

**Education *about* religion, beliefs and worldviews:
Exploring the viewpoints of educators
and parents in Canada**

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Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Doctorate in Philosophy degree in Religious Studies

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Abstract

Public apprehension about religious diversity has pervaded Canadian headlines at an increasing pace, particularly during the past fifteen years. Urban centres and suburban and rural communities alike have seen clashes over the manifestation of diverse belief systems in daily life. From immigrant ‘codes of conduct,’ a ‘charter of values,’ controversy over the wearing of the Sikh kirpan in school, to bans on religious vestments and symbols worn by public servants including teachers, conflict and socially divisive misunderstandings are often the unfortunate fruits of ignorance about the ‘other.’ Many religious actors at the center of these stories have seen their cases ultimately adjudicated in Canada’s highest court, reinforcing the perception that religious difference is a source of conflict and division in Canadian society. In this era of global conversations about how liberal democracies approach diversity, this dissertation expands the conversation on education about religion, beliefs and worldviews in Canadian classrooms. With public education situated as a primary site for constructing democratic citizenship, the question of how this evolving dynamic of diversity is taught in schools is symbolically and practically linked to broader debates about government and societal responses to pluralism. This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge by interweaving thinking from the literature on **pluralism, xenophobia and deep equality** as a conceptual framework, with empirical work investigating what parents and educators thought Canadian public-school (primary and secondary) students should learn in order to best prepare them for living and thriving in a diverse society. Triangulated data gathered from semi-structured interviews with parents and educators (**n=22**), responses from a national online survey (**n=190**), and a textual analysis of secondary student manuals from Quebec’s Ethics and Religious Culture Program (**n=5**), provided a holistic vantage point from which to consider the central research questions. Analysis and interpretation of findings revealed that learning about diversity and difference were of central importance, however, there were fundamental concerns regarding indoctrination, rejection of majority religious privilege and even-handedness in the presentation of religious and nonreligious belief systems. Existing discourse on religious and worldview literacy education in Canada tends to focus on teaching and learning in the context of a discrete curriculum such as the Ethics and Religious Culture program. However, findings from this research suggest that increased public awareness about the religious entanglements of colonization, combined with the significant rise in the number of Canadians who hold non-religious worldviews, contribute to a rethinking of how such literacy endeavours may be better integrated into other subject areas such as civics, citizenship, history or social studies.

Keywords: Calls to Action, Deep Equality, Difference, Diversity, Education, Ethics and Religious Culture, Nones, Nonreligion, Pluralism, Québec, Reconciliation, Religion and Education, Religious Literacy, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Worldview Literacy, Xenophobia

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Acknowledgements

During the course of my graduate studies, I learned that I live and work on the unceded Territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation. I continue to learn (and to unlearn) what this means to my scholarship and am deeply appreciative for the opportunities being a guest on this land provide. I am grateful for my participants, who joined the study for in-person interviews or the online survey, and who very graciously offered me their stories, thoughts and opinions which form the foundation of this thesis. I also am thankful for the generous support received from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Religion and Diversity Project and the Department of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa. Without this assistance, I would not have been able to pursue graduate studies. To graduate school colleagues and scholarly mentors who have inspired and encouraged me through difficult times, thank you for being part of my academic journey. I am not sure how to truly express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor for the many years of support, mentorship and conversations that have brought me to this juncture. To my extended family and friends that are family, I could not have done this without you. Finally, to Cathy, Sophie, Alex, Jacob and Max, I thank for your love, patience and care throughout these years.

Glossary of Acronyms and Terms

AAR	American Academy of Religion
CSF	<i>Conseil du statut de la femme</i> (Council on the Status of Women)
ERC	Ethics and Religious Culture Program
ERW	Education about Religions and Worldviews
NCCM	National Council of Canadian Muslims
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OHRC	Ontario Human Rights Commission
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RE	Religious Education
REDCO	Religion in Education: A contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries
RI	Religious Instruction
RWL	Religious and Worldview Literacy
SRI	Special Religious Instruction
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Chapter One: Exclusion by Design in a Grade One Religion Class

“Me, the kid named Fahd, and the two other immigrant girls went into an empty classroom with another teacher to go to ‘*morale*,’ while all the Quebecois kids stayed together in the regular classroom with our teacher for Catholic class. We had to draw our feelings and [expletive] while all of our other friends were listening to stories about Christmas, Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus.”

—Recollection from Grade One
Religion Class in Québec

1.1 INTRODUCTION

“I was mortified.” My now millennial-age daughter said as she recalled her first day of grade one religion class. After spending the previous year in kindergarten making new friends, tying her own shoes, and adjusting to entire days speaking French, having to leave homeroom class during the first week of a new year was distressing. Throughout graduate school, my family has listened to me think out loud about the question of religion, education and diversity and it was during one of these ongoing conversations, my oldest spoke up rather unexpectedly about her experience. As the quote above suggests, the Quebec tradition of separating students on the basis of religion as early as first grade for weekly religion classes was a fraught practice—unsettling to young students in numerous ways. After the second week, I remember her returning home in tears, begging to switch to Catholic class in order to stay with her friends. The year was 2002 and she had entered public primary school in Quebec during a time when students were still separated according to confession for religious education, generally for one class period every week. As a newcomer to Canada and first-time parent, I had no frame of reference for confessional public education, nor did I have an understanding of how this segregation played out on the ground with students. In school registration documents sent prior to the

beginning of each school year, families with children in Québec public schools selected either a Catholic, Protestant or a moral ethics stream for their child. The annual letter to parents was routine : *Votre enfant commencera la première année en septembre 2001. S'il vous plaît, indiquez votre de choix de cours parmi ces trois options¹: enseignement moral, enseignement moral et religieux catholique ou enseignement moral et religieux protestant.²* With no understanding of how the embodied logistics of separating students unfolded, the moral ethics option seemed like the logical box to select for first-time parents whose child who was being raised in a religious tradition other than Catholic or Protestant. Little did I know that choosing to put her in the moral ethics class would be lived by her, and the other non-Catholic students, as periods of exclusion and social isolation. As she reflected more deeply about this experience, my daughter recalled that the majority of her classmates were white, Francophone and of (presumably) Catholic heritage (during the early 2000s, the student body of our suburban neighborhood school was relatively homogenous). Every week the majority of the class stayed in the familiar space of the homeroom with their regular teacher, while the 'others' (students whose parents chose an option other than the Catholic stream) were separated according to religious confession or non-religious status. This state-mandated 'othering,' which was a longstanding practice in Quebec classrooms, often meant the weekly segregation of immigrant students of colour or those who spoke French with an accent other than Québécois, or French as a

¹ On July 1, 2000, the Québec Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport (MELS) declared all public schools in Québec would no longer have a confessional status. Citing the province's contemporary pluralist landscape, the MELS report indicated "Quebec today is a pluralist society: a plurality of mentalities, convictions, origins, local interests, customs and traditions; a plurality of philosophical, moral and religious choices. It is in this context that the place of religion in public schools has been revised to reflect this reality as closely as possible." Translated from the original French: « Le Québec d'aujourd'hui est une société pluraliste : pluralité des mentalités, des convictions, des origines, des intérêts locaux, des coutumes et des traditions; pluralité des choix philosophiques, moraux et religieux. C'est dans ce contexte que la place de la religion à l'école publique a été révisée afin de refléter le plus fidèlement possible cette réalité » (MELS, n. d.).

² English translation: "Your child will begin grade one in September 2001. Please indicate your choice of course among these three options: Moral Education, Catholic Moral and Religious Education or Protestant Moral and Religious Education."

second language. In her case, being raised in a bilingual home by an American mother and Quebecois father tinged her fluently spoken French with an ever so slight, but nevertheless noticeable difference. Having an atypical accent, combined with *not* being Catholic where Catholicism formed the socio-cultural backdrop of most teachers *and* students in her school, conspired to shape one of her earliest recollections of ‘otherness.’ At six years old, having to physically leave the homeroom class to meet with an unfamiliar teacher, even for one hour per week, situated her ‘other’ religious upbringing as an experience of embodied marginalisation.³ I never imagined that religious difference would emerge as a concern in my children’s Canadian public-school education. In all of my years of public schooling in the United States, any discussion of religion (and in particular confessional religion) in a classroom, was the exclusive domain of privately funded, faith-based educational institutions. Catholic families with resources to pay tuition sent their children to private Catholic elementary or secondary schools. The same scenario for Christians, Jews, Muslims or for any other members of a religious tradition which formed the basis of a private school’s mission. Nary was there discussion of religious belief or practice, much less religious curriculum in the public schools I attended.⁴ The inclusion of confessional religious curriculum in the public education system of certain Canadian provinces, with its patchwork of public funding for a wide variety of faith-based schools,⁵ was unexpected and frankly

³ Although not a central focus of this dissertation, in the course of conducting interviews for this research, I came to discover that our family experience was not uncommon. Some of my participants recounted similar stories of their children experiencing exclusion during religious education courses. I include their accounts in chapter four.

⁴ The situation has changed in recent decades in some American public schools with more openness towards religious literacy initiatives and the inclusion of world religions curriculum in certain states. Non-confessional education *about* religion has gained traction. The state of California, for example, has demonstrated leadership in the campaign for religious literacy under the auspices of the California Three R’s Project - Rights, Responsibility, and Respect. One of the core pedagogical goals of this project, which inform religious literacy curriculum in several California school districts, is to foster the “Respect that is necessary to maintain civil discourse about issues when people disagree because of deeply held beliefs” (*California 3 Rs Project - Rights, Responsibility, Respect*, n.d.).

⁵ Since education in Canada falls under provincial jurisdiction, certain provinces fund some confessional religious schools at levels. Ontario, for example, provides full funding to Catholic across the province. Other provinces, such as Québec, for example, provide partial public funding to some confessional private schools.

at odds with what I had (wrongly) assumed was a country with a comparable American-style approach to public schooling.⁶ I would only later come to understand the complex and contested history of state obligations with regard to confessional religious education, and how contemporary political debates over religion and education reached all the way back to Canada's confederation in 1867 (Beaman et al., 2016). Thus, my interest in the topic of religion and education in Canada stems from my own immigrant experience in Canada and raising children educated in the Quebec public school system. I was also a primary school teacher in the same province. During my years as an English teacher in French schools interacting with students from grades one to six, I came to understand firsthand the classroom as a crucial site for the construction of identity and youth citizenship. This dissertation, therefore, is at the crossroads of my lived experience both as a parent and as an educator.

In this research, I draw upon a number of key concepts from the bodies of literature on **pluralism, religious literacy, xenosophia** and **deep equality**, to explore education *about* religion, beliefs and worldviews. The word 'about' is purposefully set in italics to signify the focus of this work. What it is *not*: It is not an investigation with any theological or confessional underpinnings. What it *is*: It is an exploration of parents' and educators' viewpoints about curricular content in public school classrooms and learning through religious or cultural studies approaches, *about* religion, beliefs and worldviews. Ideas gleaned from the scholarship of pluralism, religious literacy, deep equality and xenosophia forms a conceptual framework, understood in this context as "as a network,

⁶ In the United States the division of 'private' and 'public' schools often falls along religious lines, and as mentioned, are differentiated by the payment of tuition. Faith-based schools are, broadly speaking, under the umbrella category of 'private' schools, while 'public' schools have no confessional nor faith-based curriculum. Some public, non-religious schools, however, do offer courses *about* religion. W.Y. Alice Chan's book *Teaching Religious Literacy to Combat Religious Bullying: Insights from North American Secondary Schools* presents case studies and a comprehensive analysis of such religious literacy education in public schools (Chan, 2021).

or ‘a plane,’ of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena” (Jabareen, 2009: 51).

1.2 WATERSHED EVENTS

A number of watershed events occurred in Canada during my graduate studies which significantly impacted the way I approached my thesis research. I have chosen to briefly highlight five examples which typify expanding and pervasive ignorance about religion, religious diversity and religious history in this country. This selective chronology represents only a few of the larger threads which situated religion as a source of conflict, tension and misunderstanding in contemporary Canadian society. Arguably, the list could have been much longer if expanded to include incidents in the U.S, Europe and beyond. These specific events captured my attention as both tipping points and upsurges in public debates focused on the religious ‘other’. My rationale for choosing particular events over others was largely the timing of their occurrence at various junctures in my doctoral journey and their impact on my thought processes. The six events elaborated in the pages that follow are: 1) the 2013 introduction of the Charter of Quebec values; 1) the case of *Canada (Citizenship and Immigration) v. Ishaq*, 2015; 3) the 2015 release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Final Report and the 94 Calls to Action; 4) the 2017 Quebec City Mosque massacre; 5) the passage of Quebec’s Bill 21 in 2019, and 6) the removal of a hijab-wearing teacher from a Quebec primary school classroom in 2021. Together, the ‘telling’ of these controversial events in various traditional media and social media outlets became narrative threads bolstering a larger story of the ‘problem’ of the religious ‘other’ in Canadian society. These watershed events and the ongoing public narrative

they generated, were the backdrop against which the parents and educators in my study were also framing their experiences and understanding of life in a diverse society.

1.2.1 Thread One: Bill 60 and beyond: The Charter of Quebec Values

The first event unfolded during my initial semester of doctoral studies in 2013 as the Quebec provincial election period gained momentum. Campaign rhetoric at this time included the proposition of a charter of ‘Quebec Values’ aimed at mitigating public outcry over perceived lacunae in state management of religious accommodation requests. This proposition set off a multitude of hostile public protests and acrimonious political conversations in Quebec and in other Canadian provinces (*Quebec Values Charter Protest Hits Montreal Streets*, 2013). The charter eventually coalesced into Bill 60 and was formally announced with its official title: *Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men and providing a framework for accommodation requests (Bill N°60, n.d.)*. Among other propositions aimed at promoting a ‘secular society,’ the Bill called for all levels of public servants (including educators) to remove religious vestments such as kippahs, turbans, hijabs, and even certain crucifixes worn as jewelry, in an effort to implement *laïcité*.⁷ The bill added fresh kindling to the already slow-burning embers of public apprehension.⁸ Muslim women became visible targets for harassment with

⁷ The proposed bill was rife with majoritarian privilege and marked contradictions. The Canadian Civil Liberties Union pointed out inconsistencies in the proposed law – such as its special protection for “the emblematic and toponymic elements of Québec’s cultural heritage, in particular its religious cultural heritage, that testify to its history” (Canadian Civil Liberties Union, 2016).

⁸ The Québec Charter of Values was yet another chapter in longstanding public debates about the place of the religious ‘other’ in Quebec society. In 2007, the *Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences*, otherwise known as the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, was set up to examine public (mis)perceptions of the accommodation of religious minorities in the province. A series of highly-mediatised instances involving requests by religious groups (specifically Muslims and Orthodox Jews) prompted the public consultation. Sociologist Gérard Bouchard and philosopher Charles Taylor sought to mitigate tensions by demonstrating that public wariness was disproportionate to the factual unfolding of the events in question (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008).

incidences of hijab-wearing women being pushed in public spaces and spat upon reported in increasing numbers to women's centres across the province (Hamilton, 2013). In the weeks that followed the bill's tabling, the Globe and Mail recounted that "Women's groups report[ed] a spike in verbal and physical assaults against veiled Muslim women in Quebec since the introduction of the province's Charter of Values, [and was] evidence that the Parti Québécois's bid to curb religious symbols in some workplaces [was] inflaming social tensions" (Peritz, 2013). Although the Bill eventually faded out of daily news cycles, its xenophobic seeds about the religious 'other' were sown and would eventually break through urban and suburban pavements across the province in calamitous ways. In the following year, a study with over 400 students living in Montreal, Quebec published in the journal *Transcultural Psychiatry*, demonstrated that debate over the Charter of Quebec Values manifested in real-life consequences for certain groups. Findings showed that "more than 30% of participants reported having experienced some form of ethnic or religious discrimination since the Charter was released (personally or as a witness)" (Hassan et al., 2016: 1139). Researchers further emphasized that this heated public deliberation "was associated with a shift from a predominantly positive perception of intercommunity relations to a predominantly negative one, particularly among women, immigrants, and those who self-identified as cultural or religious minorities" (Hassan et al., 2016: 1139). Even an informal review of xenophobic incidents reported in Quebec media, seemed more often than not, to be focused on the Muslim 'other.'

1.2.2 Thread Two: Zunera Ishaq and the niqab debate

The second event which influenced the direction of this research was the 2015 Federal Court of Appeal case of *Ishaq v. Canada*.⁹ As part of a personal commitment to Sunni Islam, newcomer to Canada Zunera Ishaq wore a niqab in public which covered her head and face. When she challenged a rule requiring the removal of face coverings during the recital of the citizenship oath (the final step required to obtain full citizenship), her action re-ignited a divisive conversation about the niqab ban which had gained traction under a Conservative government (Mas, 2015). As a restriction “shaped by Quebec’s secular charter battle,” the niqab became a contentious and convoluted political argument about so-called Canadian values, gender equality, outsiders and ultimately “terrorists” (Fitz-Morris, 2015). What was Ishaq’s ultimate goal? She wanted to cast her first vote in an upcoming election. Canadian media dubbed the controversy which ensued “a defining issue of the federal election” (National Post, 2015). Despite court records clearly indicating her willingness to remove covering for identification purposes (privately, with a female agent), the media painted a much different portrait of an unwilling, brainwashed, submissive, indoctrinated victim of a patriarchal ideology (*Ishaq v. Canada (Citizenship and Immigration)*, 2015). Evident over the course of the debate, and in the public vitriol which filled online spaces and air time, was a pervasive ignorance about Islam, its intra-tradition diversity and the myriad reasons why some women choose to veil.¹⁰ Notwithstanding a request (by Conservatives) for an intervention by Canada’s highest court, legal challenges were

⁹ *Ishaq v. Canada (Citizenship and Immigration) FCC 156*, 2015.

¹⁰ The scale of the public debate was in direct contrast to the statistical realities on the ground. A National Post report indicated that “There are no hard numbers of how many Canadian women wear niqabs, hijabs or other Islamic garb.” Moreover, the very small number of (female) Muslim public servants across the country made the whole debate even more absurd. “There are 8,495 Muslim women working in Canadian public administration positions. Stephen Harper’s musings about a ban on niqabs in the civil service would affect at best a small number of bureaucrats. Statistics from 2011 show only 1.8 per cent of 257,000 federal employees are Muslim women, and only a small subset of them is likely to wear face coverings” (National Post, 2015).

dropped by the sitting government (Liberals) and Ishaq was able to take her citizenship oath wearing her niqab (Crawford, 2015). Lingering stereotypes about the Muslim other and ongoing debate about religious symbolism (aside from Christian representations) in public life and the workplace remained unsettled. In Quebec, questions about religious symbolism in the public sphere and notably on women's bodies, continued to simmer.

1.2.3 Thread three: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The 2015 release of Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final report (hereafter referred to as the TRC) was a startling first lesson for many Canadians (myself included) about the tragic 150-year history of residential schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).¹¹ This watershed event occurred during the second year of my doctoral studies and reading the report was my first introduction to the religious roots and detrimental impact of the Doctrine of Discovery¹² and the term *terra nullius* ('no man's land'), and their ideological use in the subjugation of Indigenous peoples. The project of state-mandated assimilation education was in operation from the late 1800s through the 1990s and resulted in a multi-generational cultural genocide with lasting impact for

¹¹ From the Summary of the Final Report of the TRC of Canada: "These residential schools were created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture—the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society, led by Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. The schools were in existence for well over 100 years, and many successive generations of children from the same communities and families endured the experience of them" (2015: v).

¹² The Upstander Project offers pedagogical resources for teaching and learning about the impacts of colonization. They offer this definition of the doctrine: "The Doctrine of Discovery established a spiritual, political, and legal justification for colonization and seizure of land not inhabited by Christians. Foundational elements of the Doctrine of Discovery can be found in a series of papal bulls, or decrees, beginning in the 1100s, which included sanctions, enforcements, authorizations, expulsions, admonishments, excommunications, denunciations, and expressions of territorial sovereignty for Christian monarchs supported by the Catholic Church" (*Doctrine of Discovery*, n.d.).

Indigenous peoples across the country. Residential schools, set up by the federal government and operated by Catholic and Protestant church communities, aimed to convert Indigenous children to Christianity and to erase Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices. It provoked catastrophic outcomes for the generations of children who passed through the system. The multi-volume report culminated in 94 Calls to Action which were composed and enumerated as a policy framework “in order to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation” (2015: 1). Core objectives of the calls included appeals for direct actions in the areas of child welfare, education, language and culture, health and justice. The Calls to Action were addressed to all levels of government, to Christian churches implicated in residential schooling and even to the Pope. The impact of Christianity and its role as a driver in Canada’s colonisation was a key premise and focus of the report’s denunciations.¹³ Education (frequently intertwined with religion) figured prominently in a number of the calls. Specifically, appeals to ministries of education, schools and educators to teach young Canadians about the roots of the forced assimilation and the resultant loss of Indigenous languages, spiritual traditions and knowledge.¹⁴ Faith-based educational institutions were a key focus

¹³ For example, under the heading “Church Apologies and Reconciliation,” Calls to Action 58 and 59 state: “We call upon the Pope to issue an apology to Survivors, their families, and communities for the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical and sexual abuse of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children in Catholic-run residential schools. We call for that apology to be similar to Irish victims of abuse and to occur within one year of issuing this Report and to be delivered by the Pope in Canada;

We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church’s role in colonization, the history and legacy of residential schools, and why apologies to former residential school students, their families and communities were necessary” (2015: 7).

