Meaning-making in religious education: a critical discourse analysis of RE departments' web pages

Published in:
British Journal of Religious Education

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal

Meaning-making in religious education: a critical discourse analysis of RE departments' web pages.

James Nelson*, School of Education, Queen's University Belfast, 69-71 University St, Belfast BT7 1HL

Tel: 028 90975904

j.nelson@qub.ac.uk

*James Nelson is Lecturer in Education, coordinator of the PGCE in Religious Education and programme coordinator of the Masters in Education Studies at Queen's University Belfast.

Abstract

This paper explores what some have described as a 'crisis in meaning' in religious education (RE). One region, Northern Ireland, is chosen as a focus for exploring the question of meaning-making as it provides an example of 'agreed ambiguity' - where a common syllabus for RE is believed to be ascribed different meanings by different schools. The webpages of RE departments were used as a data source, and a critical discourse analysis (CDA) method was employed to investigate how a sample of departments construct meaning in RE. The findings identify three dominant discourses in relation to RE in the sample: Christian Community, Cultural Hegemony and Personal Quest. It is noted that when giving meaning to RE, schools show commonality and difference across three key areas: 'stake and interest'; 'pupil agency'; and 'dealing with difference'. In conclusion, it is noted that, where freedom is given to schools to construct meaning in RE, it is possible to sustain a common curriculum across schools with very different views of the subject, however, this flexibility has implications for issues of power, identity, autonomy and difference which may require mitigation. It is suggested critical education may be a valuable partner in this work.

Introduction

In regions where religious education (RE) is delivered as a school subject in publicly funded schools, the question of what it means to be religiously educated has been a persistent site of academic inquiry, a fact that is reflected in many contributions to this journal where the problematic and contested nature of the subject is regularly scrutinised and critically evaluated (see for example Court 2013; Barnes 2014b). This debate may at times seem removed from the everyday realities of classrooms but two reports in the United Kingdom (UK) have highlighted the critical importance of how meaning is given to religious education in schools and the significance of the debate for both the quality and the future of the subject. *Living with Difference* (Butler-Sloss 2015) and '*Does RE work?*' (Conroy et al. 2013; Lundie 2010; Conroy et al. 2012) express concern about the wide diversity in provision and the lack of agreement over the content and aims of the subject. The '*Does RE work?*' (*DREW*) research is particularly frank in its assessment of religious education in schools and the 'crisis of meaning' within it (Conroy et al. 2012, p.311); in their findings (Conroy et al. 2013) religious education is variously described as 'dysfunctional' (p. 220), 'conflicted' (p. 85), 'superficial' (p. 123), 'strange' (p. 55), and 'impoverished' (p. 129). The general message is that throughout the UK, teachers of religious education are confused about what they are doing and, to cover the confusion, have displaced *meaning* with *purpose* in the subject through an emphasis upon assessment and examination outcomes. Their research confirms what a number of scholars have argued for some time in relation to the potential for confusion in religious education (Wright 2007; Barnes 2006; Barnes 2014b), yet there are contexts, like Northern Ireland, where a certain amount of ambiguity and difference in the framing of religious education curriculum and policy is celebrated, for it has allowed schools to interpret RE in ways that suit their own needs and also to sustain a shared curriculum in a religiously divided context. There is evidence that this tolerance of flexibility in how RE policy is interpreted at a local level is part of other education systems too. In her investigations of RE in different school-types in England, Ipgrave (2012) emphasises the significance of institutional ethos as well as the values and attitudes of teachers in relation to meanings given to RE – especially their attitudes to religion. Similarly, the work of Fancourt (2016), Matemba (2015) and Skeie et al (2013) underline the significance of contextual issues in how religious education is constructed in England, Scotland and other European regions.

The key question is whether this contextual flexibility in meaning-making is something that sustains the subject or undermines it. Butler-Sloss believes it to be the latter and calls for a new name for the subject and for agreement about its meaning in all schools, which should be informed by human rights values and standards (Butler-Sloss 2015). This idea of a new subject which frames the study of religion in a way that is explicit and distinct from religious meanings is supported by Afdal (2014) who believes that two distinct communities of practice are identifiable, one religious (the domain of the believer) and the other educational (the domain of the religious scholar) and it is the latter meaning which should be employed in publicly funded schools. Vermeer (2012) concurs and, like Erricker (2010), argues that coherence and clarity can be achieved in religious education when, like History, it establishes meaningful rules and principles which define it as an academic discipline.

Faced with these demands between flexibility and prescription, it is also important to go beyond the question of 'what meaning?' to 'who decides the meaning?'. Critical educators would point out that in addition to issues of clarity and coherence, the contextual question of 'who decides?' or 'who influences the meaning?' raises importance issues of power and control (Giroux & Giroux 2006) and attendant issues of equality and justice, particularly in plural socio-cultural environments (Kincheloe & Steinberg 1997). Again, in Northern Ireland, the question about who decides the curriculum is contentious (Richardson 2007; Barnes 2002).

Given these issues around the construction of meaning in RE in Northern Ireland, the region serves as a particularly helpful site for investigation of 'agreed ambiguity' and so it is the purpose of this paper to discover how RE departments in schools of different management-type in Northern Ireland articulate their aims; what dominant discourses they employ; and what these indicate regarding how the meaning of the subject is constructed in relation to broader assumptions, interests and values of the departments and how particular conceptions of religious education relate to and position students within them. As will be seen, the outcomes from these questions have significance for others beyond the immediate context of Northern Ireland as they provide insights into relationships between conceptions of religious education and issues of identity, power, autonomy and agency. To begin, a brief introduction to the particular context of Northern Ireland is provided followed by a discussion of the methodological approach before the findings are discussed in detail.

Context of religious education in Northern Ireland.

All schools in the region share a common syllabus for religious education (DENI 2007) although the school population remains largely divided along religious lines with Maintained schools and Catholic Grammar schools having majority Catholic populations; Controlled schools and Voluntary Grammar schools having majority Protestant populations; and only a small Integrated school sector with religiously mixed populations. With respect to the religious climate or ethos of these schools, Barnes (2005) has categorised Catholic schools as 'resolutely confessional' (p. 128) and Controlled schools as 'weakly confessional' (p. 129). He defines weakly confessional to be where, in terms of religious provision, 'the balance is tilted firmly in favour of the secular over the religious' (p. 129) and where religious education is justified on 'strictly educational grounds' (p. 128). Armstrong (2009, p.298) agrees that Catholic schools are 'faith-based and unapologetically confessional' but is reluctant to define the religious character, or the approach to religious education, in other schools. What both agree on is that, in historical terms, all school types have a Christian influence (what could be described as 'faith-informed'), however both authors lack any reference to contemporary primary data to support their claims and so the precise nature of the stance adopted in these schools with regard to religion and religious education remains an open question.

