed to obtain the frequencies, mean scores and standard deviations for each item, measured on a five-point Likert scale (see Table 1). After this, a principal-axis factor analysis was carried out. The conditions for factor

analysis were met, with Bartlett's test yielding a chi-square value of 693.03 and $p = 0.000$, and Kaiser-Meyer Olkin's test yielding a value of .750. To obtain a clear interpretation of the factors, three factors were conducted using direct oblique rotation. The solution of three factors gave the clearest form of interpretation, with the factors explaining 47.25 per cent of the total variance in the data. Three scales were formulated on the basis of the factor analysis. Variables which had a loading of over .40 were included in the scales whereas items that had side loadings of over .30 were not included in the scales. Cronbach's alpha scores were calculated for each scale.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The mean scores and standard deviations of each item at basic level are shown in Table 1 (see Appendix). The descriptive statistics show that the highest mean scores were given to statements '1. Religious dietary requirements should be taken into consideration in school meals' and '5. Students should be allowed to use small religious symbols in school (e.g. small crosses, etc.)'. In addition, the statements '6. Students should be allowed to use visible religious symbols in school (e.g. headscarves)' and '11. Everybody should have the right to speak about their religions or worldviews in school' received high support from the respondents.

Conversely, the lowest scores were given to statements '3. Religion should not be represented visibly in school.' and '2. Schools should favour religiously neutral seasonal greeting like "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas"'. The low mean scores and small standard deviations related to statement 3 thus show that the majority of the respondents were not against the representation of religion in schools, at least not in the forms that the educators are used to, like wishing Merry Christmas.

Factor Analysis

The findings of the principal axis factor analysis confirmed the existence of the two factors entitled '*Religiously responsive approach*' (Cronbach's alpha for four valid items is 0.7) and '*Secularist approach* (Cronbach's alpha for three valid items is 0.6). However, in addition to these two dimensions the factor analysis revealed a third dimension that was entitled '*Equal visibility approach*' (Cronbach's alpha for four valid items is 0.6). The valid items for each factor are presented in Table 2 below. Variables 2, 5, 6, 10 and 12 were excluded from the factor analysis because of their high side-loadings.

[Table 2. near here]

As the results in Table 2 illustrate, the items loading to factor 1, '*Religiously responsive approach*', consisted of items that insisted on accommodations to worldview diversity. These items contained acceptance of exemptions from certain school activities, they supported gender-based grouping of students based on religious needs when necessary, and they were also in favour of providing students with spaces to pray in the school. The items loading to factor 3, '*Equal visibility approach*', showed tolerance and acceptance towards the representation of religions in the public space of the schools (such as the use of religious symbols or acknowledging different types of festivals in schools) but the favoured approach was not as proactive as in the items captured in the '*Religiously responsive approach*'. Contrary to factors 1 and 3, the items loading to factor 2, '*Secularist approach*', insisted on the absence or invisibility of religion at school. The variable concerning the taking of students to religious worships loaded negatively on it. The means and standard deviations of the three formulated factors are illustrated in Table 3 below.

[Table 3 near here].

The descriptive statistics of the formed factors show that respondents agreed the most with 'Equal visibility approach' whereas 'Secularist approach' gained the weakest support. The difference between the 'Equal visibility approach' and the 'Secularist approach' was statistically highly significant (t= 13.8, df = 168, p=0.000). Likewise, the difference between the second highest mean score of '*Religiously responsive approach*' and 'Secularist approach' was statistically highly significant (t= 3.4, df= 166, p=0.001). The difference between 'Equal visibility approach' and 'Religiously responsive approach' was also highly significant (t = 9.3, df = 163, p = 0.000).

Related to the background factors, the analysis did not show statistically significant differences between the respondents based on their gender. On the other hand, the length of working experience differentiated respondents' perceptions (F = 12.6, p = 0.000). Those respondents who had had over 10 years of work experience emphasised more the 'Secularist approach' (M = 3.3, s = 0.5) than respondents who had worked for under 3 years (M= 2.9, s = 0.5). The difference between the two respondent groups is statistically highly significant (p = 0.000). These findings thus suggest that teachers in pre-service and induction stages show higher levels of flexibility in accommodating practices based on the students' religious or worldview needs than teachers with longer work experience.