¹⁴ Under the heading “Education for Reconciliation” Calls to Action 62 and 63 establish aboriginal history as an essential component of school curriculum and outline the importance fostering intercultural respect and supporting teacher-training They read:

62. We call upon the federal, provincial and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for kindergarten to Grade Twelve students (7).

of the Calls to Action having to do with education. Although my research was not specifically focused on denominational schools, the scale of publicly funded Catholic education in Ontario (Canada's largest province) and state-supported religious schools in other provinces made certain Calls to Action seem crucially important to my research questions.¹⁵ Denominational schools were called upon to work with Indigenous elders to create curriculum in order to “provide a an education on comparative religious studies which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs” (2015: 7-8). Seen for its proper significance, this particular Call to Action should be considered as a disruptor to the idea of teaching *about* religion from curriculum which situates Christianity as its framework.

I did not conduct a formal textual analysis of the TRC's Calls to Action. Nevertheless, even a cursory counting of words relating to religion, education and adjacent themes was noteworthy in terms of frequency. The word 'church' was mentioned 12 times, '[inter]faith' five times, 'spiritual[ity]' 10 times, 'religious' six times, and 'education[al]' was mentioned 27 times in the 11 pages which comprise the text of the 94 calls. It follows from this observation that as I delved more

63. We all upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above (7).

¹⁵ Call to Action 64 is a concise yet exceedingly important call for changes to the representation of Indigenous beliefs in school curriculum:

64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with aboriginal elders (7-8).

deeply into the literature on religion and education, my evolving understanding of the Calls to Action consistently raised cautionary flags about the *raison d'être* of religious literacy education in Quebec.¹⁶ (I elaborate this point more thoroughly in the textual analysis of ERC textbooks in chapter six). Only eleven Calls to Action have thus far been completed according to scholars from the Yellowhead Institute, a policy advocacy organization at Ryerson University. According to the report *Calls to Action Accountability: A 2021 Status Update on Reconciliation*, none of the calls about education have been accomplished (Jewell & Mosby, 2021).

1.2.4 Thread four: Quebec City Mosque Shooting

In January 2017, a university student from Québec killed six Muslim men and injured others while they attended a prayer service in Quebec City's Islamic Cultural Centre. As a religiously motivated hate crime, Canadians, and indeed people worldwide, were shocked by the scale of the attack and stunned that such an act of violence could happen on Canadian soil. In the chaotic aftermath, the media were awash with speculation about the possible motivations which would give rise to such unthinkable violence. One of Canada's largest newspapers, The Globe and Mail, connected the attack with international political debates about the imagined menace of religious 'others.' The report stated:

The man who stormed a Quebec City mosque told police in the hours after the deadly attack that he was moved to act by the news of the day: U.S. President Donald Trump's restrictions on Muslim travel to the United States, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's subsequent expression of open arms to refugees (Perreux, 2018) .

¹⁶ In his article 'Quebec's Ethics and Religious Culture School Curriculum: A Critical Perspective,' Religious Studies scholar Donald Boisvert outlines the inherent dilemma of placing Christianity in a position of privilege in state-sanctioned, public-school curriculum, see Boisvert, 2015.

The shooter was eventually found guilty and sentenced to 40 years of prison time for what was judged to be a crime motivated by "racism and hatred" (Lowrie, 2019). There were rumours that the perpetrator's mental health was in question, however, deeper investigations also revealed his acquired extremist ideology fed by an obsession with anti-Islamic websites. In the time leading up to the attack, his online history showed significant interaction with stories about Islam including the portrayal of "radical Muslims" as a "dark, powerful, hidden force," controversy around women wearing hijabs and a local zoning dispute about a mosque (Riga, 2018). The massacre was a different type of watershed event—it was neither the announcement of a discriminatory government policy nor a complex legal challenge. It was a dramatic turn for me in thinking about the real life (and now deadly) power of xenophobia as a driver of violence. As a researcher exploring the potential promise of religious and worldview literacy education in mitigating social tensions around religious difference, theoretical considerations were swiftly overtaken by the tragic stories of the victims and their families. The event also coincided with my data collection, during which occasional yet subtle indications of wariness about Islam were starting to emerge. I elaborate these findings in chapter four.

1.2.5 Thread five: *Laïcité* becomes law in Quebec's Bill 21

“Eleven years after the Bouchard-Taylor report recommended the idea, Quebec now has secularism legislation that bans the wearing of religious symbols by certain public servants in positions of authority by overriding their fundamental rights” (Authier, 2019). This sub-headline appeared in Quebec's largest English daily, the Montreal Gazette, on June 17, 2019, in reference to recommendations made after the final report of the *Consultation Commission on Accommodation*

*Practices Related to Cultural Differences.*¹⁷ Long before I began my doctoral studies, sociologist Gérard Bouchard and philosopher Charles Taylor issued recommendations which included restrictions on religious clothing for certain government employees in 2008. Suggestions from what was subsequently referred to as the Bouchard-Taylor Report, focused on restrictions for a limited number of state employees in positions of authority such as judges, lawyers and police officers. Fast forward eleven years and numerous iterations of Quebec's protracted drive for a secularism law (in French *une loi sur la laïcité*), and the project ultimately coalesced into the (in)famous Bill 21. The bill was enacted into law in 2019. According to the explanatory notes to the *Act respecting the laicity of the State*:

The purpose of this Act is to affirm the laicity of the State and to requirements that follow from it....The Act proposes to prohibit certain persons from wearing religious symbols while exercising their functions....Under the Act, personnel members of a body must exercise their functions with their face uncovered, and persons who present themselves to receive a service from such a personnel member must have their face uncovered when doing so is necessary to allow their identity to be verified or for security reasons. Persons who fail to comply with that obligation may not receive the service (An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State, 2019b).

The new law placed controls on religious attire covering a much broader range of situations from what was originally imagined, including banning headgear for teachers and the requirement to receive public services (such as taking a bus, renewing a drivers' license, or seeing a doctor) without a face-covering. For over a decade, public debate about religious clothing had waxed and waned in the media, and coincided with reports of harassment targeting Muslim women. According to the Montreal group Justice Femme, "there has been a sharp increase in harassment directed at Muslim women in Québec since the province tabled draft legislation to ban religious symbols in parts of the civil

¹⁷ The commission was set up to explore public apprehensions about the growing religious diversity in what was historical a homogenous, 'culturally' Catholic population (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008a).

service” (Monpetit, 2019). As the number of harassment reports accelerated—including reports of women confronted by strangers trying to remove their hijabs, discrimination in the workplace and online persecution—various opposition groups mounted campaigns to challenge the law (Monpetit, 2019). The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA), for example, both maintained that the public education sector in Québec was a disproportionately impacted by the new law (Valliente, 2019).¹⁸ Describing the uniquely difficult situation for female Muslim educators in Québec, lawyers for both groups pointed out the law’s gendered impacts arguing that “it has become increasingly clear that the vast majority of people affected are women who wear the hijab and who want to be public school teachers” (Valliente, 2019). Although teachers were not included in Bouchard and Taylor’s original list of authority positions targeted by their recommendations, the impact on them has been significant. Ironically, the province was and continues to be mired in major teacher shortages. Eleven years after they first suggested restrictions on religious clothing, Bouchard and Taylor offered divergent opinions in the wake of the passage of Bill 21. For his part Bouchard, said he stood “behind the report he co-authored in 2008, but Bill 21 is not what he recommended” (referring to the fact that he did not include teachers among those who should fall under restrictions) (Fletcher, 2019). Taylor, on the other hand, believed he had “made a mistake,” having not anticipated the groundswell of xenophobia and violence which grew in the wake of the 2008 report (Fletcher, 2019). The mosque shooting in

¹⁸ In a December 2019 press release, the NCCM reiterated the law’s impact on certain categories of women in Quebec: “This is a law that doesn’t just affect Muslims. It affects those wearing a kippah, a turban, a crucifix and of course those that wear hijab. This means our sisters, daughters, and mothers who wear the hijab cannot be teachers, prosecutors, or police officers in the province of Quebec and that is completely unacceptable. This discriminatory law is nothing less than [sic] a law that causes second class citizenship here in Canada. This is not the Canada that we have made our home. It is time that we stand up for each other” (National Council of Canadian Muslims, 2019).

Quebec City was *the* critical juncture at which Taylor publicly shifted his opinion on religious clothing bans. In a widely-read opinion piece appearing in Quebec's most influential French language newspaper *La Presse*, he offered his rationale for the change of heart:

It was mainly the changing context that made me change my mind. I am thinking principally of the debate on the Charter of 'Quebec values.' It was noted during this debate that the proposal to restrict the rights of certain classes of citizens had a side effect of stigmatization. This effect was felt, among other things, in the increase in incidents of aggression, especially against Muslim women wearing the veil - aggression ranging from hateful words to assault in some cases. These actions were the result of a minority of citizens who already harboured hostility towards immigrants in general or towards Muslims, but who did not dare to display it beforehand. The debate had the effect of lowering or eliminating their inhibitions, in addition to thickening the clouds of suspicion and fear that surrounded the newcomers in part of public opinion (C. Taylor, 2017).¹⁹

Taylor's change of opinion came too late for many, including Muslim women with aspirations of teaching in Quebec classrooms. They remain entangled in a complicated and multi-layered morass of public opinion, public policy and ongoing stigmatization of those who wear visible tokens of belief, tradition or practice. A report in the *Montreal Gazette* even dubbed the over-reaching restrictions as the "anti-Malala law" in reference to famed advocate for girls' education Malala Yousafzai (Macpherson, 2019). In an ironically timed photo with Quebec's Education Minister Jean-François Roberge and the young Nobel Peace Prize winner in July, 2019, Roberge was asked on Twitter what would happen if Ms. Yousafzai wanted to teach in the province of Quebec. His reply, also given via Twitter was:

¹⁹ « Je pense principalement au débat sur la Charte des 'valeurs québécoises'. On a constaté lors de ce débat que la proposition de restreindre les droits de certaines classes de citoyens a eu un effet secondaire de stigmatisation. Cet effet s'est entre autres fait sentir dans la multiplication des incidents d'agression, surtout envers les musulmanes portant le voile – des agressions allant des paroles haineuses jusqu'aux voies de fait dans certains cas. Ces gestes sont le fruit d'une minorité de citoyens qui nourrissaient déjà de l'hostilité envers les immigrants en général ou envers les musulmans, mais qui n'osaient pas l'afficher préalablement. Le débat a eu pour effet d'atténuer ou d'éliminer leurs inhibitions, en plus d'épaissir les nuages de suspicions et de craintes qui entouraient les nouveaux arrivants dans une partie de l'opinion publique » (C. Taylor, 2017).

I would certainly tell her that it would be a great honour and that in Quebec, as in France (where we are now) and in other open and tolerant countries, teachers are not allowed to wear religious symbols in the performance of their duties.²⁰

The report noted Ms. Yousufzai's rejection of the minister's request to explain why she wore a headscarf, and also referenced the incoherence of the so-called secularism law when it came to the varied reasons some people wearing head coverings. (Macpherson, 2019).²¹

The report of the interaction underscored a certain cultural arrogance—a political claim to power over personal pronouncements of what is (or is not) 'religious.' Chapter II, section 6, article 2 of Bill 21 stipulates the following:

A religious symbol, within the meaning of this section, is any object including clothing, a symbol, jewellery, an adornment, an accessory or headwear, that (1) is worn in connection with a religious conviction or belief; or (2) is reasonably considered as referring to a religious affiliation (An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State, 2019a: 7).

In the case of Minister Roberge, his commentary on Twitter followed the same illogicality of the law. Whether a wearer ascribes a reason for wearing an article (be it tradition, fashion, religion, culture, modesty) or not, the power to decide “what is reasonably considered as referring to a religious affiliation” seems to be exclusively in the hands (or eyes) of the beholder. Clearly, the question was a hypothetical. Hypotheticals, however, can sometimes evolve into lived realities; a topic addressed in the following and final thread of my curation of watershed events.

²⁰ Response of Quebec's Education Minister Jean-François Roberge, original citation in French: « Je lui dirais certainement que ce serait un immense honneur et qu'au Québec, comme c'est le cas en France (où nous sommes actuellement) et dans d'autres pays ouverts et tolérants, les enseignants ne peuvent pas porter de signes religieux dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions » (Macpherson, 2019).

²¹ Ahmed's (2012) work *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*, offers an in-depth study of the wide-ranging reasons Muslim women choose to wear head scarves. With many examples from those involved in social justice and women's rights movements, Ahmed's contribution undoes common stereotypes held about Muslim women (Ahmed, 2012).

1.2.6 Thread six: The personal and political conundrums of looking “insufficiently secular”

To some, employment sector impacts of Quebec’s *loi sur la laïcité* may have appeared largely hypothetical in the aftermath of the bill becoming law. Cases of hiring discrimination, however, did emerge in the months following the law’s enactment. One such report revealed that some Montreal school boards were refusing to employ teachers because they wore religious symbols, as well as another incident in which a recent hire had to agree to remove her hijab before a job offer could be finalized (Leclair, 2019). Likewise, there was mention of a “tense work climate” for long-time in-service teachers whom the Montreal Teachers Alliance argued had “the right to wear religious symbols under the law’s grandfather clause” (Leclair, 2019). Another anecdote drew attention to a would-be teacher who said she chose to work elsewhere in Canada to avoid the humiliation of having to remove her head-covering; she said “if you ask me to take off my turban, you’re asking me to come to work completely uncomfortable. It’s part of my body” (Leclair, 2019). It would be reasonable to speculate some may have avoided seeking employment in the province altogether because of the new law, and future research will be needed to understand the scope of the law’s impact on teacher education candidates in the province or already certified teachers arriving as newcomers to Canada. Still, proponents of the so-called secularism law defended the claim of even-handed treatment of all Quebecers in a pre-defined list of employment sectors, though prejudicial targeting of women who wear religious symbols was evident on the ground.

Another instance of hypothetical spillover into real life came in December 2021, when Fatemah Anvari, a grade three teacher in Chelsea, Quebec, was obliged to leave her teaching position because she wore a hijab. The news of her removal (and reassignment to a non-teaching role

ironically working on “literacy and diversity”), echoed rapidly, reaching far beyond the small, semi-rural village in the National Capital region where she worked (Charron and Pringle, 2021). Local and national protests against the law ensued, with Canadian and international media amplifying the reach of the story. “Anvari’s removal put a face and a name on the 2019 law” according to a report in the Washington Post, “...and kindled outrage over it, sparking protest in Quebec and denunciations from officials of all political stripes across Canada” (Coletta, 2021). There were a number of well-publicized rallies in support of the ousted teacher as well as critiques of the bill by certain political leaders, notably New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh, who himself wears a religious head-covering (Fleming and Woods, 2021). Remarking that “this is no longer a theoretical issue,” Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau hinted at “the possibility of intervening as the federal government at some point in time,” though he added no precision nor timeframe for such an action (Lofaro, 2021).²² Politicians, lawmakers and education officials were not the only voices joining the debate, which at its core, was a conversation about competing agendas in the boundary negotiations of religious pluralism in a democratic society. Parents also joined the fray and were quite vocal in their support of Ms. Anvari’s continued status as a classroom teacher, *and* critical of what they considered to be a divisive, discriminatory law. Their organized green ribbon and letter-writing campaigns, in addition to in-person demonstrations, were widely reported in the media (Deachman, 2021). In an opinion piece for the Globe and Mail, one parent wrote of her experience growing up as a Jewish student in

²² Writing for Policy Options Magazine, Mario Polèse, Professor Emeritus at Montréal’s *Institut national de la recherche scientifique*, and Ed Whitcomb, senior official in Canada’s Department of Foreign Affairs, offer a compelling and divergent exchange on the social and legal complexity of a possible Supreme Court challenge to Quebec’s Act Respecting the Laicity of the State, 2019. Polèse says “the Supreme Court will, in essence, be asked to choose between two opposing views of the place of religion in society,” while Whitcomb argues “no outcome will satisfy everyone, but hearing the case risks pushing Canada into one of its worst political crises, largely over misunderstandings” (Polèse, 2021; Whitcomb, 2021).

the Christian-infused environment of Canadian schooling, detailing her commitment to the principles of secularism (including non-confessional education *about* religion), *and* her support for the teacher.

She explained:

In Grade 5, I was given a Gideon Bible during class time – part of a routine visit the Gideons would make to all students of that age back in those days – and each morning in class, I recited the Lord’s Prayer. While I appreciate the beauty of those words to this day, prayers should never have been a part of my school’s opening exercises, a debate that was broadly settled across most of Canada after the Ontario Court of Appeal ruled in 1988 that school prayer violated the Canadian Charter.

But there is a chasm between compelling a child to recite or even sit through a religious devotional prayer during class time, and allowing individuals the freedom to dress according to their wishes and beliefs. Ms. Anvari taught my son English Language Arts, not Islamic doctrine; her hijab never interfered with the education she was providing, and it had no effect whatsoever on the curriculum she was teaching to the children in her class. In short, her teaching was secular, as it rightly should be in a public school. The problem, the provincial government would have us believe, was that she was insufficiently secular, at least in her appearance (Seaton, 2021).²³

Though a personal anecdote from just one parent, it encapsulates a number of themes germane to the narrative of my research—such as religious diversity, education *about* religion versus confessional instruction, and majoritarian religious privilege in Canadian classrooms. The diverse voices of support which emerged in the aftermath of Ms. Anvari’s removal from the classroom, revived a debate which had been on a boiling/simmering cycle since the news Quebec ‘charter of values’ first started to circulate in 2013. As the final thread of six, the story of Fatemah Anvari’s truncated teaching career, and its entanglement with law and religious diversity in the public sphere, is the last filament in what I label a ‘tapestry of intolerance,’ explained in the next section.

²³ This parent’s story succinctly called out core issues at play in the long history of religion and education in Canada, including religious indoctrination in public schools, majority religion privilege, religious freedom and education *about* religion. These issues all elaborated in the following chapters.

1.2.7 Weaving the six threads together: A tapestry of intolerance

Gathered together, these six threads formed a steady storyline of intolerance which filled the airwaves and online spaces during the course of my graduate studies. I experienced them as a numbing soundtrack, discordantly and repetitively, playing in the background. Regular accounts of criticism aimed at religious ‘others’ demanding too much ‘accommodation’ as a means of avoiding integration, added heaviness to the threads woven together over decades and continuing into the present era (Bouchard and Taylor, 2008). Bouchard and Taylor, in fact, outlined a ‘Chronology of a Crisis’ at the beginning their report ‘Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation’ with incidents and debates from Quebec dating back to 1985. They traced a lengthy timeline of perceived conflicts about religious accommodations for holidays, signs, symbols, and the lived religious practices of various groups in the province. From controversies over the construction of sukkahs,²⁴ carrying kirpans,²⁵ Christmas trees in Montreal’s City Hall, kosher refrigerators and halal menus in day-care centres, the Bouchard-Taylor Report concluded that many of the cases were inaccurately reported in the media. “The negative perception of reasonable accommodation that spread in the public,” according to the authors “often centered on an erroneous or partial perception of practices in the field” (Bouchard and Taylor, 2008: 18).²⁶ The human fallout of inaccurate and piecemeal perception of the ‘problem’ of

²⁴ A sukkah is “a temporary booth or shelter built for the duration of the nine-day Sukkoth festival to commemorate the 40 years that the Jewish people spent wandering the desert” (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008: 289).

²⁵ “The ceremonial dagger carried by orthodox Sikhs” (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008: 289).

²⁶ Bouchard and Taylor stated that the events of the past several decades in Quebec resulted in a combined “crisis of perception” and “anxiety over identity,” triggered in part by rapidly involving diversity. The anti-immigrant sentiment was fanned by the media and exacerbated by the complicated collective religious memory of the province’s French population. According to the authors the “sudden media enthusiasm and rumours contributed to the crisis of perception, although they alone cannot explain the current of dissatisfaction that spread among a large portion of the population. The so-called wave of accommodation clearly touched a number of emotional chords among French-Canadian Quebecers in such a way that requests for religious adjustments have spawned fears about the most valuable heritage of the Quiet Revolution, in particular gender equality and secularism. The result has been an identity counter-reaction movement that has expressed itself through the rejection of harmonization practices. Among some Quebecers, this counter-reaction targets immigrants, who have become, to some extent, scapegoats” (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008: 18).

religion in Quebec (and the rest of Canada) cannot be underestimated, though challenging to accurately document and measure. When discrimination-tinged conversations about the Charter began to reverberate, researchers from a range of scholarly domains took note. One study of social media, for example, revealed that Charter fervour was grounded in fear – of a re-emergence of religion in the public sphere in general, and of the Muslim ‘other,’ specifically. In their study ‘Extreme Right in Quebec? The Facebook Pages in Favor of the “Quebec Charter of Values,”’ Nadeau and Helly analysed pro-Charter public pages which appeared shortly after the Charter’s introduction. Their research demonstrated

that support for the Charter [was] essentially based on five general themes: (1) the fear of a return of religion in the public space; (2) the emergence of a Muslim enemy whose values are perceived as irreconcilable with those of Quebec culture; (3) the inertia of the political class and its complicity with media and minorities; (4) the predominance of legal over political powers and of individual over collective rights; and (5) multiculturalism, as a factor of denationalization and social fragmentation (Nadeau and Helly, 2016: 6).