Since 1992 the curriculum for religious education has been the responsibility of four of the region's Christian churches (Church of Ireland, Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church and Methodist Church). The *Northern Ireland Core syllabus for Religious Education* (DENI 2007) prescribes a list of content which must be taught across the various phases of schooling for 5-16 year old students under three

main learning areas: The Revelation of God; the Christian Church; Christian Morality. The most recent iteration of the curriculum was produced in 2007 following a process of review. The revisions made were relatively minor with one exception: a fourth learning area of content was introduced for 11-14 year olds (Key Stage Three) which required the study of any two world religions.

The syllabus lacks an explicit pedagogical methodology and only offers brief learning objectives alongside a list of topics that must be covered. However, as might be expected given its authorship, the syllabus shows a bias for Christianity in the quantity and representation of the content chosen. The language of the learning objectives is not dogmatic yet clearly seeks to encourage a sympathy for a Christian perspective. At Key Stage 4, for example, the syllabus states: 'Pupils should develop an awareness, knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the key Christian teachings… and develop an ability to interpret and relate the Bible to life' (DENI 2007, 31). By contrast the objectives used for the study of world religions exclude 'understanding', 'appreciation' and the ability to relate the study to one's life; here the syllabus simply states that pupils should 'develop knowledge of and sensitivity towards… other religions'. (DENI 2007, 29).

Similar to the Northern Ireland core syllabus for religious education, the local examination specification for GCSE RE (CCEA 2012) adopts a uniform approach, where religious education is a common subject across all schools and shares common learning intentions and agreed standards. However, given the comments of Barnes and Armstrong above it might be expected that the uniformity of language does not reflect the situation in schools, where religious education has variant conceptual meanings in different schools. To date, however, there has been very little evidence in literature relating to differences in how the subject is constructed by teachers in Northern Ireland. This is a deficit which this research seeks to address.

Research design and methodology

Other researchers have used a range of research designs in order to understand what approaches are taken to the teaching of religious education, from large-scale mixed-methods studies (Conroy et al. 2013; Jackson 2011) to smaller scale qualitative studies (Afdal 2014). This study was designed as a small scale qualitative study drawing data from webpages produced by religious education departments. Considering the nature of the data source and the research questions, I chose discourse analysis as a suitable research approach. Skeie (2013, p.260f) has noted that this method has particular value in researching approaches to the teaching of religious education and a number of studies have done so with interesting results (Osbeck & Lied 2012; Buchardt 2010).

Using data from webpages raises a range of methodological and ethical questions for the researcher (Markham & Buchanan 2012). In particular, to what extent are web pages to be treated as 'publications' and to what extent are their authors 'participants' in the research (Bruns & Burgess 2012)? Given that the data in the web pages used for this research did not provide any authorial

attribution, are contained within public and freely accessible institutional websites, and contain explicit intentions to market the schools to prospective pupils and employees as well as to communicate with current pupils and parents, I considered the data to be 'public record' documentary sources (McCulloch 2012).

The sample was selected from all Post-Primary schools in Northern Ireland which have webpages produced by the school's Religious Education Department. Of 200 Post-Primary schools in Northern Ireland, 146 had a page dedicated to Religious Education (73%). From these 146 websites a sample of eighteen schools was generated by dividing the schools with RE webpages into six groups, by school management-type[1], and randomly selecting three schools from each group. Of these, the majority (13) were in towns and rural locations and the remainder (5) were based in cities. The text from each webpage was copied into a separate Word document and uploaded to MaxQDA, a CAQDAS (Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software) tool for analysis.

Within texts on research methods, discourse analysis is widely regarded as an umbrella term covering a number of different approaches and, in situations where it is used, is in need of qualification (Flick 2014; Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson 2013). In this case the approach is in the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA has a particular interest in investigating the underlying political and social aspects in discourse, including power relations and latent assumptions about what is 'right', 'normal', 'acceptable' or 'the way things ought or ought not to be' (Gee 1999, p.2). In providing a framework for analysing texts, Fairclough (2003, p.26) suggests the researcher begins by focusing upon ways of 'acting, representing and being' in the text. Potter (2004, p.609) translates this into three questions for the researcher confronted with a text: 'What is the discourse doing? How is the discourse constructed to make this happen? What resources are available to perform this activity?' The texts were read multiple times and, initially, coded through the lens of each question separately in order to understand the action of the texts. A primary outcome from the deconstruction of a text in this way is to understand how social affiliations, identities and memberships to groups and institutions are defined (Gee 1999). In other words, the questions alert the researcher to the meaning-making function of the webpages and so helps to answer the research question noted above. As well as Potter's three questions, multiple tools have been developed in the CDA tradition to assist with data analysis and these are drawn on in different combinations, depending on the nature of the texts and the purpose of the study. In this study, three CDA elements from Fairclough (1995) were considered to be of particular value for understanding meaning-making in the texts: genre, lexico-grammatical analysis and intertextuality. Applied to the text, these provided a way of deconstructing meaning-making in macro-terms (through a consideration of 'genre'), in micro-terms (through a lexico-grammatical analysis) and in contextual terms (through an intertextual analysis of how various authoritative sources are woven into the final webpage).

---

[1] Controlled; Controlled Grammar; Maintained; Voluntary Grammar; Voluntary (Catholic) Grammar; Integrated

Finally, it was possible to 'disentangle' (Jäger & Maier 2009, p.36) discourse within the texts and delineate discursive 'strands'. Any text can contain multiple forms of discourse and, within the data analysed for this study, there were examples of overlapping and cross-cutting discourse but it was also possible to identify three dominant discourse strands: a 'Christian Community' discourse, a 'Cultural Hegemony' discourse and a 'Personal Quest' discourse. Within the eighteen schools the majority could be categorised as employing one of these discourses in a dominant way. In one case there was insufficient data to categorise the discourse and in two cases there were overlapping discourses with no dominant approach. The purpose of the next section is to explicate the actions and resources employed in the texts under analysis in order to show how these categorisations were made and what they mean.