Discussion

This study has investigated educators' perspectives on the internationally topical issue concerning the representation of religions and worldviews in school activities and educational content (e.g. Hill, 2017; McGoldrick, 2011; Hemming, 2011). Based on theoretical underpinnings and previous studies (e.g. Bader, 2007; Carens, 2000; Pierik and van der Burg, 2014), this study hypothesised that two main approaches, namely, an inclusivist and an exclusivist orientation towards the representations of religions in

school, would be identified in the data. The analysis confirmed the existence of the two factors entitled 'Religiously responsive approach' that comes close to Bader's (2007) idea of associative democracy and 'Secularist approach' that includes the ideas of political secularism that favour the minimal representation of religion in public spaces (see also Casanova 2009). However, deviating from our original hypothesis, the majority of the current and future educators participating in this study were most supportive of a third dimension that was titled as 'Equal visibility approach' that supported the representations of both religious and non-religious worldviews in a moderate way. This approach, highlighting the equal treatment of different interest groups, thus resembles the idea of creating social justice through practices aimed at 'evenhandedness' (Carens 2000). These findings bring forward a different outcome about teachers' attitudes than they study by Rissanen, Kuusisto and Tirri (2015) that suggests that Finnish teachers do not support the visibility of religions in schools.

Although a larger sample of data would be needed to further confirm the three factors and to gain more information on the background factors, the results of this study suggest that the representations of religion in schools consists of multiple details that are not regarded as equally acceptable by the teachers. For example, the variables in the 'Equal visibility' factor did not include fostering religious practices or codes of conduct in schools even though they were supportive of religious-based dietary requirements. These subtle differences between the various types of inclusive and exclusive practices can be expected to become increasingly important issues of education.

Historically Finland has not been supportive of strongly secularist approaches but that is not very experienced in accommodating various types of diversities either (Casanova 2009; Poulter, Riitaoja, and Kuusisto 2016; Sakaranaho 2018; Ubani 2018). However, as the religious and worldview diversity becomes more versatile and visible in

Finland (e.g. Official statistics 2017; Martikainen, 2015), it is essential to raise educators' critical awareness of the justifications behind practices both within schools and within teacher education in order to prevent the taking of certain guidelines as given or 'neutral' (see Bergdahl & Langmann, 2018) starting points for educational practices. These issues are topical internationally as shown by the recent debates in Québec and elsewhere, that focus on defining the role of religion in the public sphere and that thus have notable implications for schools and educators (e.g. Globalnews May 5 2019, McGoldrick 2011, Moore 2015, Hill, 2017). These international developments highlight the need for teachers and teacher students to be able to reflect upon the role that religious and other worldviews play in schools. Extending beyond the scope of this study, it would also be important to gain more knowledge about the ways in which teachers and teacher students discuss the implications following from various types of inclusivist and exclusivist practices.

As one of the study's main results, the findings showed that students and teachers with the least work experience were least in favour of the secularist approach. This type of differing in perceptions may partly reflect the fact that questions of diversity, interculturality and inter-religiosity have been discussed more and from various perspectives in educational literature and in teacher training in recent years than in previous decades (e.g. Niemi & Hahl 2018). However, the outcome may also be related to the experiences, both challenges and increased insights, that the teachers and educators have gained during their work in schools. As the only significant background factor was related to work experience, it would be essential for future studies to investigate the qualitative aspects behind these differences in attitudes. Future studies should also pay attention on the role of teachers and other actors in the decision-making processes focusing on school guidelines (see Ubani, 2018).

Related to the limitations of this study, it needs to be acknowledged that the study was carried out in a special target group of university students and teaching professionals taking part in the training sessions related to intercultural and inter-religious issues. The findings cannot thus be suggested to be representative of all Finnish pre-or in-service teachers' viewpoints but rather they bring forward new approaches to discuss and study pre- and in-service teachers' inter-religious sensitivity (see also Rissanen, Kuusiso & Kuusisto, 2016). Instead of thinking about school practices according to inclusivist or exclusivist ideologies, the findings of this study show that the topic can also be viewed from the perspective of governance (see also Ubani, 2018) by identifying how the practices are supporting responsiveness, evenhandedness or secularisation. This type of approach can help to mediate discussions and develop school practices from the perspective of overall aims, instead of focusing on individual cases or issues. These findings are important for supporting the teachers' pedagogical reflection on questions of religions and worldviews during both their pre-service and in-service phases. By providing insights about the diversity of viewpoints included in both inclusivist and exclusivist approaches, the findings of this study highlight the need to recognize the multiple interpretations that theoretical ideas may have when turned into educational practices. The approach and findings of this study are beneficial for developing teachers' professional competences to address issues of religion in Finland as well as in other countries.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Biographical notes

Pia-Maria Niemi, PhD, is a university lecturer and teacher educator in the field of Religious and Worldview Education in the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research interests focus on developing subject teacher training, intercultural and inter-worldview education and the sense of membership in schools. She also has a subject teacher qualification in the fields of religious education and psychology.