The trickle-down effects of the divisive Charter (and eventually Bill 21) debates, combined with social media echo-chambers, fueled targeted suffering on the ground, as reports of harassment, bullying, and employment dismissals accumulated. Headlines such as “Muslim women report spike in harassment, discrimination since Bill 21 tabled” (Montpetit, 2019) or “Aspiring teachers denied employment as Montreal school boards apply religious symbols ban,” (Leclair, 2019) attested to deleterious impacts of exclusionary policies and offered glimpses of quantifiable discrimination.²⁷

²⁷ In 2019, researchers from a number of disciplines including psychiatry, psychology, anthropology, political science and others, raised profound concerns over the potential long-term negative effects on individuals and on entire communities in the aftermath of the 2013 Charter conversations. A series of articles published in the journal *Transcultural Psychiatry*, brought together the voices of experts, all sounding the alarm about possible future harms. They argued:

The proposal launched a polarizing public debate that mixed concerns about gender equality and the religious repression of women with local expressions of republicanism, ethnic nationalism, anger about the marginalization of French within Canada, and global anxieties about the religious Other, particularly Muslims. Colleagues at the McGill Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry, concerned about the potential impact on the populations we serve, entered the debate with a letter to the newspapers and

During the course of my doctoral work, I was an observer of the evolution of diversity in Canadian society, from the specific vantage point of a newcomer, a Quebec resident and a student of religious studies. I experienced the time period as a personal awakening of sorts, to the irony (and disconnect) of a public education system with the stated aspirational goal of promoting religious literacy and intercultural understanding.

1.3 RELIGION, EDUCATION AND THE NEW DIVERSITY

The quote which opened this chapter is suggestive of much more than a childhood recollection of ‘otherness’. By highlighting the separation of students according to religious affiliation, it can be understood as a statement about the historical interaction of church and state, the collective memory of a socially homogenous past and the impact of evolving social difference on education policy:

Me, the kid named Fahd, and the two other immigrant girls went into an empty classroom with another teacher to go to ‘*morale*,’ while all the Quebecois kids stayed together in the regular classroom with our teacher for Catholic class.

In the cast of the quote, we find newcomers to Canada and *les Québécois de souche*.²⁸ There was my daughter, Fahd and the two other immigrant students who entered a (Quebec) school system

subsequent media interviews. We argued that, in addition to its violation of fundamental human rights, the Charter constituted a risk to social peace and mental health because it would result in increased prejudice and discrimination, which would aggravate mental health problems, and impede access to safe, equitable, and effective health care for minorities (Kirmayer, 2019: 1120-1121).

²⁸ I use the term *Québécois de souche* (*souche*, in English literally meaning tree root or stump) here in the “neutral” sense as “someone who can trace ancestry to French colonizers” (Ravary, 2018). It is a term, along with the English “old stock” and “Quebecois *pure laine*” (dyed in the wool), however, which have become politically charged ways of labelling hierarchies and divisions between Canadians of various backgrounds (Ha, 2015).

structured historically by a Christian framework. The teacher and the majority of the class—all white, Francophone and of Catholic heritage—participated in the weekly performance of an established church-state partnership constructed upon an historical education policy architecture of religious identity transmission. Weekly classes of *Enseignement religieux catholique ou protestant* were a relatively uncontested norm in Quebec primary and secondary schools. For those who did not ‘fit’ with the religious majority, however, the eventual addition of a moral ethics class was a way to make the obligatory religious instruction more inclusive. According to Waddington et al. (2012):

In the old confessional schools, religion was a required taught subject. Yet parents who preferred that their children not receive explicit lessons in Catholic or Protestant religious doctrine did have the choice of a secular “morality” stream. As a result, in some schools—especially those in the culturally heterogeneous urban schools of Montréal—the amount of religious teaching had greatly diminished by the 1990s. However, whether owing to the centrality of Catholicism in Québec’s national narrative or merely the influence of the popular notion that religious belief is the foundation of morality, a strong contingency of French-speaking (and very often nominally ex-Catholic) parents not only felt unthreatened by a strong religious presence in Québec schools, but actually preferred it that way (12).

This hybrid arrangement of confessional religious and moral ethics instruction persisted in various manifestations until a gradual secularization of the school system gained momentum throughout the 1990s.²⁹ The process culminated in 2008 when the province did away with confessional instruction altogether and introduced the so-called ‘secular’ curriculum of the Ethics and Religious Culture Program (ERC).³⁰ A comprehensive summary of the evolution of the ERC program is offered in Chapter two.

²⁹The Task Force on the Place of Religion in Schools, otherwise known as the Proulx Commission, was formed “to consider the question of where, if anywhere, religion’s place would be in the new secularized school system’s curriculum” (Waddington et al, 2012). Its final report issued in 1999, ushered in a new era for Quebec schools in which institutions were no longer based on confessional affiliation.

³⁰ This quote from an explanatory brochure describing the Ethics and Religious Culture Program, demonstrates that Christian traditions held a position of privilege in the curriculum by design: “This program devotes special attention to the religious heritage of our society. The historical and cultural importance of Catholicism and Protestantism in Québec is especially highlighted, while Judaism and Native spirituality, which have also marked this heritage, are also covered,

The intertwining of religion and education in Canada, however, was not unique to one province. The sixteenth century arrival of European colonizers established Christianity as the ideological foundation of nascent government and legal systems, impacting how the citizen-building project of education would unfold over the next three centuries. Of the relationship between historical context and present-day questions about religion in schools, Beaman, et al. (2016) demonstrate that

understanding the current situation necessitates a look back to nineteenth century constitutional agreements that shaped (and continue to influence) how religion is framed in the classroom. Any discussion of religion and education in Canada logically begins with the British North America Act, also referred to as the Constitution Act, in which the individual confederated provinces were accorded the right to ‘exclusively make laws in relation to Education’ and which included guarantees of support for ‘separate’ Catholic and Protestant schools (246).

Thus, education policy across the country mirrored the majoritarian traditions (Catholicism and Protestantism) of the era. Jump forward to today, where dramatic changes in the composition of the Canadian population have resulted in what Beaman describes as a “new religious diversity” (2017: 17).

Diversity, broadly speaking, is a hallmark of life in contemporary Canada. According to its 2016 report on Immigration and ethnocultural diversity, Statistics Canada indicated that “more than one in five Canadians are foreign-born” (Government of Canada, 2017b). By 2036, this statistic is projected to rise to up to 30%, and with regard to religious diversity—the “number of people with a non-Christian religion could almost double” within that time frame (Government of Canada, 2017a). Muslims are projected to represent up to 7.2% of Canadians, for example, and the “number of

along with other religious and spiritual traditions that contribute to present-day Québec culture and that inspire different ways of thinking, being and acting” (MELS, n.d.).

unaffiliated people would continue to increase and could represent between 28.2% and 34.6% of all Canadians in 2036” (Government of Canada, 2017a). Beaman argues that this “new diversity” will look much different demographically than the Canada of previous generations:

The description of Canada as a secular country is not accurate, but neither is it ‘religious.’ Faced with a new diversity, including the rapid growth of the nonreligious; a declining commitment to organized religion; an increase in migration and minority religions; and a renewed attention to indigenous spiritualities, the challenge is to develop inclusive practices that build a solid foundation for a complex future. This means acknowledging power and renegotiating old arrangements to recognize the potential of the new diversity (2017: 17).

In Beaman’s conceptualization of the ‘new diversity,’ she argues that “something phenomenal has happened in a number of Western democracies,” referring to the growth of those who have no religion. This “critical mass of people” is showing up in the data as representing a quarter or more of the population in Canada (18). Religious Studies scholar Christel Manning has likewise argued in her book *Losing Our Religion: How Unaffiliated Parents are Raising their Children*, that the growing number of nonreligious parents have emphasized choice in the range of ‘worldviews’ (apart from religion) from which they draw upon in raising their children and that this will have ongoing generational impacts (Manning, 2015). Manning’s emphasis on the term ‘worldview’ as more inclusive of the varied ways people now create meaning and organize personal values systems, led me to widen my own research standpoint from ‘religious literacy’ to ‘worldview literacy’ (Cusack, 2016). Indeed, this rapidly developing phenomenon of nonreligion is of great import to the academic conversation about religion and education.³¹ Drawing from 2011 Canadian census data, the U.S. General Social Survey from 1972-2012 and the 2011 National Household Survey, the Pew Research

³¹ Even census practices are changing in response to the rise of nonreligion. According to a 2015 report in the Sydney Morning Herald, “for the first time since the ‘no religion’ option was introduced in 1991, the Australian Bureau of Statistics will place it first on a list of answers to the question ‘what is the person’s religion’, and move the ‘Catholic’ option into second position” (Battersby, 2015).

Centre put the North American total of the “religiously unaffiliated” or “nones” at 24% a decade ago. (*Canada’s Changing Religious Landscape*, 2013). In a 2019 poll conducted by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada with over 5,000 Canadians over the age of 18, Heimstra said the “survey suggests half of Canadians are either agnostic, atheist or unreligious. And only a tenth attend religious services weekly” (Heimstra, 2020). If the makeup of Canadian classrooms mirrors statistical population trends, student populations are likely to be comprised of students who have been raised without religion. Other Canadian scholars who study religious decline are making similar conclusions. In Clarke and MacDonald’s book *Leaving Christianity: Changing Allegiances in Canada 1945* (2017), for example, the authors make a crucial point about projections for youth, based on data from the Canadian Census, the National Household Survey and studies carried out by Statistics Canada. They found that

the data reveal a story of profound religious change in which many Canadians are leaving Christianity. The growing incidence of Canadians identifying themselves in the Census as having No Religion is but one indication of this shift, one that, as we will discover, understates the depth and extent of this trend...Our message, then is quite straightforward. Decline in Christian affiliation, membership and participation started in the 1960s and has picked up pace rapidly since then. This trend is likely to continue and, indeed, accelerate as an increasing portion of the country’s population — among youth especially — have never been exposed to Christianity. Moreover, disaffiliation is now occurring among older segments of the population. In short, Canadian society is entering into a new era, a post-Christian era (Clarke and MacDonald, 2017: 11).

This societal shift towards a new diversity represents a pivotal juncture in planning how to best educate upcoming generations of youth in Canada. For Beaman (2017), recognition of this “new diversity” should include attention to societal shifts away from religion. She suggests that “the ever-changing (non)religious landscape offers an opportunity to consider the flow of ideas from this new diversity to responses and choices at the individual, group, and state levels to inclusion and exclusion” (Beaman, 2017b).

1.3.1 Guiding Question and Thesis Structure

Considering how education policy and curricular content need to reflect the contemporary concerns of democratic society, this research project used a triangulated qualitative approach to explore the guiding question: *What, if anything, might Canadian public-school students learn about religions, beliefs and worldviews in order to best prepare them for citizenship in a diverse society?*³² The thesis is comprised of the following seven chapters including the present introduction: 1) Grade one religion class or exclusion by design; 2) Research context, literature review and conceptual framework; 3) Methodology; 4) Listening to parents and educators; 5) Canadian parents and educators weigh in online; 6) Textbook content analysis; and finally, 7) Conclusions and recommendations. Chapter two explains the research context, reviews the corpus of international research on religion and education and details the conceptual framework which undergirds the project. In this chapter, I look to the literature on **pluralism** (as it pertains to **religious and worldview literacy (RWL)** initiatives and I introduce the second conceptual pillar of xenosophia (Streib and Klein, 2018) and I tie these elements together with the framework of **deep equality** (Beaman, 2017) as promising perspectives from which to consider religious and worldview literacy education. Chapter three elaborates the different qualitative methods which were used to explore the research questions, including face to face, semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers, a national online survey and a textual analysis of student manuals used in the ERC program. Chapter four covers the analysis of data collected from interviews with parents and educators and elaborates key themes which emerged from these conversations. The majority of participants held the opinion that religion

³² In an effort to avoid normative vocabulary, the word ‘might’ is used as a narrative (and non-normative) device to suggest possibility, and a broad range of hypothetical directions.

and worldview literacy education was needed to foster openness towards and respect for diversity, they often perceived religion as a source of conflict, and considered misunderstanding to be at the root of prejudice towards specific religious groups. These themes were also echoed in data collected from the online survey. Chapter five is an explanation and analysis of these online responses from 190 participants from across Canada, which highlight a wide range of experience and opinions about citizenship education. Given that the questionnaire and survey instrument were nearly identical, a discussion of convergences and divergences from both the interviews and the online survey concludes the chapter. Chapter six provides a comprehensive content analysis of five primary-level textbooks used in the ERC program, revealing significant issues with the representation of majority religion privilege, the omission of facts about religion as a driver of colonization, and inadequate attention to non-religious worldviews. Having previously set out the conceptual framework early in the dissertation, it is in the triangulation of the three different sources of data from chapters four, five and six, that interconnections with the concepts became more apparent. Chapter seven offers a synthesis of findings and analysis, and concludes the dissertation by tying together the empirical findings with the conceptual framework, summarizing contributions to research and offering policy recommendations for educating the next generation of Canadians in an era of ever-changing diversity.

Chapter Two: Research Context, Literature Review, Conceptual Framework

2.1 RESEARCH CONTEXT | IGNORANCE

“It started out of ignorance.”

–Gurbaj Singh Multani, January 25, 2018

On January 25, 2018, Gurbaj Singh Multani came to the University of Ottawa Law School to discuss his experience at the center of the landmark 2006 Canadian Supreme Court Case *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys*.³³ I took copious notes as he explained to the packed lecture hall full of law and religious studies graduate students, how he inadvertently dropped his kirpan at his Quebec primary school when he was twelve years old.³⁴ The accidental appearance of what was normally a concealed ceremonial dagger worn under the clothing subsequently set off a highly mediatized, acrimonious and protracted legal fray which ended up in Canada’s highest court.³⁵ Briefly summarized, the Multani Case involved a series of school board decisions and reversals by the *Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys* in Montreal, Quebec, in which the student’s right to wear his kirpan at school was the focus of debate. As the case moved its way through the Superior

³³ This event was organized by the Canada Research Chair in Legal Pluralism and Comparative Law, [Professor Pascale Fournier](#), in the context of a University of Ottawa Law Course, DRC 2509C Droits et libertés.

³⁴ A kirpan is a ceremonial dagger worn by observant Sikhs. In ‘The Five Ks and the Courts,’ the Harvard Pluralism Project outlines a number of American legal challenges which centered around the five symbols of Sikh devotion. See <http://pluralism.org/religions/sikhism/issues-for-sikhs-in-america/the-five-ks-and-the-courts/>

³⁵ As a pivotal decision on religious freedom in Canada, the Multani decision established that a ban on wearing a kirpan constituted an infringement of the “freedom of conscience and religion” found in section 2(a) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. See *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys*, 2006; and The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982.

Court, the Court of Appeal and finally Canada's Supreme Court, the central question was whether the prohibition on the kirpan was a charter violation of freedom of religion and equality. The case was ultimately decided in Multani's favour (*Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys*, 2006). Ignorance about Sikh religious belief and practice emerged as an ongoing theme during the actual court proceedings and in the courts of public opinion. During his presentation, Multani recounted how the conflict over his religious beliefs was likely born of ignorance about the religious 'other.' "It started with a flicker and ended in a fire," he stated while reflecting on his experience as a young student. He emphasized that "It wasn't such a big issue. It should have been solved rather calmly." Multani went on to explain that "to the school board it was a knife," and posed a security threat to fellow students. To him, it was neither weapon nor menace, but rather a symbol of commitment to his tradition. Given his young age, Multani recalled that he had no idea of the magnitude of public debate around his case which churned like an angry storm online and across Canadian media. He did remember, however, that over 100 students did not show up to school after the initial school board negotiation permitted him to wear the kirpan with certain conditions. He changed schools during the course of the legal saga and enrolled at a Seventh-day Adventist school where he was immediately welcomed by administrators, kirpan and all. During his lecture, Mr. Multani indicated that his new school had classes about religion (and the diversity thereof) which he felt made them more open-minded towards a range of religious symbols. During the question period following his presentation at the University of Ottawa, he was asked what he thought about life in a multicultural, diverse Canada. He concluded his address with this simple statement: "at the end of the day, we all need to live together" (Multani, 2018).³⁶

³⁶ Beaman explores the Multani case in her 2017 book *Deep Equality in an Era of Religious Diversity*. She contends that "the precise details of the process by which his kirpan came to be the defining characteristic of Gurbaj Singh, rather than his academic achievements, his strength of character, or his athletic ability, remain somewhat obscured by the layers of 'facts' recited in the legal cases" (Beaman, 2017:164). By bringing attention to how singular and rigid notions of identity

Multani’s presentation was both captivating and unsettling to me as a researcher thinking about the intersection of religious/worldview literacy and public education. Hearing the story firsthand from the person at the epicenter of such a seminal legal challenge added a substantial depth of nuance absent from court records and media coverage. Had school administrators, teachers, parents and students been more familiar with Sikh traditions and symbolic religious objects, would the accidental dropping of the kirpan have incited such a bitter public and legal clash? Would education *about* religion, beliefs and worldviews have better prepared the stakeholders to navigate (in this case the clearly unfamiliar) waters of religious diversity and its potential manifestations in public life? The Quebec public school system was, at the same time, near the end of a long process of ‘deconfessionalizing’ its public school system and in the pre-implementation phase of its now (in)famous Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program.³⁷ Ironically, among the pedagogical objectives of the ERC were learning about religious diversity, encouraging dialogue and fostering *le vivre ensemble*.³⁸

are often ascribed to a person or group at the center of legal (and public) debates, Beaman’s work can be extrapolated to concerns about essentialization in education *about* religion.

³⁷ The ERC program guide preamble sets out the context of the new curriculum: “The Ethics and Religious Culture program constitutes the culmination of a long process during which the Québec school system has shifted away from essentially confessional structures and orientations—both Catholic and Protestant—to entirely nonreligious structures. This transformation, which is directed toward the emergence of educational institutions that respect the freedom of conscience and religion of all citizens, originated in the education reform of the 1960s, at which time Québec decided to assume full responsibility for its mission regarding public education. The transformation has taken place in increments, taking into account the evolving mentality of the times” (*Ethics and Religious Culture: Secondary Cycles One and Two*, 2008).

³⁸ ‘Living together’ is the literal translation of the French expression *le vivre ensemble*. While there is no singular definition, I use it in the sense of an aspirational idea about community relations and cohesion at micro, mezzo and macro levels of living in plural societies.

In the quotation which introduced this chapter, Multani stated that *ignorance* was the catalyst which propelled a small incident into a local, then provincial and subsequently national controversy. *Ignorance*, in this example, is at the core of what Diane Moore identifies as religious *illiteracy*. According to Moore, director of the Harvard Religious Literacy Project,³⁹ religious illiteracy is

the lack of understanding about 1) the basic tenets of the world's religious traditions; 2) the diversity of expressions and beliefs *within* traditions that emerge and evolve in relation to differing social/historical contexts; and 3) the profound role that religion plays in human social, cultural, and political life in both contemporary and historical contexts (Moore, 2006).

She contends that “our ignorance about the specific tenets of the world’s religious traditions significantly hinder our capacity to function as engaged, informed and responsible citizens of our democracy” (Moore, 2007: 4). Growing academic interest in ignorance about religion in public life has resulted in an expansion of scholarly writing on the topic in recent years. Boston University Professor of Religious Studies Stephen Prothero, for example, was startled by his undergraduate students’ unfamiliarity not only with their own religious traditions but those of the major world religions (Prothero, 2008) . In his book *Religious Literacy: What Every American Should Know--and Doesn't*, Prothero argues that “Americans are both deeply religious and profoundly ignorant about religion” (2008: 1). He asserts, moreover, that religious illiteracy has “civic implications” which reach far beyond the classroom to nearly every level of society, and emphasized the need for renewed attention to the neglected educational imperative of religious literacy (2008: 2). Prothero positions religious literacy as an essential point of departure in understanding historical “social reform movements such as abolitionism, temperance, women’s rights and civil rights” as well as

³⁹ The Religious Literacy Project at Harvard University “advances the public understanding of religion with special attention to power, peace, and conflict. Through resources and training for educators and other professionals we explore the complex roles religions play in society” (Harvard Religious Literacy Project, n.d.).

“contemporary debates about abortion, stem cell research... euthanasia, gay marriage, welfare policy, military policy and foreign policy” among others (6). He points to a broadly applied misconception of the American constitutional separation of church and state as the driving force that steadily removed religion and its unique vocabulary from the public classroom. Prothero was likewise unequivocal in his contention that religion—far from being a relic left behind on the path of modernity and its attendant secularity—is a driving force in contemporary society, with religious literacy thus re-emerging as a necessary component of a comprehensive liberal education. The core of objective of his work in religious literacy was “to help citizens participate fully in social, political and economic life in a nation and a world in which religion counts” (19). Religious illiteracy, according to Prothero, not only plays out negatively in the arenas of domestic public policy and international relations, but even compromises fundamental understanding of other aspects of social life including the arts. The author cautions readers, however, that “religious literacy is not just the accumulation of facts” but rather an understanding which can foster the ability to engage in productive dialogue and the exchange of ideas that advance essential values such as equality and respect for human rights (17).

In the Canadian context, Paul Bramadat, Director of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society at the University of Victoria, contends that ignorance about religion in Canada is due to willful omission or avoidance. “The virtual exclusion of religion from public discourse (including its absence from, or awkward presence in, national ceremonies, media coverage, and in most public schools),” he argues, “has produced a kind of religious illiteracy the result of which is that Canadians are increasingly ignorant about world religions” (Bramadat, 2005: 5). Bramadat’s point about the exclusion of religion in public conversations is one of many academic arguments for the possible ‘why’ of widespread ignorance about religion.