Findings and Discussion

As noted above, a core question asked by critical discourse analysts is 'What is the text doing?' From the perspective of a discourse analyst, the web pages under scrutiny are not 'just communicating information' but are forms of social activity. Willig (2013, p.109) labels this the 'action orientation' of text, Fairclough (1995, p.14) uses the term 'genre' which he defines as a 'socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity'. Following analysis of the texts, three main actions were identified: Defining 'stake and interest' in religious education; articulating pupils' agency in a religious education classroom; and dealing with difference. These will be dealt with in turn and will include consideration of Potter's questions of construction and resourcing as well.

Defining 'stake and interest' in religious education

Potter (2004, p.617) notes that a concern with 'stake and interest' is a pervasive theme in many texts and it emerges as a strong theme on the webpages. By 'stake and interest' he means how people display 'the basis on which they are talking' or how they attempt to construct a position of neutrality. Evidence of 'stake and interest' were shown explicitly in the majority of texts under analysis through the statement of the aims, objectives or mission of the department. In a number of schools these were characterised by a 'Christian Community' discourse, for example:

> *In Religious Education then we seek to explore Christian revelation with the students in the context of their concrete situation with a view to fostering faith.*
> *"In his goodness & wisdom, God has chosen to reveal himself and to make known the hidden purpose of his will...so that he may invite and take (all people) into fellowship with himself" (Dei Verbum 2)*
> *(School N, Catholic Maintained)*

In addition to the explicit aim, the stake and interest of the text is also constructed in a number of other ways including intertextuality and assumptions. Fairclough (2003, p. 47f) describes 'intertextuality' as the integration of external sources into a text, something which, he believes, warrants special attention in relation to how the external sources are 'framed' within the text under analysis. In the case of the webpages under analysis the range of external texts included Bible verses, doctrinal statements, exam specifications, policy documents and textbooks. In the case of School N, the authority of the wider church is drawn upon to make clear the basis upon which religious education is taught. Similarly, other Catholic schools' webpages draw upon church authority through referring to texts of universal status, such as the Bible, and texts of local status, such as textbooks:

THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE, AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL. JOHN 10:10

> *Religious Education at Key Stage 3 follows the Diocesan approved Fully Alive*
> *programme. Our aim is to make the RE Department a place of faith and learning. In the*
> *spirit of the Revised Curriculum, we offer pupils a wide variety of active learning*
> *opportunities through which to grow in faith, explore the mysteries of life, deepen their*
> *relationship with God, and establish right relationships with others. As pupils mature in faith,*
> *our hope is that their lives bear witness to the witness of the Gospel.*
> *(School K, Voluntary Catholic Grammar)*

Again, the explicit interest of the religious education department is shown to be the cultivation of Christian faith in students, through the religious education programme. This Christian Community discourse is evident in all of the Catholic schools in the sample, which indicates a certain level of coherence and conformity around an understanding of religious education in these schools and reflects the fact that reports and statements of the purpose of Catholic religious education are regularly made at local, regional and world-wide levels (The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference 2001). It also confirms the views of Barnes (2005) and Armstrong (2009) noted earlier who described Catholic education as strongly confessional, however, there is evidence in the sample which challenges Barnes' general representation of Controlled schools as 'weakly confessional' (2005, p.129). While the Christian Community discourse is most evident in the webpages of Catholic schools in the sample, it is not exclusively so. This is a finding which confirms Yohanis' (2015) findings of a strong Christian confessional approach taken by some teachers in Controlled schools. For example, School C draws on Biblical authority to declare its interests in teaching religious education within a community based on the teachings of Jesus:

> *RE at [School C] exists to enhance the Spiritual, Moral, Social & Cultural development of the*
> *student in preparation for this life and the next. Every Child matters and is cared for in a*
> *loving community with moral values based on the Teachings of Jesus.*
> *In the RE Department we aim to –*
> *•Encourage our pupils to view life as a precious gift from God and to share and learn form*
> *each others [sic] experiences and enjoy life together to the full.*
> *•Cultivate appropriate self esteem based on a biblical view of the identity of Jesus which*
> *enables pupils and staff to develop appropriate confidence and act with initiative,*
> *encouraging positive sacrificial loving attitudes, consideration and respect towards*
> *themselves, their peers, staff and God.*

From the sample of eighteen schools around one third contained statements of aims that positioned religious education as an activity that occurred within a community where Christian identity was largely assumed. In such texts belief in the Christian God was regarded as unproblematic and justifications for the subject were based on sources that had authority within the community – sources which arguably have limited validity in plural contexts. This is a confessional form of religious education in line with that described by Donaldson (2007, p.238) in the Northern Irish context as 'Christian-based', and where the study of religions other than Christianity is regarded as 'the natural outworking of Christian engagement with others' (Donaldson 2007, p.238).

Turning to other webpages, in four of the sample, it was possible to identify an alternative discourse around Christianity which was labelled Cultural Hegemony. In these texts Christianity was given a privileged place in religious education but this position was not underpinned with reference to specifically Christian sources of authority. In these texts there is an assumption of a more heterogeneous school community, though one where Christian religious values have predominance. Such an emphasis is based upon the importance of the religion in historical and cultural terms to the wider society. The outworking of this argument is to place an emphasis upon the 'academic study of religion' in contrast to the cultivation of faith development:

> *Given the importance and influence of religion in general and of Christianity in particular, both in our history and in the contemporary world, a broad and balanced education for our children requires a place for Religious Studies in the curriculum. Pupils' understanding of history, literature, music, art, and the cultural and political diversity of our modern world is enhanced by an academic study of religion, based on sound educational principles. Also, in our increasingly secular, materialistic and technological society, Religious Studies allows pupils to consider religious and spiritual perspectives on life.*
> *(School G, Controlled Grammar)*

The use of pronouns can be particularly revealing in relation to understanding underlying beliefs within a text (Van Dijk 2006; Fairclough 2000). In the previous examples of Christian Community discourse the collective 'we' is identified as the school or the religious education department, however, in this excerpt from School G the collective pronoun 'our' occupies a more encompassing collective in that it refers to 'our history', 'our modern world' and 'our… society'. This generalist use of the personal pronoun shows the position of the speaker is different. Rather than speaking as a representative of a school community the speaker is a member of society more generally and this extends the in-group to those who can identify with the author's assumptions of society and its history. We are given further clues to the author's views through reference to the 'academic study of religion' and 'a broad and balanced education'. Rather than drawing authority from scripture or church tradition as we saw in the Christian Community discourse, the authority is drawn from the academy and those who value education and see a study of religion as a complimentary aspect to other academic areas, although science is notable by its absence from the list. Overall, the 'stake and interest' in this and similar texts could be described as part of a Cultural Hegemony discourse which

is similar to a position taken by Penny Thompson who regards the privileging of a Christian position within religious education as reasonable on the grounds that '…the state has a duty to instruct its citizens in those structures, institutions and virtues that both constitute and legitimate it' (Thompson 2004, p.69).