Anuleena Kimanen, PhD, is currently a postdoctoral researcher in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki, in the project "Developing intercultural and inter-worldview sensitivity in education and counselling". Her research focuses on religious education, especially from pupils' perspectives, and interfaith competencies.

Arto Kallioniemi, Ph.D. is Professor in the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Helsinki. He has specialized in religious and worldview education. Furthermore, he is interested in issues related to inter-worldview dialogue and human rights. He has published several academic articles, books and also textbooks in religious education. Professor Kallioniemi holds the UNESCO Chair on Values, Dialogue and Human Rights.

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Appendix

Table 1. Items, means and standard deviations of the measures.

Items	M	s	N
1. Religious dietary requirements should be taken into consideration in school meals.	4.04	0.07	172
2. Schools should favour religiously neutral seasonal greetings like 'Happy holidays' instead of 'Merry Christmas'.	2.07	1.01	173
3. Religion should not be represented visibly in school.	2.04	1.00	174
4. Students should be allowed to be absent from school during their religion's festivals.	3.06	0.09	173
5. Students should be allowed to wear small religious symbols in school (e.g. small crosses).	4.04	0.08	181
6. Students should be allowed to wear visible religious symbols in school (e.g. headscarves)	4.01	0.09	172
7. Schools should provide facilities for students to pray or quieten during school days.	3.03	1.01	173
8. Students should be excused from participating to certain classes because of their worldviews (e.g. sports classes that include students' dancing).	3.00	1.01	173

9. The narratives used as part of the educational content in subject teaching should contain an equal number of references to religious and non-religious experiences.	3.05	1.01	174
10. Schools should allow religious activities (e.g. students' praying in break times) to take place as part of school life.	3.00	1.01	172
11. Everybody should have the right to speak about their religions or worldviews in school.	4.03	0.08	174
12. Schools should take into consideration also other festivals than the Lutheran ones if there are students from other faiths and cultures.	3.07	1.00	171
13. If dividing girls and boys into separate teaching groups enables the students participation into certain educational activities (e.g. swimming), schools should be allowed to do so.	3.07	1.00	172
14. Schools should be allowed to take students to events organized by religious communities (e.g. Church visits) as long as they have a consent from the students' guardians.	3.08	1.00	172
15. School should, if possible, aim to come up with different ways for meeting the curricular requirements with those students who have	3.04	1.00	171

religion-based restrictions (e.g. singing,

drawing).

16. The narratives used as part of the educational content in subject teaching should not contain references to religious experiences.	3.00	1.01	174

Table 2. Factors and item loadings.

	Religiously responsive	Secularist	Equally visible
8. Students should be excused from participating to certain classes because of their worldviews (e.g. sports classes that include students' dancing).	0,767		
15. School should, if possible, aim to come up with different ways for meeting the curricular requirements with those students who have religion-based restrictions (e.g. singing, drawing).	0,740		
7. Schools should provide facilities for students to pray or quieten during school days.	0,729		
13. If dividing girls and boys into separate teaching groups enables the students participation into certain educational activities (e.g. swimming), schools should be allowed to do so.	0,484		
3. Religion should not be represented visibly in school.		0,735	
16. The narratives used as part of the educational content in subject teaching should not contain references to religious experiences.		0,696	
14. Schools should be allowed to take students to events organized by religious communities (e.g. Church visits) as long as they have a consent from the students' guardians.		-0,688	
1. Religious dietary requirements should be taken into consideration in school meals.			0,675
11. Everybody should have the right to speak about their religions or worldviews in school.			0,626
4. Students should be allowed to be absent from school during their religion's festivals.			0,525
9. The narratives used as part of the educational content in subject teaching should contain an equal number of references to religious and non-religious experiences.			0,398

Table 3. The means and standard deviations of the three formulated factors.

Factors	M	s	N
S1. Religiously responsive approach	3,3	0,8	168
S2. Secularist approach	3,1	0,5	172
S3. Equal visibility approach	3,9	0,5	171