Moore, Bramadat and Prothero are but three notable voices impugning ignorance in the very large, international exchange on the social costs of religious illiteracy. In the section that follows, I outline how the proposition of religious literacy as a “threshold concept” has gained traction in education research as a possible remedy for this form of ignorance (Meyer and Land, 2003).

2.2 RELIGIOUS/WORLDVIEW LITERACY | A THRESHOLD CONCEPT

The idea of a “threshold concept” in educational theory was first introduced by Jan Meyer and Ray Land in their seminal 2003 article: “Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines.” They conducted a series of interviews with professors and students as part of larger research project in the United Kingdom aimed at improving teaching and learning. According to the authors:

A threshold concept can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress. As a consequence of comprehending a threshold concept there may thus be a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even world view (2003: 1).

With the so-called return of religion as an *enjeux* in many realms of public life, the push to situate religious literacy as a threshold concept has gained a small, but growing following in some academic circles. Scottish scholar of religion and philosophy Kenneth Primrose, for example, argues that religious literacy should be viewed as a threshold concept. In his view, it is foundational to the educational objectives of youth citizenship construction. Primrose states:

In educational theory, religious literacy could be considered a ‘threshold concept’ for 21st-century citizenship. The word threshold comes from the word threshing: to separate the wheat from the chaff, filtering out what does not nourish in order to be left with what does. A concept that establishes a threshold is one that disabuses us of superficial understandings, and creates something more profound, complex and paradigmatic. For example, a threshold concept in physics would be understanding ‘temperature gradient’, or in literature it could be learning to deconstruct text for analysis. They are a boundary through which one must pass in order to advance in the understanding of a subject, allowing one a fuller grasp of a discipline. Similarly, in the study of religion, and indeed global citizenship, religious literacy should also be deemed a threshold concept, as it moves towards a perspectival understanding of religion rather than a reductionist one. Religion moves from being a set of propositions and practices, to an animating force behind human behaviour – something that needs to be heard in its own key (Primrose, n.d.).

A consensus can be observed in the general literature on threshold concepts as ‘game changers’ for learners. In Flanagan’s gleaning of the research, including the work of Meyer and Land (2003), he describes two of the distinctive elements of a threshold concept as 1) “Transformative: Once understood, a threshold concept changes the way in which the student views the discipline;” and 2) “Integrative: Threshold concepts, once learned, are likely to bring together different aspects of the subject that previously did not appear, to the student, to be related” (Flanagan, n.d.). When applied to the field of religion and education, there are a number of arguments for the consideration of religious/worldview literacy as a threshold concept. Foremost among those arguments is the fact that Canadian public-school populations are no longer homogenous in the ways they were a half a century ago. Classrooms in our major cities and suburbs naturally reflect the everchanging diversity of the Canadian populace. The inculcation of openness in young learners is, therefore, a vital preparation for citizenship in a plural society. Moore’s (2016) elaboration of the qualities of a “religiously literate person” underscore the relevance of religious/worldview literacy as a threshold concept:

Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the

history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions and expressions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place (Moore, 2016: 4).

How best to teach such a threshold concept in public education settings, of course, is highly dependent on context. Does a best-practices approach position education about religion in its own discrete curriculum, or does it integrate it into other subjects? Woven throughout the literature review which follows, is the hypothesis that education *about* religion and worldviews has the potential to be both transformative and integrative.

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW | AN INTERNATIONAL ENDEAVOR

The scholarly study of religion and education is a vast international endeavor undertaken in a wide range of disciplines including economics, education, law, political science, psychology, religious studies, sociology and theology. While this is by no means a comprehensive list, it is indicative of the field's breadth and potential intersections. It is, in nearly every sense, an evolving scholarly conversation happening on many continents. Where there is diversity, there are discussions about how to respond to diversity. There is however, no clear consensus on about terminology in the study of religion and education. As a starting point for this review of literature, I will first discuss this dilemma of terminology and elaborate the principal terms as they apply to this research. I will then present a cross-section of domestic and international scholarly research on religion and education principally taught as a non-confessional subject in primary and secondary schools. In essence, the work cited here reflects ongoing educational (and by extension political) adaptations (or resistance)

to pluralism.⁴⁰ It is an overview of the practical and theoretical concerns of researching, teaching and learning *about* religion, religious diversity and non-religious worldviews in western democracies.

Terminology

What do researchers signify when they refer to religious education, religion education, or education about religion? The short answer is – it depends. It depends on a host of factors which are not easily catalogued by jurisdiction. Every country, and indeed each province, state, or other intra-national division may approach religion in the classroom differently. In the chapter entitled Young

⁴⁰ Definitions of pluralism are as varied as the bodies of literature in which they are found. Although an in-depth discussion of pluralism is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I offer a brief selection of illustrative quotes which are germane to my project. As a political philosophy, for example, pluralism can encompass various forms of coexistence amid a range of differences and competing interests. It is a contested concept, however, and thus no one definition adequately captures its breadth. According to the Global Centre for Pluralism (a collaboration of the Canadian Government and His Highness the Aga Khan), “pluralism is a positive response to diversity... [and] involves taking decisions and actions, as individuals and societies, which are grounded in respect for diversity (*What Is Pluralism?*, n.d.). In the book *Pluralism*, political theorist William Connolly puts forth the idea of a “deep pluralism” and uses an example from film about an international group of housemates to clarify his line of reasoning. Using a micro view of differing lifestyles to offer a macro understanding of a diverse society, he emphasizes the potential of connection and argues that:

such a pluralism of everyday collage feeds into the larger politics of public pluralism, showing each participant that one’s faith, sexuality, language, cooking habits, and temperament, while pertinent in divergent degrees and times to the larger life of Europe, do not exhaust everything pertinent to living together across multiple modes of difference. Europe is being recreated through such micro-political, layered practices of connection across multiple differences (Connolly, 2005: 66).

Common threads from Connolly’s deep pluralism can also be found in Bouchard and Taylor’s 2008 report ‘Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation,’ wherein they define pluralism as:

a system or philosophy which, in the name of respect for diversity, acknowledges the existence of different political opinions, moral and religious beliefs, and cultural and social behavior. More specifically, it refers, in common parlance to respect for minority rights. Pluralism calls for a series of measures aimed at the harmonization of cultural differences. It operates within the limits of values deemed to be fundamental, which prevents it from lapsing into relativism (2008: 288).

These three threads, from different but interconnected thinking on pluralism, form an apt introduction to a more in-depth explanation of pluralism (as it pertains to religious literacy) elaborated in the conceptual framework presented in chapter two.

People and Religious Diversity: A Canadian Perspective, Beaman et al. describe the dilemma of terminology using the Canadian example:

the idea of ‘religious education’ or ‘religion education’ can be conceptually ambiguous in the Canadian context since it has no stable meaning across provinces, referring to confessional, denomination-specific instruction in some or to world religions curricula in others. Finding a common lexicon is correspondingly problematic. In contrast to other countries like the UK, where the use of the abbreviation RE immediately connotes a broadly understood model of instruction that pays heed to religious diversity, there is no Canada-wide consensus about what to even call such a programme of study (Beaman et al., 2016).

In some countries, religion in the classroom is understood as confessional instruction from the perspective of a majority tradition; it can be based on a religious studies approach where no particular tradition is considered normative; it may take the form of a hybrid confessional and world religions approach or it may be entirely absent from the curricula.⁴¹ Jackson (2015) has drawn attention to the fact that education literature is rife with competing understandings of even foundational words such as ‘pedagogy,’ ‘didactics’ and ‘education’ (27). The terms may refer to theories of learning, methods of teaching, subject-specific instruction or to learning beyond the classroom.⁴² Vocabulary in the

⁴¹ The study of religion and education is plagued by nebulous terminology which Jackson contends “causes a great deal of confusion.” He uses several international cases to make the point: “What in the United States and the Republic of Ireland, to take two examples, is usually called “religious education” is in England often called ‘religious nurture’ or ‘religious instruction’. What in England is called ‘religious education,’ generally seen as an impartial study of religions in state-funded schools, is called ‘religion education’ in the United States of America and South Africa. In France, where in public education there is still some uncertainty about the place of studies of religion, the term *le fait religieux* has been used to indicate material ‘about religions’ taught through various subjects rather than appearing as a separate subject of study. *Le fait religieux* has often been translated into English as ‘education about religious facts’ but, according to a Council of Europe source, the expression could be rendered, according to context, as ‘religion and beliefs,’ ‘religions and beliefs’ (both plural) and ‘religions and belief systems’ (meaning non-faith-based belief systems)” (Jackson, 2015: 29).

⁴² As an example of how vocabulary within a defined body of literature can vary, particularly when dealing with issues of translation, Jackson states: “Educational terminology has its own issues of translation. For example, ‘pedagogy’ (pedagogikk), in the Nordic countries, is used as a general term for ‘education’, covering theories of socialisation and learning in a wider sense than teaching or schooling. ‘Didactics’ (didaktikk) is that part of the pedagogical discipline that deals specifically with teaching. However, ‘education’ (educazione) in Italian is understood more narrowly as the practice of educating and its results, while ‘pedagogy’ (pedagogia) designates educational theory. In English usage, ‘education’ can be used for theory or practice, and pedagogy is often used to refer to teaching methods or approaches. This is confusing, since what in the UK is often called pedagogy...is usually called didactics (or equivalent) in various other European languages. In the German context the term Bildung includes not only knowledge and understanding, but also the implications of learning for personal development” (Jackson, 2015: 27).

academic literature about religion and education is equally, if not more problematic. In his compendium of best practices *Signposts: Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious worldviews in intercultural education* Jackson maintains that

The area of religions and beliefs is a particular terminological minefield. Key terms – such as “religion”, “religions”, “religious”, “religious diversity”, “dimension of religions”, “religious dimension”, “faith”, “non-religious”, “theist”, “atheist”, “agnostic”, “secular”, “secularity”, “secularism”, “belief”, “conviction”, “spirituality”, “world view”, “life stance”, “multicultural education”, “intercultural education”, “intercultural dialogue”, “religious literacy”, etc., have different understandings and associations in different languages and contexts. Sometimes these contexts relate to particular national situations. Other times the contexts relate more to particular viewpoints within and across nations (2015: 27).

Jackson goes to great lengths to detail the predicament of terminology—a dilemma echoed in my own struggle with how to refer, in the most inclusive of ways, to the topic of my research. Based on what is commonly found in the literature, I opted for the term ‘religious and worldview literacy’ (RWL) as an inclusive articulation of the ways in which people organize their lives and construct meaning. Though I am aware the terms ‘religion’ and ‘religious’ are critiqued in the academy for having a particular western, colonial baggage,⁴³ the term ‘worldviews’ is also not without controversy, having its own contested history in the literature of western philosophy.⁴⁴ Religious Studies founder Ninian

⁴³ "Religion," according to Jonathan Z. Smith “is not a native category. It is not a first-person term of self-characterization. It is a category imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture. It is the other, in these instances colonialists, who are solely responsible for the content of the term” (Smith, 1998: 269).

⁴⁴ In his article *Meta//Narrative(s)// V. World//Views: Rethinking the philosophy of religion*, Saville-Smith expands the work of J. Z. Smith regarding the category of ‘religion.’ He pushes against the term ‘worldviews’ because it “has a long and contentious history in Modernist philosophy,” and in his view the term ‘metanarrative’ is a more flexible alternative. Though his work is only tangentially pertinent to this dissertation, his arguments are nevertheless an interesting aside to debates about the religious/secular binary. In Saville-Smith’s reasoning, his preference for the term ‘metanarrative’ is based on the idea that “in premodern cultures, or extra-modern cultures - that is cultures largely untouched by the modernist project - there is no distinction between philosophy and religion. The differentiation between philosophy and religion is a consequence of modernity’s critique of the religious as being fundamentally unreasonable. Philosophy is what remains when the supernatural beings of religion have been reduced to pictures in the sky ... In the very act of dismissing, or at least domesticating religion, Modernity generates a dichotomy, which manifests as the twin poles of the sacred and the secular. This is a false dichotomy, a thought experiment perpetrated by modernist theorists, like a messy divorce...” (Saville-Smith, n.d.).

Smart, however, articulated the problem with a straightforward proposal: “the English language does not have a term to refer to both traditional religions and ideologies; the best expression is perhaps worldviews.” In Smart’s usage, the term was employed “in a general sense to refer to both religions and ideologies, and also to refer specifically to secular ideologies” (Smart, 1983: 2). Thus, I use the hybrid term ‘religious/worldview literacy’ throughout this dissertation in the spirit of Smart’s contention that it takes account of a spectrum of beliefs and ideological commitments.

An International Endeavour

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, or 9/11 attacks on New York City’s World Trade Centre and the American Pentagon, anxiety grounded in widespread illiteracy about the religious “other” alerted educators, academics, and policy-makers to the need for increased understanding of religion and religious diversity. These events and other highly mediatized episodes of violence with some link to religion (imagined, or factual) in recent years continue to feed a substantial international research effort, exploring productive ways to quell social tensions and to promote intercultural understanding and peaceful coexistence. The ‘how’ of approaching these objectives are quite context-specific. There are common modes across geographic regions, however even within particular localities, differing state projects result in a *mélange* of educational objectives. This has resulted in a substantial and diverse body of literature, reflective of the intersections of cultural histories and contemporary social issues in play in the public sphere. The majority of these published works are of fairly recent vintage and I have therefore opted to organize this geographic review of literature, rather than exclusively chronologically. In highlighting scholarship from three continents, three core themes

are evident in the literature: the relationship of church and state, the role of religion education in cultivating *le vivre ensemble* and the debate over differing pedagogical approaches. This geographic overview begins in the United Kingdom and Europe, moves on to Australia, then to the United States and finally to Canada.

The United Kingdom and Europe

The scholarly study of religion and education broadly speaking, and of state-supported education *about* religion, more specifically, is most extensively developed in the United Kingdom and Europe. This may be attributable to the high levels of immigration after the Second World War which then prompted greater attention in later decades to how education policy addressed shifting ethnic, cultural and religious diversity (Byrne, 2014). Grand narratives about secularization in Europe likewise lulled scholars and policy makers into thinking that religion had ebbed.⁴⁵ Religion was reemerging, however, as a social and political *enjeux*. Research on religion and education would thus see another upsurge as ignorance about religious diversity and concerns over radicalization unfolded in the aftermath of 9/11. While religious education (RE) takes on different aims and formulations from across Europe and the UK the contributions of Robert Jackson (1997, 2004, 2006, 2015) are considered foundational to the field.⁴⁶ Noting an overall lack of empirical studies and ambiguity in

⁴⁵ On the underestimation of religion's influence at the beginning of the 21st century, Weisse emphasizes "In most European countries, we have assumed for a long time that increasing secularisation would lead to a gradual retreat of religion from public space. This tendency has reversed itself in the course of the past decade as religion has returned to public attention. Both throughout Europe and internationally, we are seeing a revitalisation of religion in both the individual and public sphere. Even in states such as France, which has had a system of strict separation of state and church for more than a century, we can observe a new trend towards acknowledging religions' growing relevance... Similar developments can be seen in other states and societies" (Weisse, 2012).

⁴⁶ In 1994, Jackson founded the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) in the UK, bringing together a community of researchers, working in fields such as RE, citizenship education, intercultural education, teacher training and others. Many WRERU scholars have been influential in developing a very large body of literature based on empirical

previous research on religious education, Afdal (2010) credits Jackson with putting forth the idea that pluralism significantly changed religious education over time. Jackson's interpretive approach (1997, 2006, 2015), as elaborated in the previously cited report *Signposts*, addresses "'supranational' issues of diversity, globalization, and secularization" (14). Refined over several decades and across many countries, the interpretive approach emphasizes "how religions are portrayed or represented to learners (representation); how religious language and symbols are interpreted by learners (interpretation); [and] how learners respond to their learning about religions (reflexivity)" (36). It is a framework through which students are encouraged "to find their own positions within the key debates about religious plurality" (Jackson, cited in Skeie, 2009: 23) and is undergirded by theoretical insights from philosophy, religious studies as well as cultural and social anthropology. Jackson's work has given scholars and practitioners both theory and pedagogy for disrupting monolithic understandings of religions in educational settings and is widely accepted as the basis upon which subsequent research in religion and worldview education has been inspired.^{47, 48}

studies. The work of WRERU Principal Research Fellow Elizabeth Arweck (2016), for example, brought to the fore the importance of geo-social 'embeddedness' in understanding youth's viewpoints on religious diversity in school and community contexts.

⁴⁷ On the question of religion and culture, and the inherent mutability of lived experience, Jackson writes: "The approach criticises the representation of world religions as homogeneous belief systems...The approach is equally critical of simplistic representations of cultures and of the relationship between religion and culture which see religions and cultures as homogeneous. The approach takes account of both the dimension of 'traditional' plurality the overt diversity to be seen through the presence of different religious and ethnic groups in society and that of 'modern' or 'postmodern' plurality, in which individuals from any background can use cultural ideas and practices from many possible sources. Descriptively speaking, the interaction of these two dimensions is reflected in the ideological and spiritual diversity to be found within religions" (Jackson, 2016: 155-156).

⁴⁸ Religious and worldview literacy is not a conversation exclusive to education. It is also a matter for many other public service sectors, including health care, police work and government. Dinham's research, for example, demonstrates how "health and social care educators, policy makers and practitioners need to develop their religious literacy in order to engage fully and competently with the religion and belief identities of their service users in a religiously diverse and complex world" (Dinham, 2018: 83).

Jackson's founding of the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) in 1994 also set the stage for major collaborations on education policy work, and teaching and learning about religious diversity, as well as religious literacy research. Scholars such as Arweck (2014), Robbins and Francis (2016), and Ipgrave (2014), among many others, made significant contributions to the corpus of literature, particularly with empirical studies conducted among youth and young adults.

Names of scholars from other institutions in the UK have likewise become synonymous with the field of religion and education, and religious literacy, in particular. Dinham and Francis (2015), for example, suggest that the disappearance of micro and macro level conversations about religion in the public sphere over the last five decades has resulted in an inability (or reluctance) to engage in nuanced and informed discussions about this aspect of diversity in contemporary society. They stress the need for increased religious literacy programs at all levels of educational institutions, including in universities, as well as in the employment sector. Dinham and Francis have also underscored the importance of including nonreligion in the mix, arguing that

diversity isn't limited to religious beliefs...and this stretches the 'religious literacy' idea still further. Non-religious identities are just as complex, and assumptions that all non- or areligious people conform to a standardized form of atheism is as misleading and damaging as assumptions about Islam or Christianity that ignore centuries of debate, contest and conflict between different understandings (2015: 259-260).

Citing Catto's and Perfect's research on religious literacy, law and human rights, Dinham and Francis also specify the importance of expanding literacy conversations to include non-religious belief systems such as environmentalism (2015). This rapidly expanding academic field of nonreligion of course, has particular significance for conversations about religious literacy in education. In a recent

doctoral study exploring the junctures of religious literacy, nonreligion and secularity in the United Kingdom and beyond, Ellis takes an alternate tack, saying that:

advocates for religious literacy also call upon notions of secularity, explicitly citing the idea that the need for religious literacy results from our so-called secular society's lost ability to interact with religious populations and identify religious tropes. Religious literacy, in this way, participates in the debate around religion's place within the liberal-democratic public sphere and points to tensions underlying the category of the 'secular.' Despite the growing body of literature on such themes, there is a dearth of scholarly analysis connecting theories of secularism to current policy proposals (Ellis, 2020).

Ellis' arguments underscore the importance for future research to consider education policy implications in the context of shifting scholarly understandings of secularity in specific jurisdictions.

Europe

European countries were among the first to collaboratively publish curricular guidelines for teaching *about* religion and worldviews. In 2007, for example, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) unveiled the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools.⁴⁹ Responding to the escalation of public animosities aimed at the religious 'other,' the OSCE/ODIHR saw the need for education interventions to counter misinformation in the 56 jurisdictions which comprise the OSCE constituency. According to the guide:

⁴⁹ The authors introduce the publication with a story about the contextual "Significance of Toledo" (2007: 1). The aptness of the Spanish city as the meeting site for the creation of the document, was found in its complex socio-religious history. "What awareness of Toledo suggests," according to the preface "is that it is vital to grasp the confluence rather than the clash of civilizations. Throughout Europe—as with the church of San Roman in Toledo—there are layers of civilization built on and interacting with other layers. Modern-day Europe is the result of the interweaving of migrations of disparate peoples, interactions of religions within a cradle moulded by Christianity and by other religious and cultural forces for more than twenty-five centuries, through borrowing, copying, transforming, transmitting, and absorbing. Toledo offers us not only visual reminders of interwoven civilizations, but also remnants of civilizations alternatively fighting each other, living together under tension, prospering together, suffering together, as well as exhibiting examples of tolerance and intolerance" (2007: 2).