As well as the normative claim behind the references to 'our society' in the Cultural Hegemony texts, that on the basis of history and existing social status Christianity ought to be studied, the speaker aligns him or herself with the forces which maintain that social power. What is not explicit in the texts but which, from a critical discourse perspective with an interest in the position of power within the text, is worth highlighting is the flip-side of the alignment with state power – as well as giving authority to the endeavour it also gives control to the state in opening the possibility for the state to use the subject for its purposes. An example of this in Northern Ireland has been the promotion of diversity and mutual understanding elements through religious education in response to community conflict (Richardson 2010). Similarly, in England there has been a statutory requirement on religious education to promote community cohesion, to prevent young people from becoming 'radicalised' and to cultivate British values (Home Office 2011; Department for Education 2014). For some, like Gearon (2013) who is close to the Christian community discourse outlined above, the result is a subject that becomes too politicised and which can lead to a distortion of its core purposes.

A third dominant discourse in five of the sample with respect to 'stake and interest' was that of 'Personal Quest'. In this approach the interests of the school community or any single religious community are seen to be secondary to the interests of the pupils; religious education is to facilitate the pupils in their quest for spiritual and religious meaning.

> *Whether you are seeking to find answers to the origin of the universe or simply trying to discover your 'place in this world', the Religious Studies Department here at [School E] is committed to assist in your quest for answers to these complex issues.*
> *(School E, Controlled Grammar)*

Of the sample, seven schools were identified as having a dominant Personal Quest narrative, although it was also possible to discern a difference within this group. Five of the departments which emphasised the Personal Quest rationale made little or no reference to the values of the department in religious terms or even in relation to the values of the wider school or community. These schools were, with one exception, all Grammar schools with a predominantly Protestant population. The one exception was an Integrated school. By contrast, the remaining two departments aspired that students flourish as individuals 'within their own community' (School R, Integrated), and they were conscious that diverse communities were represented in the school.

With regard to the first position, the priority given to the individual and the lack of reference to any religious position would suggest a neutral approach where no particular religious perspective is

given dominance, however, this would be a premature conclusion. Indeed, Wodak and Meyer (2009) note the need to pay particular attention to discourses which appear as neutral as they are generally indicative of unchallenged assumptions. There is a concern for 'exploration', 'challenge', 'enrichment' and 'holistic development' (School H, Voluntary Grammar) which suggests a constructivist approach to learning. This can also be seen in the excerpt from School E above which addresses pupils directly, and which suggests the students are at the centre of the action with teachers there to 'assist' them. This position is similar to the 'narrative approach' which places the student and his or her hermeneutical inquiry at the centre of religious education (Erricker 2010). In their observations of religious education classrooms, Conroy et al (2013) found that constructivist approaches had a strong influence throughout the UK but they deemed these extremely negative in that they created a conception of religious education that is 'insensitive to foundationally distinct religious and metaphysical worldviews' (Conroy et al. 2013, p.222). Other religious educators such as Barnes (2014a) are equally critical of an approach which prioritises the personal; he believes it is indicative of a liberal or post-modern position where the truth of religion is relativized and the touchstone of religious education becomes the private experience of the individual. The end result, he believes, is a religious education that does not take religion seriously and can seriously distort the religion it seeks to represent.

Those departments which adopted a Personal Quest approach but emphasised the 'individual in community' perspective were in Integrated schools. Arguably this position comes closest to the 'committed pluralism' identified by Conroy et al (2013, p.129) and favoured by them as more effective in making religious education 'work' than the attempted neutrality that they observed in some schools. The fact that not all the Integrated schools in the sample adopted the same approach reflects Montgomery et al's (2003) findings that the concept of integration is approached differently in different schools. The distinction between these two types of approach to community in the Personal Quest discourse is particularly clear in relation to how each deal with difference and this will be addressed more fully in the relevant section below.

Articulating pupils' agency
The second dominant action observable in the texts under study was the way they articulated the personal agency of the students. A common product of discourse analysis studies is an enriched understanding of the identity and identity relations of those in the text (Tamatea et al. 2008). In this study, when attention was paid to how the identity of the pupils was constructed, it was possible to notice differences in the agency ascribed to them. In using the term agency I am following Matusov (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane 2014) who understands agency as the ability of the individual to be creative, to initiate new meanings and to transcend culture and history. For Matusov, like other discourse analysts in the Foucaultian tradition, agency is not a sense of the rational self or of free will but is 'an effect of power and constituted in discourse' (Charteris 2016, p.191).

In the Christian Community discourse the agency of the pupil is subsumed into the faith community in that the pupils' interests are assumed to be in step with the interests of the community. Evidence

of this can be seen in what Fairclough (2003, p. 56) describes as the 'existential assumptions' of the text. For example, in the extract from School K, above, the desire to help students 'deepen' or 'mature in' faith assumes that a faith is present to begin with. In several webpages from Catholic schools the term 'catechesis' is used which denotes an 'education in the faith… with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life' (Catholic Church 1994, para.5). On other web pages students are 'encouraged' to view life from a biblical or Christian perspective (School C, above), 'live Gospel values' (School O) or avail of opportunities for prayer and meditation. While it must be said that there is no compulsion in the language, there are normative assumptions in relation to the students' actions and choices because the religious education class and the religious community are regarded as synonymous: 'Each religion class takes place in the context of a Christian community' (School N). Further, the identity of the individual finds its fullest expression in conforming to the ideals of the community, in this case the person of Jesus:

> *The department understands and aims to promote that the project of Catholic education is the idea and practice of the formation of the whole person in the manner of Christ who is the whole Person. The department understands its role is to integrate the person in sense of Justice and Truth and their history and the world about them with the presence of Christ.*
> *(School P)*

As a result, pupils are offered 'guided' or 'informed' choices as they learn about religious, moral and philosophical views. Similarly, they are also expected to conduct themselves in ways that are guided or informed by the faith tradition:

> *The RE department aims to play its part to ensure that [School C] is an orderly, well disciplined, caring and loving community, in which consideration for others, courtesy and good manners are expected as normal with our students having a positive attitude towards discipline, behaviour and authority both human and divine.*
> *(School C)*

Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane (2014, p.24) argue that agency is 'always there' but it is shaped by culture and history. In these extracts the discourse gives pre-eminence to socio-cultural elements which constrain the opportunity for the student to exhibit agency or, in the words of Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane, they provide limited 'material for the personal agency to work with (i.e. transcend)' (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane 2014, p.24).