It is important for young people to acquire a better understanding of the role that religions play in today's pluralistic world. The need for such education will continue to grow as different cultures and identities interact with each other through travel, commerce, media or migration. Although a deeper understanding of religions will not automatically lead to greater tolerance and respect, ignorance increases the likelihood of misunderstanding, stereotyping, and conflict (2007: 9).⁵⁰

The same concerns over social tensions prompted a sizeable number of other scholars from a variety of institutions, to delve into the problems presumed to arise from religious illiteracy. One of the most well-known, large-scale research projects about religion and education ever conducted was the Religion, Education, Dialogue and Conflict (REDco) project, coordinated by Wolfram Weisse, Professor of Pedagogy and International Theology at the University of Hamburg. The vast research project was carried out with teen-aged students in schools across eight European countries from 2006-2009, including participants from the United Kingdom, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, the Russian Federation and Spain. The central research focus “addressed the question of how religions might contribute to dialogue or conflict in Europe” and explored the varied experiences of youth and teachers from a broad spectrum of viewpoints, cultural backgrounds and political affiliations (Jackson, 2012). REDco project contributions to literature were extensive and demonstrated students' vision of how “peaceful coexistence” was grounded in religious literacy but also that social cohesion was significantly enhanced by “sharing common interests as well as doing things together” (Jackson, 2012: 8). Social interaction was essential, according to the youth who

⁵⁰ At the time the Toledo guidelines were developed, scholarly conversations about ‘nones’ in the study of religion and church-state relations had not yet become commonplace. Nevertheless, the publication does make this statement: “...it should be noted that the principles address not only teaching about religions, but also teaching about beliefs, that is, non-religious conceptions of life and the world. The main concern of these Guiding Principles – deepening commitment to human rights principles – applies equally to both” (2007: 20).

participated in the study, for equality to flourish and for the perspective of ‘other’ to evolve into a vision of ‘us.’ Jackson’s interpretive approach provided the key theoretical underpinnings of the study, with religions “understood not as homogenous and bounded systems” and consideration given to intra-religious diversity and the individuality of adherents (Weisse, 2010: 191). Published research from the REDCo project is significant, both in quantity and in relevance to future studies in other countries, given its particular emphasis on classroom interaction and methodological approaches such as incident analysis and ethnographic video analysis (Avest, Jozsa, Knauth, Roson, and Skeie, 2009). Findings from the REDCo research revealed openness towards religious pluralism, belief in harmonious coexistence despite religious differences, critiques of claims to truth resulting in exclusion, and the importance of respect and dialogical skills when learning about/discussing religions.⁵¹ Other results from this landmark study revealed the importance of schools as the primary setting for youth from non-religious backgrounds to learn about religion and the key site of interaction with those from religious traditions other than their own (Weisse, 2010, 2012).⁵²

⁵¹ Results from the REDCo research demonstrated that learning about diversity impacted students’ attitudes of openness towards the ‘religious’ other (Jackson, 2012). I would suggest that where restrictions on dialogue about religion in schools are more extreme, the risk of social incoherence is greater. In France, for example, historical reluctance to engage conversations about religion in classrooms has resulted in higher levels of social apprehension about diversity. With education policy historically based on a rigid interpretation of secularism or *laïcité*, the evolution of diversity in French schools has been the source of escalating tension. Since public expression of religious belonging is significantly restricted by French law, visible religious minorities such as Muslims, in particular, have been the focus of negative public scrutiny. A very acute degree of religious illiteracy was revealed in aftermath of the 2015 attacks at the Paris headquarters of the Charlie Hebdo newspaper (Donadio, 2015). In a post-Charlie Hebdo article published in the New York Times, Donadio sums up the conundrum for French educators: “The attacks have placed teachers on the front lines in a country where schools are seen as responsible not only for reading and math, but also for instilling moral values, citizenship and the concept of the rule of law” (2015).

⁵² Jackson (2012) offers this summary of REDCo project findings:

- “Students wish for peaceful coexistence across differences and believe this to be possible”
- “For students, peaceful coexistence depends on knowledge about each other’s religions and worldviews and sharing common interests as well as doing things together”
- “Students who learn about religious diversity in school are more willing to have conversations about religions/beliefs with students of other backgrounds than those who do not”
- “Students wish to avoid conflict: some of the religiously committed students feel vulnerable”
- “Students want learning to take place in a safe classroom environment where there are agreed procedures for express and discussion”

Australia

Australian scholars have made significant contributions to the international body of literature about religion and education. As a mix of approaches from exclusively confessional courses to hybrid ‘teaching *about* religion’ from a majoritarian tradition perspective, Religious Instruction (RI), Religious Education (RE) or Special Religious Instruction (SRI) in Australian schools varies from state to state (Halafoff and Bouma, 2019). Scholars such as Bouma (2011, 2012), Byrne (2014), Halafoff (2015) and Maddox (2014) have animated longstanding academic conversations about religion in Australian schools and some are key academic actors in government consultations about education reform.⁵³ As in other countries, the intersection of religion, education and state has a protracted and contentious history in Australia.⁵⁴ Bouma provides a helpful system of categorization for understanding this relationship of religion and state in Australia as “religions as the *object* of policy, the *source* of policy, the *critics* of policy, and the *implementers* of policy” (2012: 282). With regard to education, he sees much of the religious education ‘service’ (classroom instruction on religion) provided on a volunteer basis by well-organized conservative groups (and with state support) as an example of religions as implementers of policy. The prickly issue of religion in Australian

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- “Most students would like the state-funded school to be a place for learning about different religions/worldviews, rather than for instruction *into* a particular religion/worldview.”

⁵³ Bouma, Byrne, Halafoff and Maddox formed REENA (Religions, Ethics and Education Network of Australia) in 2011, as an alliance focused on lobbying the Australian government for educational reform (Halafoff, 2015: 367).

⁵⁴ In his comparative research on religious education in the United States and in Australia, Mayrl explores the “secular settlements” (208) of each country, asserting that “America’s decentralized system of education administration facilitated the more rapid and extensive secularization of American education,” whereas “Australia’s insulated state structure centralized curricular decision-making, making secularizing reforms more difficult for religious minorities and educators alike” (209). Mayrl’s work adds nuance to the Australian scholars’ collective concerns about the sway certain traditions have historically had on education policy in that country. “Australian political institutions” argues Mayrl, “are far more amenable to religious influences, despite Australians’ somewhat lower levels of belief and practice” (Mayrl, 2015).

classrooms seems to have arrived at a very critical juncture, parallel in certain ways to the situation in Canada; according to Bouma, the seemingly painful transition from a country self-defined by its historically ‘Judeo-Christian’ character now reluctantly grapples with how to embrace a “multi-faith and no-faith” identity (2012: 293). In her work on the intertwinement of religion education with political history, Marion Maddox shows that by the late nineteenth century, the majority of Australia’s founding architects of education favoured a secular system based on the premise “that the segregated religious schools that preceded universal public education were damaging to the colonies’ social cohesion by dividing their children on religious lines” and that “the new nation deserved nothing less than for all of its children to enjoy the best education, side by side, and to grow up knowing that their destinies were bound together” (31). While she acknowledges that the “meaning of ‘secular’ in Australia has not always been stable,” one of her core claims is that the education system has undergone a significant regression in recent decades, essentially undoing the founders’ broad, inclusive vision for the construction of citizenship (202).⁵⁵ This regression, she argues, is in part fueled by the influence of various religious organizations on the content and delivery of religious curricula. Pointing to a multitude of factors that compromise “Australia’s once proudly free and secular education system,” Maddox positions state-funded school chaplains and faith-based private schools as key drivers in the growing entanglement of church and state in Australian education (5). For Byrne (2014) this entanglement boils down to the idea of how “majority justifies privilege” (65). Her research has likewise demonstrated that the approach to religion and education in Australian classroom “repeats and amplifies Christian centrism” (266). As a remedy, she suggests a curricular

⁵⁵ My commentary on Maddox’s contributions to the literature on religion and education in Australia comes from a previously published review of her book *Taking God to School: The End of Australia’s Egalitarian Education?* See Cusack, 2015.

shift to “secular R and E” as an “approach [which] values the potential dialogue between religious and non-religious worldviews and ethical systems as an important forum for conversation” (267).

Beset by the historical and contemporary influence of conservative religious voices, Halafoff (2015) contends Australia’s reluctance to integrate “international best practices” approaches to teaching about religion is due to lack of political motivation and nostalgia for a ‘Christian’ Australia to arise as “an antidote to the ills of secular modernity” (363, 364). In Halafoff’s view, the curricular elevation of “Judeo-Christian values over and above the values of other faith traditions and of people with no religious affiliation can be viewed as dangerous, given that they may lead young people from non-Judeo-Christian communities to feel alienated from Australian mainstream society” (365). She suggests that the current status of majority traditions in religious education may make students “vulnerable to processes of radicalisation” (365). Education about diverse religions and non-religious worldviews or ‘ERW,’ in Halafoff’s opinion, is the way forward for inclusive education in a diverse Australia, although institutional “inertia” on the part of policy makers has stalled and continues to hamper the adoption of evidence-based best practices approaches used in other jurisdictions (376).

The United States

Religion and education in the United States, as mentioned in the beginning of this dissertation, have historically been the domain of privately-funded, confessional educational institutions. Fears of treading on constitutional protections regarding the establishment of religion precluded a robust expansion of education *about* religion in American public schools. In the aftermath of 9/11 and with the rise of religion as a contentious topic in the American political scene, scholars, educators and

policy makers looked to schools as a place to mitigate misunderstanding and to foster dialogue about religious diversity. In 2007, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) (the largest association in the United States devoted to the scholarly study of religion) formed the Schools Task Force in a coordinated effort to create a guide for educators.⁵⁶ The goal of the pedagogical tool *Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States* (2010), was “to provide guidance for how to teach about religion in intellectually sound ways from the nonsectarian perspective appropriate for public schools” (Moore and Pike, 2010). In the same time frame, Diane L. Moore put forward a plan for the influential Religious Literacy Project at Harvard University (*Harvard Religious Literacy Project*, n.d.) and started to publish her thinking on a cultural studies approach to religious literacy (2006, 2007). In this work, Moore stipulates

that economic or political dimensions of human experience cannot be accurately understood without understanding the religious and other ideological influences that shape the cultural context out of which particular political or economic actions and motivations arise (2006).

Emphasising contextual “situatedness” and a critique of power (“which perspectives are politically and socially prominent and why? Which are marginalized or silenced and why?”) Moore describes her approach as a postmodern view of how “cultural norms are fluid and socially constructed even though they are often interpreted as representing uncontested absolute truths” (*Harvard Religious Literacy Project*, n.d.). Looking at the timeline of literature, it appears to have been a defining moment. The work of the AAR task force (2007-2010), Prothero’s (2008) influence as mentioned in

⁵⁶ The 2007 formation of the Schools Task Force, and subsequent publication of its guide in 2010, were relatively recent initiatives by the AAR to promote teaching *about* religions in American public schools. However, scholarly concern about religious literacy predated this work by over four decades. In the 1960s, members of the AAR had already formed a working group in response to two seminal U.S. Supreme Court decisions which ended public school prayer and bible study (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962 and *Abington v. Schempp*, 1963). See Moore & Pike, 2010 for more information about this corpus of early research and why interest in the project waned over time.

the previous chapter, and the insertion of Moore’s cultural studies approach into the academic debate—all conspired to reignite an interest in research on religion and education and began a fertile period for scholarship.⁵⁷

Explanations for historical exclusion of religion from the public classroom and hypotheses on how to best respond begin to surge in the post-9/11 era and scholarly debates about various approaches increase. Take Fiala’s (2013) contention, for example, that Enlightenment-inspired government secularity and its influence on the neutrality of public education translated to a reticence in addressing religion in the classroom and resulted in widespread ignorance and misunderstanding about religion and religious diversity. Despite concerns over potential lawsuits, Fiala suggests that in context of a neutral classroom “equal opportunity for diverse views” trace a path for productive dialogue about diversity (2013: 28). He calls for training in the art of “Socratic questioning” where students are taught “to keep rival ideas in tension,” asserting the approach has the potential to thwart the “incivility” that can emerge from relativism (2013: 32-34). In California, Grelle (Grelle, 2013) and Lester’s (Lester, 2014) innovative work with the California 3Rs Project (Religious Liberty - Rights, Responsibilities, Respect) operates on a civic (community) consensus approach, grounded in human rights. Findings from qualitative and quantitative research conducted among students and teachers involved with the innovative 3Rs Project from the Modesto, California School (where religious literacy courses are mandatory) revealed some gains in students’ level of “passive

⁵⁷ Moore’s cultural studies approach and explanations of “situatedness” is integrated into the HarvardX MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) Religious Literacy: Traditions and Scriptures. A video animation from the course explains situatedness as thus: “There are many different sources of knowledge and interpretations of religion. The cultural studies approach assumes that every source of knowledge is rooted in a particular context, giving rise to a partial perspective situated from the place. The historical, cultural, social and political place from which a knowledge claim is made, shapes that perspective, and this is true for all knowledge claims, but religious interpretation is often particularly susceptible to being seen as ahistorical and absolute, rather than situated and contextualized” (*Situatedness Animation*, 2018).

tolerance,” but showed problems when it came to articulating core differences between religions (Lester, 2013: 121). Critics of the 3Rs curriculum have called out this assumption of teacher and subject neutrality in the 3Rs curriculum on the basis that it “promotes a specific ideological vision and inculcates core liberal values,” making the supposed neutrality “as value-laden as any other approach” (Grelle, 2013: 102). Grelle also acknowledges other weaknesses of the religious literacy aspect of the consensus approach to include the presentation of world religions as “stable,” “static” and “discrete,” without due justice to their “historical and cultural variations” (104). Drawing on parallels from Québec’s Ethics and Religious Culture Program to the 3Rs program, Lester (2011a) considers the possibilities and limits of John Dewey’s thoughts on democratic education as a potential guide for teaching about religion in American public schools. Deweyan democracy holds promise, according to Lester, because of “its willingness to allow substantial parts of its political and cultural consensus to be revised perennially” thereby opening up educational space for religious understanding beyond the embedded biblical Christianity advocated by some American religious literacy proponents (290). According to Lester, Dewey’s theory of democratic education positions students as agents who “participate in creating their collective democratic future” (290). Therefore, increases in religious diversity through immigration and “the rapid rise of the unaffiliated” would factor into the participatory composition of religious diversity education (2011: 290). The diversity of the class (religious and non-religious) in concert with a student-centered (rather than teacher-centered) approach thus becomes part of the dynamic process of learning.

Canada

It is an understatement to say that the topic of religion and education in Canada is a complicated affair. Religion, either as a confessional or academic subject, varies widely from

province to province, resists facile categorization and requires highly contextualized examples for proper analysis. Understanding the current situation necessitates a look back to nineteenth-century constitutional agreements that shaped (and continue to influence) how religion is framed in the classroom. Any discussion of religion and education in Canada logically begins with the British North America Act, also referred to as the Constitution Act of 1867, in which the individual confederated provinces were accorded the right to ‘exclusively make laws in relation to Education’ and which included guarantees of public support for ‘separate’ Catholic and Protestant schools where these had already existed at the time of Confederation (Canada, 1867: 93). Originally conceived to address concerns about religious, cultural and linguistic minorities, these arrangements created parallel systems of education in several provinces, reflecting the religious makeup of Canada’s populace during that era (Dickinson & Findlay, 2014) Contrary to many other Western democracies, Canada has no national ministry of education and the heterogeneous treatment of religion in Canada and religious diversity in its educational system is a reflection of how education policy evolved independently in each province.⁵⁸ In a large-scale bibliography on religion and education in Canada compiled by researchers from the Religion and Diversity Project, it is evident that most of the research has focused largely on issues related to Quebec and Ontario, such as the Ethics and Religious Culture program and public funding of confessional Catholic schools, respectively.⁵⁹ I have therefore chosen to narrow the scope of this section to two Canadian provinces—offering a brief overview of literature about Ontario (where religious literacy education is a rare option) and about Quebec, where education about *religion* was obligatory for all students from 2008 to 2020.

⁵⁸ Portions of this section previously appeared in the chapter ‘Young people and religious diversity: A Canadian perspective,’ by Beaman, Beyer & Cusack (2016).

⁵⁹ The Religion and Education in Canada bibliography can be accessed from the [Religion and Diversity website](#).

Canada (Ontario)

The literature about religion and education in Canada frequently centers on the debate about public funding for confessional education. While this review is not intended as an exploration of fiscal policy, it is an important illustration of the relationship of church and state. The clear distinction between private schools and public schools in the United States, for example, is not as distinct in Canada. As a general rule, American private schools are often faith-based and privately funded, while public schools are tax-payer funded and exclude all forms of confessional instruction. In some Canadian provinces, however, taxes may fund all or part of some public schools which are confessional and also subsidize at varying levels, some private, faith-based schools. In other words, school funding in Canada is not neatly aligned along private/public or religious/nonreligious lines. In Ontario, for example, the state affirms a continued privilege for the Christian majority. Catholic school boards across the province are fully funded by taxpayer dollars and having exclusionary hiring and entrance policies which privilege teachers and students from Catholic backgrounds. Previous to this, Protestant school boards were funded under similar arrangements. Arguing from a minority religions perspective, Stewart (2008) asserts that secularization of Protestant schools in Ontario was “an incomplete rectification of the religiously hierarchical system” with exclusive public funding of Ontario Catholic schools an ongoing failure to acknowledge core tenets of multiculturalism (50). Bayefsky & Waldman (2006) demonstrate that this historical state/family partnership in the construction of religious identity does not extend to all Canadians. Tracing religious school funding from Canada’s confederation to the early 2000s, they argue against exclusive funding for Catholic education in Ontario as religious discrimination, harmful to Jewish families’ right to choose education supportive of their religious identity. In that some religious citizens do not make the same distinctions

between public and private life as does western liberal democracy, Stewart (2008) notes the preference to send school children “in their own cultural and religious milieu is not seen as a preferable option, but, rather, a necessary element of identity formation” (54). The current situation in Ontario obliges such families to incur the high costs of private education, while offering a free, church-state partnership option to those from the majority religion.⁶⁰ Controversy over the extension of public funding to all religious schools or reversal of the current funding policies are mired in circular arguments over the politics of universalism and the politics of difference (Stewart, 2008) and is likely correlated with the dearth of literature about how religious diversity is actually addressed in Ontario classrooms. Religious literacy courses Ontario are for the most part, either non-existent or come in the form of an elective such as World Religions offered by a few schools in the later years of secondary education. Van Arragon (2015) takes up this point in his work on religion in Ontario public education, noting that in both case law and public policy, religion occupies a very tenuous position in discourse about public education in the province. In his view, both state and religious actors are in opposition over what constitutes “civic values” and how they should be taught, which has a direct bearing on how religious difference is addressed (or not) in the classroom. “This has meant that debates about the role of religion in public education tend to be volatile,” asserts Van Arragon “making serious dialogue about this important social issue difficult to achieve while restricting the space for religious diversity in public education” (Van Arragon, 2015: v).

⁶⁰ The ongoing controversy over the place of publicly-funded confessional schools in Canada remains divisive. According to Gee “the publicly bankrolled Catholic school system is a glaring anachronism in a 21st century metropolis. With every year that passes, it looks more outdated, more out of step with the evolution of the city, the province and the country” (2017).

Québec

Under Canada's *Constitution Act* of 1867, which codified publicly funded confessional education throughout the country, parents had the prerogative to choose either a secular or faith-based (Catholic or Protestant) education for their children (1867). For much of its history, public education in the province of Québec followed this structured partnership between families, church and state. Schools were an extension of family and religious community in the inculcation of confessional values and sometimes even in the preparation of children for Christian (Catholic and Protestant) rites of passage such as first communion or confirmation. Increasing levels of religious diversity eventually pushed policy makers to remove faith-based education from all its elementary and secondary institutions, in a process which turned at the following critical junctures:

1997: Amendment to the *Constitution Act* removing Québec's obligation to grant privileges to members of the Catholic and Protestant faiths by means of denominational schools;

1997: Adoption of a law creating linguistic school boards to replace confessional school boards;

2000: Abolition of confessional structures in the school system, such as confessional committees and deputy minister positions associated with the Catholic and Protestant faiths, as well as the confessional status of schools and the pastoral animation service;

2005: Adoption of a law that provides for the implementation of a common ethics and religious culture program at the start of the 2008 school year (MELS, n.d.).

This highly contested shift from faith-based to linguistic-based (French or English) school boards in 2008 removed confessional religion courses in public schools throughout the province, replacing them with compulsory Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program (MELS, n.d.). This deconfessionalization of the school system was intended to foster an openness towards diversity, wherein "students are encouraged to open themselves to the world and to develop their ability to act

with others” (MELS, n.d.). Responding to the rapidly changing multicultural visage of Québec society, the project of the ERC was born of increasing concern for social cohesion—with its hopeful language and vision for the future testifying to this end: “By grouping all the students together, rather than dividing them into groups according to their beliefs, and by promoting the development of attitudes of tolerance, respect and openness, we are preparing them to live in a pluralist [sic] and democratic society” (MELS, n.d.: Advantages for Students). The new program marked a definitive end to the church and state partnership in the education and socialization of the religious citizen and put the province in the company of other western democracies striving to align education policy and curricular content with the demands of religious pluralism. I have reiterated this unique history of religion and education in Quebec because it has been a driver in the production of a particularly large body of literature.

The literature demonstrates the change from confessional to non-confessional did not happen smoothly (Farrow, 2015) . In fact, the shift created a vociferous public and legal debate among advocates and opponents alike not only because it implied “a significant transfer of power from civil society to the state” but also because concerns were voiced about the question of state power over seemingly private spheres (Farrow, 2015: 104). Since public schools in Québec no longer served as a space for religious instruction, nor the inculcation of a specific faith tradition, this “void” as described by Georges L  roux (2007; 2016), obliged an alternative to ensure the continuity of the transmission of ethical principles. Boudreau (2011) addresses the implications of the transition “from confessional to cultural” education and points to the 1997 Proulx Report as the pivotal work which redefined religious education in the province’s public school system. The report was constructed from “public consultation[s]” that incorporated the broad, disparate views of key stakeholders

including and resulted in sweeping changes to the way religious education in the province was defined and delivered (Boudreau, 2011). Estivalèzes and Lefebvre (2012) (Estivalèzes & Lefebvre, 2012) enhance discourse about the impact of the ERC program as they trace the social and historical evolution of religious education in Québec and provide a deeper understanding of how the implementation of the Québec model of religious culture education addresses an essential challenge for democratic societies which is “*la conciliation entre le soi, l’autre et le nous*” (the conciliation between the self, the other and the we). Their research provides an indispensable resource for assessing the development of the ERC program since its inception in 2008. Given the province’s religious history, McAndrew (2010) positioned the study of religion and education in Quebec as a particularly compelling site from which to explore reasonable accommodation and minority religious rights. In her research with Muslim communities, she suggests that

even if controversies, stereotypes, and prejudices surrounding the Muslim community are extremely visible in Quebec society, many elements indicate that a reasonable consensus on religious adaptation is slowly emerging in Quebec schools, at least in Montreal where contact and changes are happening on a daily basis (2010).

Other notable scholars who have left their imprint on the study of religion and education in Quebec include Bouchard (2006) on identity construction and *la quête de sens* in the ERC classroom; Hirsch and McAndrew (2013; 2014) on the depiction of Judaism in Quebec text books and the Jewish experience in Montreal schools; Milot (2009) on the relationship of church and state and the historical context of religion in Quebec; and Morris (2011) on the controversies and aspirations of the ERC. For Quebec scholar Donald Boisvert, the curious appellation of the new curriculum revealed the watermarks of influence which came together in the creation of the program. He specified:

The name itself tells you a great deal: ethics and religious culture. The first thing one notices is this coupling of ethics and religious culture, a rather unusual and puzzling combination for a programme given at the lower educational levels. The second is the expression religious culture – not religious studies, not the study of religion, not even

simply religion. The use of the expression religious culture comes from culture religieuse, which resonates more explicitly with a French academic tradition in the study of religion. The term 'religious culture' foregrounds an explicitly non-theological, non-theistic approach to religion. Borrowing from a neo-Marxist perspective, religion is therefore understood as an eminently human cultural phenomenon, on a par with other cultural productions such as art or the legal system. To study religion from this so-called cultural point of view therefore means that one's analysis is necessarily less engaged or personal and seemingly more neutral. The third element of note in the name of the programme is the presence of ethics in its own right, perhaps more of a seemingly philosophical undertaking than a strictly religious one. What is also striking – and this has not really been pointed out or explored in the emerging corpus of scholarly literature about this still relatively young educational programme – is the academic tone of the nomenclature, which ultimately points to the influential role that Quebec academics and scholars of religion played in the elaboration of the ERC curriculum (2015: 383).

Boisvert's incisive analysis and commentary on the evolution of religion and education in the province of Quebec, and the many conundrums, advances and dilemmas which the transformation engendered, are further developed in chapter six (2015).

It is safe to say that the much of the literature on the ERC in particular evolved from the 'why' of teaching about religion (in the sense there was a consensus around needing to fill the space previously occupied by confessional curriculum), to the 'how' of constructing and incorporating best practices approaches in the teaching and learning of religious/worldview literacy. The argument might also be made that a good part of the international body of literature has followed a similar developmental path, albeit during different chronological periods. Not all conversations about the ERC, however, were affirmations of its potential contributions to *le vivre ensemble*. Criticism of the ERC has been an ongoing parallel conversation amongst certain scholars, politicians and policy makers since its implementation. These critiques, elaborated in chapter six, include calls for the outright removal of the curriculum on the basis that it is a form of apologetics for religion in general and that it glosses over contested aspects of some traditions such as gender inequality, among others

(Baril and Baillargeon, 2016). With this corpus of literature in mind, I constructed a conceptual framework that would help me to tie both the related and disparate lines of thinking together which have influenced the direction of this study (Ravitch and Riggan, 2016). I explain how I understand the interconnections among pluralism, xenosophia deep equality and their application to this research in the following section.

2.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK | PLURALISM, XENOSOPHIA AND DEEP EQUALITY

Conceptual Framework

Varying definitions of conceptual frameworks abound in the literature on qualitative research.⁶¹ For example, Imenda (2014) defines a conceptual framework as “an inductive process whereby small individual pieces (in this case, concepts) are joined together to tell a bigger map of possible relationships” (189). For Kivunja (2018) a conceptual framework is “the total, logical orientation and associations of anything and everything that forms the underlying thinking, structures, plans and practices and implementation of your entire research project” (47). In thinking about the many possible ways to approach this research, I was drawn to the work of Ravitch and Riggan (2016) who describe this type of framework as

⁶¹ In their volume *Reason and Rigor: How Conceptual Frameworks Guide Research* (2016), Ravitch and Riggan elaborate the lack of consensus around the definition of a conceptual framework. They argue that the term is frequently used to describe three discrete possibilities: first, “a visual representation of a study’s organization or major theoretical tenets;” second, the consideration of “conceptual and theoretical frameworks as essentially the same thing;” and third, “the conceptual framework as a way of linking all of the elements of the research process: researcher interests and goals, identity and positionality, context and setting (macro and micro), formal and information theory, and methods” (4-5).

an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous. By argument, we mean that a conceptual framework is a series of sequenced, logical propositions the purpose of which is to ground the study and convince readers of the study's importance and rigor (Ravitch and Riggan, 2016: 5).

In their definition, they merge a number of strands of thinking from scholarship on conceptual frameworks, however, their overall classification offered distinctive nuances. The clarity of their definition had particular relevance to my study:

We define the conceptual framework as the overarching argument for the work—both why it is worth doing and how it should be done. The genesis of that argument lies in the researcher's *personal interests and goals*, which in turn are shaped by the researcher's *identity and positionality*. The argument is formed and bolstered through literature review, a process of learning from the work of others. Much of the literature that informs the conceptual framework is what we call *topical research*, that is, work that focuses on a similar topic or question to that of the researcher...In sum, while others suggest that literature review, theoretical frameworks, and conceptual frameworks are more or less synonymous, we argue that the conceptual framework serves as a superstructure for the work. Personal interest and goals, identity and positionality, topical research, and theoretical frameworks each fit within that superstructure, while literature review serves as the primary process through which all of these elements are forged into a cogent, persuasive argument (2016: 8-9).

Based on this definition of a conceptual framework, I have chosen to combine a triad of (what I contend are) interconnected lenses — Eck's (2016) conceptualisation of pluralism, Streib and Klein's (2018) elaboration of xenosophia⁶² and Beaman's blueprint of deep equality (2017) — as paradigms from which to draw upon for this study. In the next section, I provide an explanation of the each of the three lenses and their relevance to discussions about religious/worldview literacy.

⁶² A review of Streib & Klein's 2018 volume *Xenosophia and Religion. Biographical and Statistical Paths for a Culture of Welcome*, (Rowat, 2019) indicated that "the authors are the first to my knowledge to introduce the term xenosophia in empirical research (which Streib brings to us from the philosophical work of Waldenfels' and Nakamura's thinking about 'the alien'). Those familiar with word origins will recognize Greek terms *xenos* (stranger or foreigner) and *sophia* (wisdom). Xenosophia is offered as an alternative to xenophobia (or a fear of refugees and immigrants) because immigrants are perceived to be strange or alien to our culture and way of life" (224).

Pluralism as an “encounter of commitments”

In my review of literature, various interpretations of and approaches to pluralism were a consistent thread in conversations about religious and worldview literacy. Pluralism, therefore, provided a point of departure for understanding research findings as they emerged. Now, of course the word ‘pluralism’ evokes an extremely long list of possibilities, a variety of distinctive definitions and a range of criticisms. It is, as mentioned in the previous chapter, a highly contested concept. The Cambridge dictionary offers a succinct, starting point definition of pluralism as “the existence of different types of people, who have different beliefs and opinions within the same society” (‘Pluralism,’ n.d.). Stewart, Seiple and Hoover point to the considerable amount of literature on the topic, asserting that “theorists from both the ‘left’ and the ‘right’ have increasingly recognized the need to articulate a philosophy of pluralism that corresponds better to empirical facts on the ground, and that has better prospects for normative coherence and functional consensus across the deep global diversity” (Stewart et al., 2020: 8). Commenting on the abundance of definitions, the authors list the “many faces of pluralism,” such as “confident” “courageous” “pragmatic” “deep/agonistic” “principled/civic/structural” “inclusive” “principled distance” “religious harmony” “political secularism” “difference” “living together differently” “encounter of commitments” and “global square;” finally suggesting their own qualifier of “covenantal” (2020:8-9). In response to Stewart et al.’s analysis (2020), political scientist Robert J. Joustra further refines and defines their work. In ‘Have We Reached Peak Pluralism: Proposing a New Paradigm,’ he asks “How do we talk about this explosion of pluralist sentiment? Where does one begin, in a sprawling and – ironically-divisive literature, to get a handle on contemporary debates in pluralist theory, and a conceptual map of the philosophical terrain? (Joustra, 2021). Joustra moves the conversation away from a “spectrum” of

pluralisms, to an organizational approach using two axes, and four sections – proposing, instead, four groupings on a “quadrant” of what he puts forward as a “coherent map of the pluralist territory.”⁶³ He labels them as “Quadrant 1: Diversity Pluralisms; Quadrant 2: Relational Pluralisms; Quadrant 3: Constitutional Pluralisms; and Quadrant 4: Pragmatic Pluralisms” (2021). Among these various “brands” (and ‘rebrands,’ I would add), Both Joustra (2021) and Stewart et al. (2020) call attention to the concept of pluralism as defined by Diana Eck’s work at the Harvard Pluralism Project. In Joustra’s quadrant schema, pluralism à la Eck is considered “relational,” demarcated “by being primarily, though not usually exclusively, social” (2021). Indeed, Eck’s version of pluralism offered a particularly useful lens through which to explore my own data. Eck defines pluralism in these four ways:

First, pluralism is not diversity alone, but the *energetic engagement with diversity*. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettos with little traffic between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.

Second, pluralism is not just tolerance, but the *active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and ardent secularists to know anything

⁶³ Joustra details his organizational reasoning in this way: “The quadrant that our project uses as the context for rehabilitating pluralism therefore uses not one, but two axes, and it does not use conventional “left” and “right.” On the first axis, we talk about *political vs. social* pluralism, or, as some might say, “top down” vs. “bottom up” pluralism. The key distinction here is *who* are the actors that guarantee or safeguard pluralism. On the social side of the axis, you find those skeptical of political power, or the “politics is downstream of culture” crowd, who argue that ultimately coexistence is only possible amidst vigorous social *engagement*. Here we also find critics of tolerance. Tolerance, argue the social pluralists, is just enough to get folks to irritably coexist with each other, but not enough to use diversity as a strengthening glue for common projects. Grassroots, social engagement is essential. Political pluralists, on the other hand, default more to the processes and institutions of the state, its courts and constitutions. They focus on the “rules of the game” which enable fair play. On the other axis, I talk more about the *quality* of pluralism: “thin” vs. “thick.” This is what I call the gambling axis: how much trust do you have in your fellow citizen? Do you need a thin set of ground rules, a small number of pragmatic areas of alignment, that can carry the project of social and political order? Or do you need a thicker set of ground rules, more robust rules for engagement, more structured and coerced rules and norms? ... It depends...on the balance sheet of your social reserves, *trust*. It depends on which society, which people, and which diversity is being adjudicated” (2021).

about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotypes, the half-truths, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.

Third, pluralism is not relativism, but the *encounter of commitments*. The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.

Fourth, pluralism is *based on dialogue*. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the “table” will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table — with one’s commitments (Eck, 2006).

Eck’s tetradic explanation of pluralism provided useful connections to help me make sense of both the existing literature and how I approached the collection and analysis of my data. Thinking about pluralism as “an encounter of commitments” (Eck, 2006) lead to a number of convergences with Streib and Klein’s concept of “*xenosophia*,” as explained in the next section (2018).

From Xenophobia, to Xenophilia to Xenosophia

It was from outside of my scholarly reading that I stumbled upon, metaphorically speaking, a second vantage point from which to consider my research. I am beholden to Maxwell for reinforcing the notion of exploration beyond the customary literature of one’s field and how it can sometimes yield fruitful results. “The most productive conceptual frameworks,” according to Maxwell, “are often those that bring in ideas from *outside* the traditionally defined field of your study, or that integrate different approaches, lines of investigation, or theories that no one had previously connected” (Maxwell, 2012: 40). The ‘outside’ path to this supportive concept was both serpentine

and serendipitous. In November 2016, the Los Angeles Times reported that ‘xenophobia’ was chosen as word of the year, selected in part because online searches for it rose sharply in the wake of the “anti-immigrant rhetoric of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump” (Schaub, 2016). It’s contemporary infamy was credited to a “worldwide interest in the unfortunate rise of fear of otherness in 2016” (Schaub, 2016).⁶⁴ The term ‘xenophobia’ is, evidently, well documented in academic literature on discrimination, immigration, multiculturalism, political philosophy, religion, sociology and a host of other areas which delve into the topic of otherness. Yet, I had never heard nor read about any of its cognate antonyms until I came across an article in the New York Times which brought attention to a new term: ‘xenophilia.’ In his moving opinion piece, National Geographic writer Paul Salopek detailed a four-year walking trip across the world during which he was frequently questioned about his personal security; “Americans in particular,” he indicated “seem preoccupied by risk” (2017). Despite a few “close shaves” with danger, Salopek recounted his 1,567-day journey as an extended experience of hospitality, generosity and “openheartedness” at dinner tables and in homes of strangers (2017). He offered this definition of the lens through which approached his work: “Xenophilia is the opposite of xenophobia. Broadly speaking, it describes openness to the immense human diversity of the world. But the concept is supple...the word combines the ancient Greek “xenos” — meaning “alien” — with the word for “attraction” (Salopek, 2017).⁶⁵ Thus began a deep search into the

⁶⁴ Giving additional rationale for selecting ‘xenophobia’ as word of the year, Liz McMillan, head of the popular online reference tool Dictionary.com, indicated "this year in the United States we saw the rise of the alt-right, white nationalism, and other ideologies that promote hate, especially directed toward Muslims, Latinos, Jews, trans and queer communities, black America, and other nondominant groups...On November 9, the day after the U.S. presidential election, the term xenophobia spiked in lookups on Dictionary.com, and, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there has been an increase in hate-based incidents since election day" (Schaub, 2016).

⁶⁵ Xenophilia has other connotations in a variety of disciplines. The author noted that in psychology, the term has associations with sexuality: “Psychologists apply the term narrowly to patients seized by an uncontrollable urge to have sex with foreigners or, in extreme cases, extraterrestrials” (Salopek, 2017). Evidently, this was not the desire direction of my thought processes about the possibilities of ‘xenos’ as applied to the study of religion and education.

etymology of ‘xenos.’ From the Greek, ‘xen’ is a “word-forming element meaning ‘strange, foreign; stranger, foreigner,’” however ‘xenos’ can likewise make reference to “a guest, stranger, foreigner, refugee, guest-friend, [or] one entitled to hospitality” (*Xeno*, n.d.). According to Liddell and Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon* “The term was politely used of any one whose name was unknown” (1888: 539).⁶⁶ From my introduction to the word ‘xenophilia’ and exploration of the richness of ‘xenos’ as sometimes relating to openness, friendship and cordiality, I was drawn to the innovative work of German scholars, Heinz Streib and Constantin Klein from the University of Bielefeld, who were building a body of research about religion and ‘xenosophia.’ The year-long study, *Xenosophia and Religion in Germany*, was conducted in 2015 and 2016 during “a time of an epidemic global increase of prejudice and xenophobia, particularly against immigrants and refugees, and epidemic that obviously has infected also political leaders” (*Xenosophia and Religion in Germany*, n.d.).⁶⁷ The aim of the study was to explore the “pathogenic developments” of the timeframe “with a salutogenic perspective, which documents the development of xenosophic attitudes such as a culture of welcome” (*Xenosophia and Religion in Germany*, n.d.). In their volume *Xenosophia and Religion: Biographical and Statistical Paths for a Culture of Welcome*, principal investigators Streib and Klein outline their study of xenosophic attitudes among people living in a plural society and the possible correlation with manifestations of *Willkommenskultur* or a “Culture of Welcome” (Streib and Klein, 2018).⁶⁸ I was

⁶⁶ See Appendix 11 for a complete list of referential terms for ‘xenos’ from Liddell & Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon* (1888: 539).

⁶⁷ The study was conducted by scholars from the [Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion at the Universität Bielefeld](#). (*Research Center*, n.d.)

⁶⁸ At the Research Centre for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion in Bielefeld, Germany, scholars conduct empirical research about religious development and social life with a wide demographic of participants. From the introduction of their xenosophia project, we read: “Our research was taking place in a time of an epidemic global increase of prejudice and xenophobia, particularly against immigrants and refugees, an epidemic that obviously has infected also political leaders. Thereby the central concern of the study was to complement the investigation of these pathogenic developments with a salutogenic perspective, which documents the development of xenosophic attitudes such as a culture of welcome. The question regarding a culture of welcoming became highly topical during our investigation period, because of the then increasing flood of refugees arriving in Germany and Europe. Of central interest for our study were

immediately drawn to the word ‘xenosophia.’ In all my reading on religious and worldview literacy education, I had not come across the term in any of the literature. Indeed, as Streib and Klein themselves speculate: “we are probably the first to explicitly use ‘xenosophia’ in empirical research” (2018:17). They pose (and expand upon) the following fundamental question:

What is the opposite of prejudice and xenophobia? It is illuminating that, for signifying the positive developments, mostly *negations* are use such as ‘prevention,’ ‘reduction,’ ‘counteracting’ or ‘overcoming.’ Obviously, there is some uncertainty regarding positive antonyms...There are, of course, a row of candidates for antonyms to xenophobia and prejudice, for example: ‘tolerance,’ ‘fairness,’ ‘open-mindedness,’ ‘acceptance,’ ‘respect,’ ‘generosity,’ ‘xenophilia,’ ‘identification with all of humanity’ – and, not to forget, Allport’s association to ‘universalism’ (2018: 8-9).

They then go on to explain the “shortcomings of ‘tolerance’”(10), citing the work of psychologist James Fowler, who is best known for his book the *Stages of Faith Development: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (1981). I was intrigued by this connection—not for the faith-oriented aspects of Fowler’s thinking—but rather for its potential to offer a continuum of thought on how the development of a universalized, non-comparative and nonjudgmental view of religion, beliefs and worldviews can evolve. Put simply, Fowler’s stages chart a plot of how people can go from holding tightly to exclusionary ideological commitments, to the loosening of the psychological grip, so to speak, making room for divergent points of view to share space in other possible ‘right’ ways of thinking. Streib and Klein elaborate:

With reference to the difference between accommodation and assimilation, as assumed in the developmental theory in the tradition of Piaget, Fowler’s critique is directed toward the dominance of one’s own world view and thus the mere assimilation of the ‘other,’ while questions or challenges toward their own system of categories are suppressed. What is missing, is the *inter-action* between the partners in communication and the specification of the eventually *beneficial outcomes for both partners in inter-action*. While the *tolerant* relation may lead to and include respect

the psychological and biographical contexts of pathogenic developments that cause xenophobia and the salutogenic development that may lead to xenosophic attitudes” (Streib & Klein, n.d.).

and eventually esteem for the other's world view and the other's cultural and religious practices, it leaves the category system of the observer *unchanged*.

This is different in the concept of xenosophia. Here, the basic assumption is that the 'own' inter-acts with the 'other' or 'strange' to the effect that the 'own' is challenged and receives inspiration to creatively change and develop new perspectives. This list of mechanisms that were implemented in the studies on prejudice reduction mentioned above may open a perspective on xenosophia. Despite the difficulties to clearly measure such outcomes, the assumptions are that perspectives change, counter-stereotypes or recognition of differences in the *other* may lead to prejudice reduction – and to the emergence of something new.

Using 'xenosophia' in this way and assuming that the individual, from the inter-action with the *other*/the *strange* receives challenges for re-evaluating his or her own worldview, which eventually leads to creativity and wisdom...(10).

The authors lay out a detailed path of reasoning for their use of the concept of xenosophia, indicating its potential for advancing work on prejudice reduction in religiously diverse societies. As I delved more deeply into xenosophia, my reading generated a number of intersecting thoughts and sub-thoughts about its nexus with the work of Lori G. Beaman, from her volume *Deep Equality in an Era of Religious Diversity* (2017).