By contrast, those schools which employ a 'Pupil Quest' discourse in articulating the aims of the RE department, keep socio-cultural context in the background and frame pupil identity in terms of the individual learner. There is an emphasis upon the development of individual skills of decision making and critical thinking as a result of which religious education students are 'enriched' and 'challenged' (School I, Voluntary Grammar) as well as having their 'individual needs, aspiration and talents' (School H, Voluntary Grammar) met. On one level, the discourse here gives strong 'authorial agency' (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane 2014) to learners, seeing them as growing in maturity and increasing in their ability to shape their own lives as they wrestle with 'questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life' which will ultimately 'prepare them for adult life' (School J, Voluntary Grammar). Yet, in each of the sample which adopted a Personal Quest discourse this freedom is constrained by

the purpose of achieving 'academic excellence' (School I) and 'good examination results' (School J). For Matusov (2015, p.78), where learners have strong authorial agency the endpoint of the learning is not preset by the teacher, but he recognises that in the majority of classroom learning scenarios a tension exists between the agency of the learner and the 'didactic purpose'. So, we can see that the framing of the agency of the learner is quite different between Personal Quest and Christian Community discourse, but, to different degrees, both constrain the learner and direct them towards certain ends.

While the tension requires some teasing out in the Personal Quest and Christian Community discourse, it is more explicit in the Cultural Hegemony discourse, where the values of choice and freedom for pupils are expressed alongside a view that one particular position will be privileged in the classroom:

> *Throughout their GCSE studies, students are encouraged to have an open and honest*
> *approach to the studying of these demanding issues. However, there is an underlying*
> *conviction that the Bible is the Word of God and is highly relevant to the world in which we*
> *live.*
> *(School D, Controlled Grammar)*

Overall, we can see that pupil agency is, to some degree, inevitably constrained and can be influenced by the positions RE departments adopt in two areas – recognition of diversity in pupils' beliefs and the extent to which the endpoint of the subject of RE is prescribed. Within these areas, the level of agency can be understood in relation to two elements: the 'materials' provided for students to work with and the 'authorial power' awarded individuals. The data is particularly helpful in illustrating a range of positions taken on this question, including ones which are more conservative in their approach to agency. Positions represented in the religious education literature tend to represent religious education in terms of its potential for individual autonomy, like Hella and Wright (2009, p.62), who see religious education in terms of the empowerment of young people to make 'informed judgements about the ultimate nature of reality and the implications of this for the way in which they choose to live their lives'. However, the data above suggests this is not straightforward and the extent to which pupils are empowered is significantly influenced by the 'stake and interest' of a department.

Dealing with Difference
Understanding the orientation to difference in a text is fundamental to understanding the social interaction of which it is a part (Fairclough 2003, p.41). In an effort to explicate different forms of difference Fairclough differentiates between five scenarios:

> *a) openness to, acceptance of, recognition of difference; an exploration of difference, as in*
> *'dialogue' in the richest sense of the term*
> *b) an accentuation of difference, conflict, polemic, a struggle over meaning, norms, power*
> *c) an attempt to resolve or overcome difference*

d) a bracketing of difference, a focus on commonality, solidarity
e) consensus, a normalization and acceptance of differences of power which brackets or
suppresses differences of meaning and norms
(Fairclough 2003, p.41f)

Within the Christian Community discourse, the texts tend towards position (e), where assumptions are made about the homogeneity of the pupils in the religious education classroom where, for example, all pupils '*explore Christian revelation… with a view to fostering faith* (School N).

A second way difference is dealt with in the texts comes close to (c), where difference is acknowledged but it is problematic, and it is not fully resolved. For example, School E (Controlled Grammar) uses the language of the Core Syllabus to outline the learning intentions for the first three compulsory Christian elements of the syllabus stating that in their department pupils will 'develop an awareness, understanding and appreciation of' and 'relate to' Christian content. In contrast, the learning intention for the fourth element on world religions is framed very differently: 'In light of the new KS3 curriculum, the focus for our World Religions will be Judaism and Islam.' Notably, the corresponding learning intention from the Core Syllabus (that pupils will 'develop knowledge of and sensitivity towards… other religions') has been omitted and the phrasing suggests that the study of religions other than Christianity is carried out primarily from a duty to fulfil the curriculum.

Reflecting the Cultural Hegemony discourse, this acknowledges that other positions exist, but that one should be privileged. Not all departments who employ a Cultural Hegemony discourse show the same wariness towards difference as the example above. Elsewhere cultivating 'respect for others' is regarded as important although 'the other' is undefined or considered to be at a distance from the current situation:

> *The R.S. department seeks to further the general aims of the school and has a particular role*
> *to play in the whole school's aim 'to foster a respect for spiritual and moral values and a*
> *tolerance towards other races, religions and ways of life.*
> *(School G, Controlled Grammar)*

Where texts show characteristics of a Personal Quest discourse, difference is regarded as something inevitable but, as noted above, there are two approaches to difference within this discourse. One is similar to the Cultural Hegemony discourse where difference is connected with life beyond school. Pupils should learn to show 'respect for and sensitivity to others' (School J) and 'understand and appreciate them' (School Q) when they are encountered in 'adult life', 'at university or college' or 'the world of work'. When difference is encountered in these environments it will allow those who have studied religious education to employ the skills of criticality, evaluation and debate learned in the religious education classroom. To some degree we can distinguish variance between difference as it is described in the text and 'dealing with difference' as an action of the text. In the former it is

regarded as something important to be recognised and explored while in the latter it is put at a distance from the immediate context and bracketed out from the lived experience of the students.