Deep Equality

Putting Eck's rich description of the 'is and is-nots' of pluralism, and Streib and Klein's elaboration of xenosophia, into conversation with Beaman's framework of deep equality (2014, 2017) provided me with a trio of notions upon which to build the conceptual framework for this project. In Beaman's guiding question: "How do we live well together in a diverse society?" she draws upon William Connolly's "deep pluralism" and "agonistic respect"⁶⁹ to formulate her thinking on deep

⁶⁹Fisken defines agonism as a "philosophical outlook emphasizing the importance of conflict to politics." He differentiates "descriptive" from "normative" types, saying that in Connolly's "descriptive form," the theorist "advocated what he called 'agonistic respect,' which sees that conflict as something to be maintained, rather than something to be overcome through consensus" (Fisken, 2014).

equality.⁷⁰ For Beaman, “respect is ‘agonistic’ because it requires an abandonment of ‘rightness’ and the conviction that one is imbued with truth through some sort of transcendent authority” (2017: 93). As director of the Religion and Diversity Project at the University of Ottawa, Beaman’s research in Canada and beyond has formed the basis of her concept of deep equality. She contends negative stories about religion and conflict have led to public (mis)understandings of religious diversity as a ‘problem’ to be managed. When tolerance and accommodation are employed to address the ‘problem,’ they reinforce an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ division of majority and minority groups. Missing from the public conversation, according to Beaman, are accounts of everyday interactions where people from diverse backgrounds successfully work out differences. A deep equality approach rejects hierarchical positionality in such debates as untenable for living (and flourishing) in diverse and sustainable societies. Under Beaman’s framework, working towards deep equality requires the following elements:

- Agonistic respect: An ethos of engagement which requires letting go of the idea that there is one truth or right way;
- Recognition of similarity: A focus on shared experience and social relations rather than erasure of difference of rigid interpretations of identity;
- Sharing space as equals: A reimagining of democratic spaces of equality rather than established hierarchies; and

⁷⁰In his book *Pluralism*, Connolly argues for a deep pluralism which insists on the incorporation (rather than the effacement) of religious traditions and expression into the quotidian life of the *polis*. For Connolly, agonistic respect for the religious ‘other’ is multifaceted and implies an ongoing struggle in the sense of a reciprocal give-and-take and positive engagement with worldviews beyond one’s own (Connolly, 2005).

- Mapping success stories: Using the tools of the social sciences and the humanities to tell the stories of how people work out conflicts based on principles of respect, humility and neighborliness.⁷¹

It is Beaman's contention that over time, seeing and hearing stories of deep equality and how they play out in everyday life, will shift public focus from diversity as a problem to diversity as an opportunity. A deep equality approach, therefore, puts narratives about successful negotiation of difference (be it religious or otherwise), into the service of changing public perception from 'hindrance' to 'potential for progress.' The concept of deep equality forms a particularly relevant *pierre angulaire* or keystone, supporting pluralism and xenosophia in this conceptual framework for a number of reasons. Chief among them is the fact that the study of education about religion, beliefs and worldviews in contemporary Canada is happening at a time of great societal shifts. Canada is no longer a nation of only two majoritarian (Christian) traditions. Beaman's list of these changes include:

increased demographic diversity with enhanced populations of non-Christian immigrants in majoritarian Christian countries; the decline of institutional Christianity coupled with an increase of religious 'nones'; a concomitant disjuncture between a residually Christian society...and the lived experiences of nones, noninstitutional Christians and religious 'others'... (2014: 89).

The ensemble of demographics and societal characteristics which Beaman outlines are quite significant to the overall objective of this thesis, in that I seek to gain a holistic understanding of religious/worldview literacy education in the context of today's Canada.

Together at the pluralism, xenosophia and deep equality round table

⁷¹ This description of Beaman's research is from an infographic I created in 2018 to summarize the concept of deep equality and show the frameworks potential salience for other fields (beyond the sociology of religion) such as animal ethics, anthropology, conflict studies, economics, education, environmental studies, law, public policy, religious studies and wider areas of sociology. The infographic can be downloaded from: [Infographic Beamans Deep Equality](#).

In pouring through the writings of Eck, Streib, Klein and Beaman, I could not help but imagine what it would be like to have all four scholars in a room together for a round table discussion on the intersections of their work. With pluralism, xenosophia and deep equality together forming the conceptual framework or “superstructure” (as defined by Ravitch and Riggan, 2016) of this research project, I was drawn immediately to the junctures of these three streams of thinking at the outset of my study. Imenda’s definition of a conceptual framework bears repeating: as “an inductive process whereby small individual pieces (in this case, concepts) are joined together to tell a bigger map of possible relationships” (2014: 189). The map of these relationships became clearer over time, and the consonant components of each of the three enabled me see the connections the data points plotted as they emerged from interviews, the survey and the textual analysis. In Eck’s (2006) argument that “the new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments,” her description of this “encounter of commitments” resonated with from Streib and Klein’s perspectives on ‘encounter.’ The theme of ‘encounter’ is also very much present in their definition of xenosophia:

The Ancient Greek word *xenos* means the stranger or foreigner—as in today’s meaning of ‘xenophobia;’ and the Ancient Greek word *Sophia* means wisdom. Thus ‘xenosophia’ means the wisdom that might emerge from the encounter with the strange and the wisdom of adequately responding to the strange (Streib and Klein, 2019: ix).

They take this notion of ‘encounter’ further in their scoping of research on “prejudice reduction mechanisms,” focusing on four such mechanisms (detailed in the footnote below), which emerged from their survey of the literature.⁷² They make the claim that

⁷² “Reading across the research design of these studies, we may identify patterns of prejudice reduction mechanisms, which can be summarized as follows:

a. Experience of multicultural ‘otherness’ such as past real-world multicultural exposure, or the eliciting or recalling of experiences of multicultural ‘otherness,’ for example in an essay writing experiment, leads to reduction of prejudice and to a reduced need for cognitive closure.

the common pattern in these four ‘mechanisms’ is the assumption that prejudice reduction — the ‘unmaking’ of prejudice — emerges from the encounter with difference, with otherness, with strangeness. And the studies document that this ‘works,’ thus giving answers to the question ‘what works in prejudice reduction’ (2019: 8).

I understand the empirical work of Streib and Klein as an expansion Eck’s vision of the possibilities of ‘encounter.’ However, their perspectives on encounter and tolerance veer the conversation in a different direction in that they consider tolerance as only a precursor to prejudice reduction, emphasizing its “shortcomings” (2018: 10). “While the tolerant relation may lead to and include respect and esteem for the other’s world view and the other’s cultural and religious practices” they argue, “it leaves the category system of the observer unchanged” (2018: 10). It is here that Beaman’s characterization of tolerance as a concept which perpetuates hierarchies of an ‘us’ tolerating or accommodating a ‘them,’ connects the xenophobic and deep equality approaches.⁷³ The discussion of tolerance and its limits is but one among many junctures between these lines of thinking. The possible exchanges which might unfold during a pluralism, xenosophia, deep equality roundtable would certainly include a cross disciplinary exchange of other related concepts such as respect and openness, concepts which I discuss in later chapters.

b. The invitation to the cognitive engagement (e.g., in essay writing) with a ‘strange’ person, who is a person from another culture, is an invitation to perspective-taking — and such perspective-taking has prejudice reducing effects.

c. The encounter with an amazing or perplexing *difference* and *variety* in the “strange,” e.g., in the form of perceived variability in a group of ‘strangers’ who eventually are the object of prejudice and discrimination, reduces prejudice.

d. The encounter with creative linguistic alienations, such as counter-stereotypes, reduces prejudice.” (Streib & Klein, 2019: 8).

⁷³ From [“Infographic: Beaman’s Deep Equality” \(2018\)](#).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Outside of scholarship from or about Québec, relatively few studies of education *about* religion have been conducted in Canada (Beaman et al., 2016).⁷⁴ Given the sheer volume of English-language publications⁷⁵ on the topic, spanning both time (over three decades) and locations, (primarily Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States), it is evident that “Canada lags far behind in analogous empirical research” (Beaman et al., 2016).⁷⁶ One of the central aims of this thesis, then, was to respond to this knowledge gap and to contribute to both scholarly and policy discussions on education *about* religion and religious/worldview literacy. In exploring what teachers and parents thought students should learn in order to best prepare them for citizenship in a diverse society, this study offers a deeper understanding of what some Canadians consider to be educational imperatives.

In this chapter, I begin with a comprehensive explanation of the research background. I describe my involvement with the Religion and Diversity Project at the University of Ottawa, which was influential to both the genesis and direction of this project. The six watershed events detailed in

⁷⁴ Beaman et al. (2016) note “the paucity of research, and in particular the lack of ethnographic studies about teacher and student experiences with religious diversity, is disquieting.”

⁷⁵ I specify publications in English here in order to make the point that I am aware of the large body of Canadian research in French on the topic of religion and education. I have not engaged in a substantial manner with this literature, but wish to acknowledge seminal contributions of scholars from Québec. See Beaman & Cusack (2020) for commentary on this research corpus.

⁷⁶ Scholarship from Australia, Europe, North America and the United Kingdom dominate the academic conversation about religious literacy, RE, and worldview education. Evidently, this geographic concentration of literature reveals a citation blind spot of scholars from other areas of the world such as Africa, Asia, and South America.

the first chapter, also shaped the trajectory of my research project and were of paramount importance to how my entire graduate experience unfolded; thus, this background merits a more detailed explanation. I then outline my research methodology including explanations of these subdivisions: 1) background 2) research approach rationale 3) access challenges and research sample, 4) instrument design and interview process, 5) transcription, 6) online survey, 7) textual analysis of student manuals, 8) data collection and analysis, and 9) limitations of the study. This chapter closes with a concise summary highlighting the study's key components.

3.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND | THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT

When I began my doctoral studies 2013, my supervisor, Professor Lori G. Beaman invited me to join the Religion and Diversity Project as a student team member. Headquartered at the University of Ottawa and funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, this international project was a Major Collaborative Research Initiative which spanned the years 2010-2017. Led by Professor Beaman and involving 37 researchers from across the world, the project positioned Canada as “uniquely situated to be a leading voice at a global level in developing innovative responses to the opportunities and challenges posed by religious diversity” (*Religion and Diversity Project*, n.d.). The project was guided by this central research question:

What are the contours of religious diversity in Canada and how can we best respond to the opportunities and challenges presented by religious diversity in ways that promote a just and peaceful society? (*Religion and Diversity Project*, n.d.)

This multifaceted research endeavor was further divided into four broad strands, each piloted by its own sub-question.⁷⁷ Education emerged as a central research concern of strand one, centered on the social construction of religious identity. According to the project's grant application, the objective of this strand was to examine:

the social and cultural context in which people, institutions, and narratives conceptualize and construct religious identities. It will critically assess how religion is understood, shaped, and deployed as a category of identity within various discursive contexts such as the media, education, scientific research environments, and religious groups themselves (*Religion and Diversity Project*, n.d.).

Specifically, the project sought to explore and understand debates on religion and education in Canada and how they have historically focused on divergent pedagogical approaches used in Canadian schools. From publicly-funded confessional education to education *about* religion, the project proposal noted the absence of any consensus approach to religion and education in Canada. Learning from international research on religion and education was also indicated as a path to implementing successful strategies from other jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom, Australia and the Nordic countries. Over the course of the seven-year project, numerous articles, book chapters and graduate theses devoted to or having a link with religion and education were produced.⁷⁸ Additionally, an extensive, open-access, bilingual bibliography on religion and education in Canada was created,

⁷⁷ According to the grant application, the four research strands of the Religion and Diversity Project were guided by these questions: 1) How are religious identities socially constructed? 2) How is religious expression defined and delimited? 3) How and why do gender and sexuality act as flashpoints? 4) What are alternative strategies for managing religious diversity? (*Religion and Diversity Project*, n.d.).

⁷⁸ This excerpt from the project's grant application demonstrates a wide range of academic concerns about religion and education in Canada: "Curricula and debates concerning religion in education centre on two aspects that are sometimes regarded as alternatives: some advocate teaching about religion and religious diversity as a way of increasing the understanding of religion, while others favour religiously based education especially through publicly supported religiously identified schools and curricula..." (*Religion and Diversity Project*, n.d.).

bringing together over 1,000 scholarly publications on the topic.⁷⁹ In short, my involvement with the Religion and Diversity Project provided extremely fertile ground from which to glean insight and inspiration as well as to hone the parameters of my own research. Having just begun my doctoral program, I was new to the field of religious studies and only beginning to familiarize myself with the various bodies of literature on religion and education. In the midst of this ‘deer in the headlights’ first semester phase of graduate school, the Religion and Diversity Project hosted a workshop in November, 2013 entitled ‘Whose Religion: Education about Religion in Public Schools’. At that early juncture in my studies, I did not adequately grasp the importance of the two-day event which brought together many key researchers from Australia, Canada, Europe, India, the United Kingdom and the United States. I would only later understand the significance of this gathering to my own research as I immersed myself in the work of those who presented at the meeting.^{80 81} The primary objective of the workshop was to “examine the complex intersection of religion and education from a variety of theoretical and transnational perspectives” (Religion and Diversity Project - Religion and Education, n.d.). To this end, researchers engaged a wide range of issues and debates which reflected concerns from their various geographic, social and political locations. From confessional religious education, the role of the state, sexuality education, teacher neutrality, and religious freedom to questions of indoctrination and the inculcation of civic values, the workshop itself was a microcosm of the many questions and concerns of the very large, international field that is religion and education.

⁷⁹ The Religion and Education Bibliography is available through this link: <http://religionanddiversity.ca/en/projects-and-tools/projects/whose-religion-education-about-religion-public-schools/>

⁸⁰ An entire section of the project’s website is devoted to the ‘[Whose Religion: Education about Religion in Public Schools](#)’ workshop and provides open access to all presentations, panels and keynote addresses (*The Workshop*, 2013).

⁸¹ This gathering also culminated in an edited volume entitled *Issues in Religion and Education: Whose Religion?* (2015), merging the work of established and emerging scholars in the field of religion and education.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH RATIONALE

With inspiration from the Religion and Diversity Project's guiding query of how to promote a "just and peaceful society," and the subtexts of Canadian conversations about diversity and inclusion, this research was grounded in a desire to understand what educators and parents thought Canadian public school students should learn about religious difference (*Religion and Diversity Project*, n.d.). To accomplish this objective, I used a qualitative approach to explore research objectives, combining in-person interviews, online survey responses and textual analysis. "Qualitative research is grounded in an essentially constructivist philosophical position," according to Bloomberg and Volpe, "in the sense that it is concerned with the complexities of the sociocultural world are experienced, interpreted and understood in a particular context and at a particular point in time" (2008: 80). In the encounter with 'the other' (in this case study the idea of learning about the 'religious' other), constructivism offers a way to think about how people form their understandings of diversity in Canada. The current historical period in Canada is one of increasing and evolving diversity and also a time in which questions of religious belonging and identity are at the forefront. Gathering empirical data from the field using three qualitative research methods allowed me to deepen my own comprehension of the current context and to strengthen the analysis which followed. This triangulation included in-person, semi-structured interviews, an online survey component and a textual analysis of primary-level textbooks from Québec's Ethics and Religious Culture Program. This foray into qualitative research was an academic 'first' for me and I was quickly enamored by the process of interviewing, of listening to the recorded voices of my interlocutors during transcription and of immersing myself in the rich textual details from transcripts, online surveys and textbooks. Ritchie and Lewis assert that "there is fairly wide consensus that qualitative research is a naturalistic, interpretative approach concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to

phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values etc.) within their social worlds” (2003: 3). Indeed, from my participants’ (both in-person and online) generous sharing of thoughts and stories from their work and family milieu, unfolded a veritable cornucopia of lived experience and articulations of ‘meaning’. Though this combination of interviews and online responses provided the bulk of data for this project, the textbook analysis added helpful familiarity with the curriculum which clearly informed responses from both educators and parents.

3.4 ACCESS CHALLENGES

Access challenges for in-person interviews were a significant hurdle during the course of this research. In fact, I contemplated changing the heading of this section to its more sardonic alternative ‘Irksome Research Roadblocks: Regrets and Reflections.’ I originally planned to gather empirical data from the field (through educational institutions) using participant observation, focus groups, and in-person interviews. Specifically, I anticipated doing participant observation in both French and English elementary schools in the National Capital region of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. My intention was to access a participant pool from linguistically and culturally distinct populations within the same geographic region. In recruiting student, teacher and parent participants from schools in both Quebec and Ontario I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of how obligatory religious literacy curriculum (in Quebec) and limited access (in the form of elective classes) to world religions curriculum (in Ontario) might influence participant responses to my research questions. I did not anticipate *the* major challenge of my experience in conducting research in schools would be *access*. In Canada, all research involving humans requires an extensive application submitted to institutional research ethics boards. After receiving initial approval from the University of Ottawa Office of Research Ethics on April 19, 2016, I applied to the three largest proximate, public-school boards. This included one

French and two English boards in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario.⁸² Each had their own rules for submission, ranging from a unilingual (rather than a bilingual) application and submission of ten, separate, spiral bound copies of a hundred-page application for a specialized ethics review board. The range of application protocols were onerous. Three months later I had my responses: one acceptance and two rejections. The Commission scolaire des Draveurs (CSD), headquartered in Gatineau, Québec, readily accepted my request with a stated enthusiasm for supporting research endeavours in general.^{83,84} Both the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB)⁸⁵ and the Western Quebec School Board (WQSB), however, rejected my requests on the basis that this research would have no direct benefit for students, schools or boards. An excerpt from the Ottawa-Carleton Research and Evaluation Advisory Committee (OCREAC) rejection letter reads:

While it is clear that you are interested in collecting opinions from students, staff, and parents related to the public education of beliefs, religions and worldviews, your rationale for doing so from within the public-school board, rather than sampling a wider public audience, is unconvincing. As the collection of opinions related to the education of these topics offers no direct benefit at a school or Board level, it is recommended that you approach the Ministry directly with your request if you wish to do so from within public schools. Alternatively, our second recommendation is that you approach other venues, both denominational and non-denominational, to obtain a wider, more representative sample of student and parent voices.⁸⁶

⁸² The three school boards included in original applications to Research Ethics Boards were: La Commission scolaire des Draveurs in Gatineau, Quebec (French); Western Quebec School Board in Gatineau, Quebec (English); and the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, Ottawa, Ontario (English).

⁸³ ‘Commission scolaire’ is the French term for ‘school board.’

⁸⁴ The only minor challenge with my request to the Commission scolaire des Draveurs (CSD) was related to language. When I submitted the bilingual version of my ethics application, it was delayed until I could submit a French-only version. Once received, my project was immediately approved. Full text of the CSD response is found in Appendix 9.

⁸⁵ Putting into context the OCREAC’s rejection—of the 47 non-board-initiated research proposals received in 2015-16 by the Ottawa Carleton District School Board, over half were rejected.

⁸⁶ The full text of the OCREAC response is found in the appendices.

The WQSB declined my request along the same line of reasoning. A message from their Assistant Director General-Director of Education stated simply that “we are frequently solicited for access to our staff and students for research purposes and must decline my[sic] requests that do not have a direct potential for impact on student achievement.”⁸⁷ Given my proposed methodology of participant observation in classrooms, student focus groups and recruitment for parent/teacher interviews through schools, the pool of potential participants from which to draw was drastically reduced. Access proved to be not just a bureaucratic hurdle, but also time-consuming stumbling block given the time requirements of preparing multiple applications and waiting on adjudication from gatekeepers and ethics review boards. The reduction of available recruitment pools from three school boards with diverse linguistic and ethno-cultural populations to one Francophone school board in Quebec required a redirection of my entire data collection strategy. Drawing interview participants predominantly from a single school board (in this case a French school board in Quebec, where the ERC program had already been in place for a decade), narrowed the potential perspectives of educators and parents whose children do not attend schools where religious literacy programs are in place. Likewise, the inability to conduct focus groups with students precluded the inclusion of student voices into my study. Given the significant amount of literature on youth as “social actors who are ‘experts’ on their own lives,” not having direct access to students was a considerable loss (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010: 175). I anticipated a good part of my data collection would be done in a participatory format with students in focus groups, in familiar spaces where they would have more influence on the direction of conversations. Once resigned to the practical impossibility of directly including students in my study, I looked to parent and educator interviews with parents and educators as potential second-hand sources for students’ experience. My experience suggests that the dearth of student voices in research

⁸⁷ The full text of Western Quebec School Board response is in the appendices.

on religion and education in Canada (and studies outside of Quebec in general) is perhaps due, in part, to institutional reluctance.

During the course of my graduate studies, I crossed paths with other researchers who noted similar access barriers to conducting research with both students and teachers.⁸⁸ Discrepancies in the quantity of published research from Quebec versus the rest of Canada may also be explained by historical reasons.⁸⁹ Given that the history of religion and education in Canada has unfolded as a multifaceted issue with numerous political flashpoints—from funding disputes brought to the United Nations Human Rights Tribunal⁹⁰ to numerous legal changes in the country’s highest court—I speculate that a partial explanation of school board reluctance reflects an effort to avoid litigation and public scrutiny of so-called ‘controversial’ religious literacy curriculum.⁹¹

3.5 RESEARCH SAMPLE

Sociologist Douglas Ezzy argues that “the most important point about sampling, as it relates

⁸⁸ For example, in a 2015 Religion and Diversity Project workshop on religion and education held in Montréal, the Principal Investigator of the ROSE Project (Research on Secularism and Education) cited institutional refusal for school access as the major impediment to their research with teachers across Canada. See seculareducation.com/the-project.html

⁸⁹ For more on the leadership of Quebec scholars in the area of religion and education see, this chapter by Beaman & Cusack (2020), “Étudier l’éducation sur la religion: Ce que l’on peut apprendre du Québec”. In Koussens, Laniel & Perreault, (Eds.), *Étudier la religion au Québec: regards d’ici et d’ailleurs*.