The second position sees difference in ontological terms. It is not regarded as what happens in a different time and space but part of the lived experience of the students; difference is regarded as something that is embodied within the school:

> *The curriculum is designed to meet the needs of all children and takes account of the*
> *different cultural backgrounds that the College welcomes.*
> *(School R, Integrated)*

It is known that RE teachers often choose to deal with difference by minimising it or avoiding interactions that would draw attention to it (Everington et al. 2011), yet many scholars (Erricker 2010; Wright 1993; Jackson 2000) argue that the most effective way to teach religious education is to acknowledge the beliefs which pupils bring to class as a starting point for developing religious understanding. In this view, dealing with difference in open and creative ways is likely to create a more inclusive classroom environment and encourage meaningful inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. Constructing difference in ontological terms, rather than something which is beyond the perimeter of the school, would seem to be an important step in that direction.

Conclusion

This study has shown that in Northern Ireland, while there is a common RE curriculum across all key stages and a shared language in exam specifications about a subject called 'religious education', the meanings given to the subject and the authoritative sources used to justify its place in the curriculum vary significantly between different RE departments in post-primary schools. The critical discourse analysis has enabled us to deconstruct these differences to understand that decisions made about meaning in RE have implications for how RE departments address issues of power, identity, agency and difference. From a traditional CDA perspective, this alerts us to the potential for misuse of power, misrepresentation of identity and difference or constraint on autonomy and so it would seem reasonable to conclude with some elaboration of these themes, however, Rogers et al (2016) explain how, over time, CDA results have become much more inclusive of reconstructive frameworks. As a result, in the findings from contemporary CDA studies, in addition to a critical analysis of power structures, there is likely to be a discussion of the potential for agents within those structures to affect change through identifying social relations which have the potential for leading to 'emancipatory ends' (Rogers et al. 2005). In education a similar type of approach is adopted by theorists in the fields of critical education and critical pedagogy (Cho 2013). In the remainder of this section, then, consideration is given to conclusions that can be drawn in both deconstructive and reconstructive terms from the themes of 'stake and interest', 'pupil agency' and 'dealing with difference', and noting possible connections with critical education.

Firstly, in relation to 'stake and interest', similar to the outcomes of other studies (Fancourt 2016; Matemba 2015), the findings show that significant differences can exist in how RE is constructed within one region in the UK and also across different school types in the same region. Not only does this show the extent of the freedom and power that schools and even individual RE professionals have in constructing aims in religious education but the critical discourse analysis also draws particular attention to the fact that these differences go down to foundational epistemological levels. What is also evident is that the power and influence being exerted is in some cases explicit but in others implicit therefore the extent to which pupils and parents are aware of the *stake and interest* of the RE department is likely to be inconsistent. The need for a pedagogy which adopts an explicit approach to teacher and pupil positions is argued for by Wright (2007) in his critical religious education but the findings from various research projects in the UK suggest that there is continued confusion around the purposes of the subject and the manner in which policies relating to it are implemented (Matemba 2015; Ofsted 2013). In general, the response to this has been further calls for clarifying the nature of the subject (Butler-Sloss 2015) but the evidence here suggests that, in addition, a critical consideration of 'stake and interest' in RE ought to include the learners and help them to understand *what* is taught (what content is chosen?), *how* it is taught (what values are conveyed?) and *who* decided. Copley (2007, p.296) speaks of this as making the 'telling position' of the teacher clear. Parents have a right to know about what happens in religious education in order that they can make an informed choice regarding religious education (Mawhinney et al. 2010). Similarly, it is important that young people are aware of the aims and purpose of the religious education they experience and the assumptions implicit in it, and that they are given sufficient critical space within which they can position themselves in relation to the subject (Wright 2000).

Such an approach would be similar to a critical pedagogy (Giroux & Giroux 2006) which seeks to raise learners' awareness of the reality of power and the value-based nature of education more generally.

Secondly, the study indicates that religious education contains within it certain constructions of personal agency and so RE departments have choices to make in respect of the extent to which they provide 'material' (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane 2014) for students to develop agency. In some cases, where religious positions limit the availability of such materials, schools may need to consider what actions they should take to mitigate potentially negative outcomes from such restrictions. A suggestion from Hella and Wright (2009, p.62) is that in a plural context where it is not acceptable to impose one particular worldview on students, the task of the teacher is to cultivate 'a deep understanding of students' horizons of meaning and the horizons of various religious and secular traditions'. There is limited potential for such deep understanding to be conveyed in the sense intended by Hella and Wright on a departmental web page but Parker (2011, p.489) reminds us that 'a discourse not only conveys meaning; it also makes meaning, reinforcing some practices and slighting others', so even a resource like a web page could provide material for the development of agency through the inclusion of diverse perspectives, whether within or beyond the school community. Further, from a critical education perspective, the inclusion of 'student voice' can have a transformative effect (Fielding 2011) and so the inclusion of student voices, something which was absent from all the texts in the sample, has the potential to provide additional material for agency.

There is also evidence within the discourse that personal agency can be constrained by actions of the state, whether by systems which distort education through high-stakes assessment or which exert forms of social control through the curriculum. This need for vigilance over how one uses power imbued by church, state institution or other authority in educational contexts is noted in other CDA studies (Paugh & Robinson 2011; Tamatea et al. 2008). Therefore, teachers should be aware of the climate they create and the extent to which there is a balance between developing agency and didactic or socio-political outcomes in their departments.

Thirdly, the findings in relation to constructions of difference remind us that dealing with difference must begin with the recognition that power is unequally shared (Nieto & Bode 2008). Where religious education is taught in publicly funded schools, RE departments should reflect upon the extent to which the discourse of the teachers recognises plurality in their classrooms and allows for the expression of diverse religious and non-religious beliefs in ways that affirm the 'other', especially those who do not feel part of the majority belief or dominant cultural perspective within the school. Some critical educators go further and believe that where inequality or injustice in treatment is identified a response is demanded and there is a need for transformation (Freire 1996) There are those in the religious education community who have echoed this emancipatory message. Miedema and Bertram-Troost (2014), for example, believe such work can be enhanced through an emphasis upon human rights in religious education as well as strengthening opportunities for building solidarity and engaging in dialogue. These strategies illustrate a further reconstructive possibility emerging from this study, brought to light through a consideration of the deconstructive power of CDA and the analysis of critical educators.

To conclude, in a situation where freedom is given to construct meaning in RE the implications for issues of identity, agency and difference may require mitigation. One approach is to demand clarity and create boundaries around certain forms of content and learning, however, a complementary approach is to consider religious education through the lens of critical education in ways that offer opportunities for deconstruction and reconstruction and extend a theoretical dialogue between the two.

References

Afdal, G., 2014. Modes of learning in religious education. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 6200(March 2015), pp.1–17. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01416200.2014.944095.

Armstrong, D., 2009. Religious education and the law in Northern Ireland's Controlled Schools. *Irish Educational Studies*, 28(3), pp.297–313. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03323310903335401 [Accessed May 15, 2013].

Barnes, L.P., 2014a. *Education, Religion and Diversity: developing a new model of religious education*, London: Routledge.

Barnes, L.P., 2005. Religion, education and conflict in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 26(2), pp.123–138. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13617670500164213 [Accessed July 29, 2013].

Barnes, L.P., 2014b. Religious studies, religious education and the aims of education. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 37(2), pp.195–206. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01416200.2014.953912.

Barnes, L.P., 2006. THE MISREPRESENTATION OF RELIGION IN MODERN BRITISH (RELIGIOUS) EDUCATION. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(4), pp.395–411.

Barnes, L.P., 2002. World Religions and the Northern Ireland Curriculum. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 23(1), pp.19–32.

Bruns, A. & Burgess, J., 2012. Doing Blog Research. In J. Arthur et al., eds. *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education*. London: Sage Publications.

Buchardt, M., 2010. When "Muslimness" is pedagogised. "Religion" and "culture" as knowledge and social classification in the classroom. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 32(3), pp.259–273. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01416200.2010.498614.

Butler-Sloss, E., 2015. *Living with difference (Woolf Report)*, Cambridge (England). Available at: https://corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf.

Catholic Church, 1994. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, London: Geoffrey Chapman.

Charteris, J., 2016. Envisaging Agency as Discourse Hybridity: A Butlerian Analysis of Secondary Classroom Discourses. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 37(2), pp.189–203.

Cho, S., 2013. Critical pedagogy and social change [electronic resource] : critical analysis on the language of possibility. Available at: https://encore.qub.ac.uk/iii/encore_qub/record/C__Rb1773202;jsessionid=071BA4B6E4FD4E6E2B5FFB777F12F134?lang=eng [Accessed December 1, 2016].

Conroy, J.C. et al., 2013. *Does religious education work? : a multi-dimensional investigation*, London: Bloomsbury Academic,.

Conroy, J.C., Lundie, D. & Baumfield, V., 2012. Failures of meaning in religious education. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 33(3), pp.309–323. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2012.732812 [Accessed October 9, 2014].

Copley, T., 2007. The Power of the Storyteller in Religious Education. *Religious Education*, 102(3), pp.288–297. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00344080701496264 [Accessed June 23, 2015].

Court, D., 2013. Religious experience as an aim of religious education. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 35(3), pp.251–263. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01416200.2012.750596 [Accessed July 29, 2014].

Department for Education, 2014. *Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools: Departmental advice for maintained schools*, London. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380595/SMSC_Guidance_Maintained_Schools.pdf.

Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI), 2007. *Core Syllabus for Religious Education*, Bangor: DENI.

Van Dijk, T. a., 2006. Ideology and discourse analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), pp.115–140.

Donaldson, A., 2007. Catholic Education at the Crossroads: Issues Facing Catholic Schools in Northern Ireland. In G. R. Grace & J. O'Keefe, eds. *International Handbook of Catholic Education: part one*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, pp. 231–247.

Erricker, C., 2010. *Religious Education: a conceptual and interdisciplinary approach for secondary level*, Abingdon: David Fulton.

Everington, J. et al., 2011. European religious education teachers' perceptions of and responses to classroom diversity and their relationship to personal and professional biographies. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 33(2), pp.37–41. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2011.546669.

Fairclough, N., 2003. *Analysing discourse : textual analysis for social research*, London : Routledge,.

Fairclough, N., 1995. *Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: Longman.

Fairclough, N., 2000. Dialogue in the Public Sphere. In *Discourse and Social Life*. Harlow, Essex : Longman.

Fancourt, N., 2016. The classification and framing of religious dialogues in two English schools. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 26(5), pp.1–16.

Fielding, M., 2011. Student Voice and the Possibility of Radical Democratic Education: Re-Narrating Forgotten Histories, Developing Alternative Futures. In G. Czerniawski & W. Kidd, eds. *Student Voice Handbook: Bridging the Academic/Practitioner Divide*. Bingley: Emerald, pp. 3–17.

Flick, U., 2014. *An introduction to qualitative research* 5th ed., London : SAGE,.

Freire, P., 1996. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Harmondsworth : Penguin Books. Available at: http://encore.qub.ac.uk/iii/encore_qub/record/C__Rb1495535__Spaulo freire__P0,11__Orightresult__U__X4?lang=eng&suite=qub [Accessed December 20, 2016].

Gearon, L., 2013. *MasterClass in Religious Education* S. Brindley, ed., London: Bloomsbury.

Gee, J.P., 1999. *Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, London: Routledge. Available at: https://encore.qub.ac.uk/iii/encore_qub/record/C__Rb1825758.

Giroux, H.A. & Giroux, S.S., 2006. Democracy and the Crisis of public Education. In H. A. Giroux, ed. *America on the edge: Henry Giroux on politics, culture and education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 43–52.

Hella, E. & Wright, A., 2009. Learning "about" and "from" religion: phenomenography, the Variation Theory of Learning and religious education in Finland and the UK. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 31(1), pp.53–64. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01416200802560047 [Accessed July 29, 2014].

Home Office, 2011. *Prevent Strategy*, London. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf.

Ipgrave, J., 2012. Conversations Between the Religious and Secular in English Schools. *Religious Education*, 107(1), pp.30–48.

Jackson, R., 2011. The interpretive approach as a research tool: inside the REDCo project. *British*

Journal of Religious Education, 33(2), pp.189–208. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01416200.2011.543602 [Accessed July 30, 2013].

Jackson, R., 2000. The Warwick Religious Education Project: The Interpretive Approach to Religious Education. In M. Grimmitt, ed. *Pedagogies of Religious Education*. Great Wakering, Essex: McCrimmon Publishing, pp. 130–152.

Jäger, S. & Maier, F., 2009. Theoretical and methodological aspects of Foucauldian critical discourse analysis and dispositive analysis. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer, eds. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 34–61.

Kincheloe, J. & Steinberg, S., 1997. *Changing Multiculturalism*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Langdridge, D. & Hagger-Johnson, G., 2013. *Introduction to Research Methods and Data Analysis in Psychology* 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson.

Lundie, D., 2010. "Does RE work?" An analysis of the aims, practices and models of effectiveness of religious education in the UK. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 32(2), pp.163–170. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01416200903537613.

Markham, A. & Buchanan, E., 2012. Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee. *Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0)*, p.19. Available at: http://www.aoir.org/documents/ethics-guide.

Matemba, Y.H., 2015. Mismatches Between Legislative Policy and School Practice in Religious Education: The Scottish Case. *Religious Education*, 110(1), pp.70–94. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00344087.2015.989097 [Accessed February 27, 2017].

Matusov, E., 2015. Chronotopes in education: Conventional and dialogic. *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal*, 3(2015), pp.A65–A97. Available at: http://dpj.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/dpj1/article/view/107/91.

Matusov, E. & Marjanovic-Shane, A., 2014. Democratic dialogic education for and from authorial agency. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 10(1), pp.9–26.

Mawhinney, A. et al., 2010. *Opting Out of Religious Education: the views of young people from minority belief backgrounds*, Belfast: School of Law and School of Education, Queen's University Belfast.

McCulloch, G., 2012. Documentary Methods. In J. Arthur et al., eds. *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education*. London: Sage Publications.

Miedema, S. & Bertram-Troost, G., 2014. Reconciling the Civic, the Sacred, and the Just in Critical-Pragmatic Education. *Religious Education*, 109(1), pp.72–80. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00344087.2014.868233 [Accessed February 27, 2017].

Montgomery, A. et al., 2003. *Integrated Education in Northern Ireland: Integration in Practice*, University of Ulster at Coleraine: UNESCO Centre.

Nieto, S. & Bode, P., 2008. *Affirming diversity : the sociopolitical context of multicultural education*, Boston : Pearson/Allyn and Bacon. Available at: http://encore.qub.ac.uk/iii/encore_qub/record/C__Rb1614119__SAffirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education__Orightresult__U__X4?lang=eng&suite=qub [Accessed February 27, 2017].

Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), 2012. *CCEA GCSE Specification in Religious Studies*, Belfast. Available at: file:///C:/Users/3049091/Downloads/GCSE-REL--REVISED-Specification-3222.pdf.

Ofsted, 2013. *Religious education - realising the potential*, Manchester: Ofsted. Available at: http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/filedownloading/?file=documents/surveys-and-good-practice/r/Religious education - realising the potential.pdf&refer=0.

Osbeck, C. & Lied, S., 2012. Hegemonic speech genres of classrooms and their importance for RE learning. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 34(2), pp.155–168. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01416200.2011.628194.

Parker, W.C., 2011. "International education" in US public schools. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 9(3–4), pp.487–501. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14767724.2011.605330 [Accessed February 20, 2017].

Paugh, P. & Robinson, E., 2011. Keeping a "vigilant critique": unpacking critical praxis as teacher educators. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 24(3), pp.363–378. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09518398.2010.538747 [Accessed February 20, 2017].

Potter, J., 2004. Discourse Analysis. In M. Hardy & A. Bryman, eds. *The Handbook of Data Analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

Richardson, N., 2010. Division, Diversity and Vision: Religious education and community cohesion in Northern Ireland. In M. Grimmitt, ed. *Religious education and social and community cohesion: an exploration of challenges and opportunities*. Great Wakering, Essex: McCrimmon Pub, pp. 215–231.

Richardson, N., 2007. *Rights and Religious Education in a Plural Northern Ireland*, Belfast: Irish School of Ecumenics. Available at: http://www.ecumenics.ie/wp-content/uploads/NIHRC-2010-Rights-and-Righteousness.pdf.

Rogers, R. et al., 2005. Critical Discourse Analysis in Education: A Review of the Literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), pp.365–416. Available at: http://rer.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.3102/00346543075003365.

Rogers, R. et al., 2016. Critical Discourse Analysis in Education: A Review of the Literature, 2004 to 2012. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), pp.1192–1226. Available at: http://rer.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.3102/0034654316628993 [Accessed February 16, 2017].

Skeie, G., 2013. A Contextual Turn in Research on Religion and Education. In G. Skeie et al., eds. *Exploring Context in Religious Education*. Munster: Waxmann, pp. 249–272.

Skeie, G. et al., 2013. Exploring context in religious education research: empirical, methodological and theoretical perspectives. Available at: http://encore.qub.ac.uk/iii/encore_qub/record/C__Rb1870639__Sexploring context in religious education__Orightresult__U__X6?lang=eng&suite=qub [Accessed September 3, 2016].

Tamatea, L., Hardy, J. & Ninnes, P., 2008. Paradoxical inscriptions of global subjects: critical discourse analysis of international schools' websites in the Asia–Pacific Region. *Critical Studies in Education*, 49(2), pp.157–170. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17508480802040241 [Accessed February 20, 2017].

The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2001. *PROCLAIMING THE MISSION: The distinctive philosophy*

and values of Catholic education, Armagh.

Thompson, P., 2004. Whose confession? Which tradition? *British Journal of Religious Education*, 26(1), pp.61–72. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0141620032000149926 [Accessed October 21, 2014].

Vermeer, P., 2012. Meta-concepts, thinking skills and religious education. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 34(3), pp.333–347.

Willig, C., 2013. *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*, Maidenhead : Open University Press. Available at: http://encore.qub.ac.uk/iii/encore_qub/record/C__Rb1864581__Swillig__Orightresult__U__X 4?lang=eng&suite=qub [Accessed November 13, 2015].

Wodak, R. & Meyer, M., 2009. Critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory and methodology. In *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 1–33.

Wright, A., 2007. *Critical Religious Education, Multiculturalism and the Pursuit of Truth*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Wright, A., 1993. *Religious education in the secondary school : prospects for religious literacy*, London: David Fulton in association with the Roehampton Institute.

Wright, A., 2000. *Spirituality and the Curriculum*, London: Falmer.

Yohanis, J., 2015. *The implications of Christian teachers' faith perspectives for the teaching of World Religions : a study of Religious Education teachers in Controlled schools in Northern Ireland*. Queen's University Belfast.