⁹⁰ The United Nations Human Rights Committee declared in *Waldman v. Canada* (Communication No. 694/1996), that Canada should remediate discriminatory public funding of religious education. In considering the case of a Jewish family’s claim of religious discrimination, the UNHRC stated the following: “the Committee considers that the differences in treatment between Roman Catholic religious schools, which are publicly funded as a distinct part of the public education system, and schools of the author’s religion, which are private by necessity, cannot be considered reasonable and objective” (*Waldman v. Canada*, 1999: para 10.5).

⁹¹ For review of Supreme Court of Canada cases pertaining to religion and education see Law’s entanglements: Resolving questions of religion and education (Beaman, Forbes, & Cusack, 2015: 156-182).

to qualitative data analysis, is that the sample is purposeful” (2002: 74). “A purposeful sample” he stipulates “is one that provides a clear criterion or rationale for the selection of participants, or places to observe, or events, that relates to the research questions” (74).⁹² Given the aims of my research project, the use of purposive sampling approach to recruit participants was intended to reach individuals who fit the following criteria: 1) Educators (in-service or retired) in public primary or secondary schools in Canada; and 2) Parents or guardians with children in public primary or secondary schools in Canada. As it turned out, many of my participants were *both* educators and parents, a confluence of positionalities which provided for many unique and insightful conversations and viewpoints. Despite field access obstacles, I was able to conduct in-person interviews with 22 educators and parents from both Quebec and Ontario, who were recruited using a snowball sampling method.⁹³ I conducted interviews on school property in the single board which granted permission, and in homes, coffee shops or in the lab of the Religion and Diversity Project on the campus of the University of Ottawa for participants coming from within the jurisdictions of the other school boards. I also posted announcements about my study on the Religion and Diversity Project website⁹⁴ and on the project’s social media accounts. In total, 190 online survey participants from five Canadian provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Quebec) were recruited through the website,

⁹² Robinson (2014) notes that “the primary criticism of purposive sampling is that researchers who utilize this technique sometimes fail to adequately disclosed their selection criteria, thus undermining the transparency of their research...” (5244). Based on this caveat, I have been careful to outline my selection criteria and the reasoning behind my choices.

⁹³ “The two most common, and undesirable, sampling techniques employed in qualitative research,” according to Ezzy (2002) “are convenience samples and snowball samples.” He added that “the main disadvantage with these methods is that the only rationale is ease or convenience” (74). Although I recognize these drawbacks, given the institutional barriers to participant recruitment I encountered, snowball sampling provided an additional avenue for contacting participants based on necessity.

⁹⁴ Potential participants were directed to this page on the [Religion and Diversity Project](#) website where they could directly access the online survey in French or English. (*Learning about Religion, Beliefs & World Views in Public Education*, n.d.)

Facebook and Twitter. I combined data from these in-person interviews, responses from online survey participants and triangulated this data with a textual analysis of five secondary student manuals used in the Quebec Ethics and Religious Culture Program. I was able to integrate multiple aspects of the same topic of investigation in my analysis which strengthened my overall grasp of knowledge as it emerged during both data collection and assessment.

As a purposive, non-representative rather than random sample, findings from my study are not generalizable. Robinson defines this type of non-probability sampling as an “intentional selection of informants based on their ability to elucidate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon” (2014: 5244). Among the main advantages of purposive sampling is that it affords opportunities to assemble “divergent perspectives, thereby illuminating the relevance of the positionality of informants vis-a vis the research in question” (5244). Interviewing and collecting survey responses from teachers, parents who were also teachers, and parents of school-age children, provided a range of viewpoints and lived experiences with direct relevance to the goals of this research. I opted for this form of data collection as a means to leverage my informants’ lived experience in classrooms or as learning guides for their own children. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I offer arguments for the pertinence my research contributions to academic and policy conversations about religious/worldview literacy education.

Who participated in my study? Participants in this study included the 22 people I interviewed and the 190 people who responded the online survey.⁹⁵ All of the interviewees resided either in Quebec or Ontario, with the majority of online participants coming from Ontario. Participants ranged range in age from 33 to 75 years old and self-identified as coming from religious/worldview

⁹⁵ The table in Appendix 6 outlines the demographic breakdown of interview participants.

backgrounds including Anglican, Atheist, Buddhist, Catholic, Lutheran, Mormon, Muslim, Nones, and spiritual but not religious (SBNR).

3.6 INSTRUMENT DESIGN

The use of semi-structured interviews as a part of an overall qualitative methodology, was intended to be one of three data-collection instruments used in the design of this research project. As I have outlined in previous paragraphs, I was obliged to modify my methodological plan somewhat in order to compensate for obstacles I encountered in recruiting participants from certain school populations. While I was concerned about the possible impacts on my overall project design and findings, I decided that the triangulated combination of interviews, an online survey and textual analysis would still offer meaningful findings.

The interview and online survey questions for this project were informed in part by a 2015 British study entitled *RE for Real: The Future of Teaching about Religion and Belief* by Adam Dinham and Martha Shaw.⁹⁶ Their study, which grew out of the Westminster Faith Debates⁹⁷ in the UK, sought to find out what parents, students and employers thought students should learn about

⁹⁶ Dinham & Shaw's RE for Real study culminated in ten recommendations for future directions in United Kingdom education policy for the teaching of religion and belief. "This is set against the growing vigour of debates about religion and belief across a range of public settings and sectors, largely driven by new laws against discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, and by anxieties about extremism. The question of what to do about religion and belief in general collides with the issue of how best to educate in this area. Is the current RE landscape up to the challenge? How might it be re-imagined, and what might the alternatives look like?" (Dinham & Shaw, 2015).

⁹⁷ The Westminster Faith Debates were created by Charles Clarke (former British Education Secretary) and Linda Woodhead (Professor, Lancaster University), with the goal of "informing public debate and advancing understanding of religion in a complex world." Many of the debates are specifically about religion and education in the United Kingdom (*The Westminster Faith Debates Seven Debates on the Place of Religion in Our Public Life*, 2012).

religion in order to prepare them for life in a diverse society. According to the study's authors "from the Religious Literacy perspective, RE can be explored in a different way: not as about cohesion and citizenship, but concerned with preparing students for the practical task of engagement with the rich variety of religion and belief encounters in everyday, ordinary life" (Dinham and Shaw, 2015: 3). In contrast to the Canadian system, religious education, or its common abbreviation RE, is a compulsory part of education in the UK. With permission from RE for Real's principal investigator Adam Dinham, Professor at Goldsmiths, University of London, I adapted portions of the questionnaire for the Canadian context.⁹⁸ Having this resource for instrument design from which to draw upon was a tremendous benefit to the early stages of my project.⁹⁹ With substantial input from my thesis supervisor, I formulated questions specific to my field work context, such as queries about Indigenous traditions and other curricular content. Initial interview questions were predominantly demographic, with the addition of Likert-type scales intended to gauge participants' positionality with regard to religious belief and practice. The remaining interview questions were open-ended and allowed participants to expand their responses as they saw fit. Choosing to conduct field work in both Ontario and Quebec required my study to be bilingual and this aspect of my study came with both advantages and disadvantages. I was able to interview people of different backgrounds, but terminology was not always the same across languages. Interview questions were first formulated in English and subsequently translated into French.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Because the RE for Real study predominantly focused on religious literacy in the labor force and was intended for participants for whom the idea of education about religion was an educational expectation, I have chosen not to pursue any cross-national comparisons at this juncture, leaving that as a possible consideration for future research.

⁹⁹ I would like to express my gratitude for the generosity of Professors Dinham and Shaw in allowing me to take inspiration their research as a springboard for my own study.

¹⁰⁰ Questionnaires for face-to-face interviews and the online survey in English and French are found in Appendices 7-9.

In order to test the content and flow of the questionnaire, I conducted three pilot interviews, one in English, one in French and one bilingually. These were particularly important steps in the process of honing the research instruments as, the original French translation proved to be (according to a French-speaker) too ‘français de France, est pas assez français du Québec.’ In other words, some terminology proved to be unfamiliar for participants from Québec, drawing more requests for clarification rather than actually speaking to the aims of questions. For example, the word ‘worldview’ translated as ‘représentation du monde’ was one such term which was not immediately familiar to francophones from Québec. In the academic literature the term ‘worldview’ has gained popularity because it is inclusive of religious and nonreligious belief systems. Once suggestions from the pilot interviews were incorporated, I began the process of interviewing participants. After several interviews it was evident that people consistently floundered on the word ‘interculturalism.’ I eventually opted to strike this question from the list, however it was interesting to note that even for participants who were residents of Quebec, the word ‘interculturalism’¹⁰¹ was wholly unfamiliar. This is indicative that it is a term employed predominantly in academic discussions and not in the day-to-day conversations of my participants. The flexibility of a qualitative research approach afforded me the opportunity to modify my instrument design during the course of data collection. Throughout the process of conducting interviews, it became clear that the design of an effective interview questionnaire is part science and part art, with a generous dose of input from an experienced qualitative researcher. In retrospect, I probably would have shifted the demographic questions to the end of the interview in order to improve the flow of conversations.

¹⁰¹ Bouchard advances this definition: “Interculturalism as a form of integrative pluralism, is a model based on a search for balance that attempts to find a middle ground between assimilation and segmentation” (2015: 32).

3.7 DATA COLLECTION: INTERVIEWS

I contacted participants via email and arranged dates, times and places for interviews. Before each interview, participants signed consent forms in duplicate in the language of their choice, one copy for them and the other for my own records. Interviews ranged from 18 minutes to over two hours, and were conducted in people's homes, offices, local coffee shops, and in one instance, in the Religion and Diversity Project Lab on the University of Ottawa campus. The duration of the shorter interviews was often dictated by the presence (and varying needs) of small children or pets in the home. All interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription.¹⁰² I also made some minimal notes in the margins of questionnaires, but tried to focus my attention on the person, rather than on writing.¹⁰³ After each interview, I left a small printed copy of my research poster and invited participants to pass it on to other parents or educators who might have been interested.¹⁰⁴ A follow-up thank-you email was sent to all participants, which also included request to for referrals and digital version of the research poster.

In thinking about how and where I would actually conduct this study, what I imagined (interviews happening primarily in schools) and what actually transpired (interviews elsewhere than

¹⁰² I came to understand transcription as both bane and beauty of the qualitative research process. Transcribing interviews was a tedious process ranging from annoyance to misery, and yet my supervisor's insistence on the role of transcription as a way to get 'close to the data' proved fruitful. In the course of doing the interviews, and with supervisor guidance in reviewing early transcripts, I was able to improve the process by being more silent, allowing for longer pauses, I was a beginner, in a hurry to get through the interview so as not to be a time burden to the interviewee. This afforded me the opportunity to improve on interviewing. Interviews were not transcribed verbatim, that is, I did not include 'ums' and 'ahhs' but did include in brackets, long pauses and laughter.

¹⁰³ One of the most intriguing parts of the interview process, considered in combination from the online surveys, was the variety of answers to the question: What three words first come into your head when you think about religion? Certain patterns, and many surprising 'outlier' words, emerged in these answers. A thorough discussion of these responses, and of course the ensemble of interview questions is found in the following chapters.

¹⁰⁴ Research poster is found in the appendices.

in schools), somewhat altered my initial research blueprint. Despite certain access obstacles to gathering data via schools, the physical settings for this study did offer a variety of backdrops for illuminating conversations with parents and educators who generously offered their time at kitchen tables, local cafés, and downtown office buildings. Participants put aside the demands of busy lives to contribute to my study. One parent even sat for an interview in the midst of a move, graciously having a conversation with me sitting on the carpet of their living room surrounded by moving boxes, wandering children and parade of curious pets.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION: ONLINE SURVEY

Triangulating data collection with the addition of an online survey proved to be a rich source of qualitative data. Given the institutional roadblocks I encountered in recruiting interview participants from schools, the responses from the online survey were an extremely valuable enhancement to the ‘story’ which emerged from interviews. Online survey participants were recruited via social media, specifically using Facebook and Twitter accounts of the Religion and Diversity Project and my own Twitter account. In total, 190 people participated in the online survey, 145 in English and 45 in French. 57% of respondents (English) identified as female, 42% as male, and two individuals identified as ‘trans female’ and ‘two spirit.’ Participants ranged in ages from 22-70 and over half (55%) participated in the study as either a parent or a guardian of a public-school student, 25% as educators, and 20% as both. The number of years in working in the education sector was widely distributed (5 years-8%, 30+ years 5%). 80% of respondents worked in Ontario. A more thorough elaboration of the online survey is found in chapter five.

3.9 DATA COLLECTION: TEXTBOOK CONTENT ANALYSIS

In addition to interviews and the online survey, data collection for this research came from a content analysis of Ethics and Religious Culture textbooks used in Quebec classrooms. While trying to avoid the reductionist assumption that teachers rely solely on textbooks, they remain an important reference point for both teacher training and classroom discussions. Curricular content, moreover, often establishes what is deemed or understood by educators and students as ‘official’ knowledge in the classroom (Apple, 1993). According to Fairclough (2003) “one of the causal effects, of texts which has been of major concern for critical discourse analysis, is ideological effects –the effects of texts in inculcating and sustaining or changing ideologies” (9). Informed by Fairclough’s approach to analysing discourse, I used the tools of discourse analysis in order to see how narratives from secondary level student manuals from the Ethics and Religious Culture Program might “contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power” (Fairclough, 2003: 9). Guided by the claim that “social effects of texts depend upon meaning making,” the core focus of this content analysis was to explore how the representation of religions and worldviews operated as a baseline from which meaning(s) could be constructed (Fairclough, 2003: 11). Thus, examining the content of ERC textbooks was a path towards a more holistic understanding of how religious literacy education might be presented in Quebec classrooms. As a rationale for selection and a continuation of the purposive sampling method used for interview and online survey participants, I chose five secondary student manuals, using only those on the approved list of teaching materials by the Ministère de L’éducation, de l’enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (Gouvernement du Québec, 2019). Selection criteria and content analysis of these five secondary-level textbooks were based on the following: 1) the choice of secondary-level texts over primary-level texts (in order to have more

in-depth coverage of the subject matter); 2) a focus on only Quebec Education Ministry approved texts from a single publisher and the exclusion of teacher's guides and student activity books (in order to have a small, manageable data set, suited to the objectives of a single chapter); and 3) the use of English language versions (in order to eliminate need for translation). Given that the ERC program has two distinct components – one devoted to ethics and the other to religious culture, this content analysis focused exclusively on the religious culture component. I then established a list of religions and worldviews from the texts as “units of analysis” and created an “instrument” using pre-defined categories in order to organize data for analysis and interpretation (Ezzy, 83).

I approached this content analysis through the same conceptual framework which informs the overall direction of this thesis, drawing upon pluralism, xenosophia and deep equality as a triangular prism through which I sought to ‘see’ (to understand) what emerged during data collection. Using categories of religions and worldviews (as demarcated in the texts themselves) as the aforementioned units of analysis, I conducted a qualitative exploration of how the ‘story’ of religious diversity is represented in the textbooks. I also drew upon previously published work around gender, reconciliation and nonreligion to help guide my inquiry (Beaman and Cusack, 2020).¹⁰⁵ Given the by-design privileging of Christianity in ERC textbooks, however, I did not carry out data collection with any quantitative objectives.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ From our chapter entitled “*Étudier l’éducation sur la religion: ce que l’on peut apprendre du Québec*,” Beaman and I elaborate several issues regarding the future of religion about education. “In our estimation, there are three emergent issues which complicate ongoing debate about future directions for religion and education in the Quebec education system, and which are likely to attract the attention of Quebec scholars in the ongoing project of assessing and debating issues in religion and education, particularly around the content of the curriculum. They are: First, nonreligion; second, gender equality and third, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples” (Beaman & Cusack, 2020: 429).

¹⁰⁶ As noted in the beginning of this thesis, the ERC program was, by design, constructed with Christianity (specifically Catholicism and Protestantism) as its foundational tradition. In promotional material targeting parents, the ERC is framed as a curriculum which “devotes special attention to the religious heritage of our society” (MELS, n.d.).

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

In the process of reading ERC textbooks, listening to my interview participants and in pouring over open-ended online survey responses, I soon came to understand that “qualitative data analysis,” really was as Ezzy argues, “an interpretive task” (73). He states

Interpretations are not found—rather they are made, actively constructed through social processes. Data collection in qualitative research is not something easily separated off from data analysis. Researchers make many choices during data collection that are integral to how the data are analyzed and will be analyzed—choices, for example, about what or who to sample, what to ask, what to pursue, and what to ignore. These choices are a product of the researcher's developing interpretation of the phenomena being studied (2002: 73).

This characterization of the simultaneous nature of data collection and analysis helped me to articulate my experience while engaged in all three modes of data collection and analysis. It felt as though after each in-person interview, for example, more nuanced understandings of my research objectives emerged as participants articulated perspectives I had not yet considered. Reflecting on my conceptual framework while analyzing the content of textbooks and going over online survey texts likewise helped me to see unanticipated and surprising connections. Analysis of my three data sources was carried out in phases of open, axial and selective coding (Williams and Moser, 2019), using an adapted Framework Method for organizing findings (Gale et al., 2013b).¹⁰⁷ First, I did an initial open coding

¹⁰⁷ Tsang (2019) notes that differences in “methodological orientations” result in varying uses of terminology “such as pattern coding, selective coding, and axial coding.” Following Tsang, who considers such terms as “similar” and “interchangeable,” I acknowledge that there are differing opinions on how to specify three phases of coding (128).

of transcribed interviews, online survey texts and ERC textbooks during which broad patterns were noted in the margins and three preliminary coding matrices were created. A second pass of axial coding entailed colour coding primary themes and sub themes as they became more precise and during which coding matrices were further refined to reflect more clear-cut categories. Selective coding followed as the next step which allowed me further clarify and cross-reference the large amount of data I was organizing and analyzing. According to Williams & Moser

the open, axial, and selective coding strategy enables a cyclical and evolving data loop in which the researcher interacts, is constantly comparing data and applying data reduction, and consolidation techniques. As the coding process progresses, its dynamic function and nonlinear directionality enables essential themes to be identified, codified, and interpreted in the service of a research study's focus and contributes to the associated literature (2019: 47).

Approaching my analysis using three levels of coding—open, axial and selective—allowed me to “immerse” myself in the data, which ultimately provided a firm foundation for telling a holistic story as it materialized from the various sources (Williams and Moser, 2019: 54). The “construction of meaning” (which took form as data analysis progressed), provided an interrelated network of themes creating a circular flow of thinking, resonating in turn with all three elements of my conceptual framework (Williams and Moser, 2019: 45). I was struck by Williams’ and Moser’s choice of words for the process: “cyclical and evolving data loop” and “nonlinear directionality,” as I found myself going back and forth between ideas which connected individually and collectively with aspects of pluralism, xenosophia and deep equality. As is common for this type of qualitative research, I did encounter coding challenges. One of the most difficult parts of coding was distinguishing when commonalities could have been condensed into one code, or be kept distinct because of certain important nuances. This led to the problem of an “overload of codes,” which occasionally prompted the feeling of being overwhelmed by information (Tsang , 2019: 128, citing Glaser and Aludel, 2013).

In addition to challenges, the study also had numerous limitations, which I explain in the next section.

3.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has a number of limitations related to sample size and language as well as those which are inherent to qualitative research generally speaking. One such inherent limitation is, of course, researcher bias. On the question of this bias, Ezzy states

to try to be 'objective' is therefore to pretend that our preconceptions and biases are not influencing our research when they actually are an unavoidable influence on research practice. It is better to acknowledge how our subjective preconceptions and biases shape the research, and to deal with these biases openly and honestly, rather than to pretend they do not exist (53).

With Ezzy's caution in mind, my objective for this section is to make apparent particular limitations of this study and how I have addressed them. Sample size is the first limitation, and as I have mentioned previously, access to a broader number of interview participants was restricted due to my applications being rejected by two out of three school boards. Although snowball sampling eventually led to participants outside of the single school board which did grant permission, the study's research design originally envisioned recruitment from both English and French school boards in two different provinces (Quebec and Ontario). This obstacle essentially restricted the potential direct recruitment pool to a single, francophone school board. This resulted in a rather homogenous group of francophone interviewees of European descent, who came from predominantly Catholic backgrounds. Although there were non-religious participants and one Muslim respondent, the majority of interviewees were from a limited number of traditions within Christianity (specifically Anglican, Catholic, Latter-day Saint, and Lutheran). If access to a larger recruitment pool had been unimpeded, I could have interviewed participants from a broader range of Protestant denominations (and perhaps

more conservative branches), as well as traditions beyond Christianity, for example. Data which might have emerged from a more diverse group may have yielded different (or more nuanced) themes than those which I observed. Not being granted access to the two school boards in Ontario precluded conversations with parents and educators who may have immigrated to Canada, and also impacted my ability to conduct interviews and focus groups with students. Missing from my study are these youth perspectives which had been central to planning of the original research design. I was therefore neither able to include students' opinions on learning about religions, beliefs and worldviews, nor their lived experiences with diversity in their school settings. Mine is likely not a unique situation. It is probable that the barriers I experienced in gaining access to schools for recruitment purposes have impacted other researchers working in similar or adjacent disciplines, and had an influence on the availability of published empirical research in the field.

The religious/belief/worldview background of participants in both the French and English online surveys tended (in similar fashion to interview participants) heavily towards Christianity. The nonreligious (specifically atheists), however, also made up a large share of participants. This limited results from the online survey into two distinct themes which are elaborated in the conclusion. An adjacent limitation was that I conducted a number of interviews in French, and although I am functionally bilingual, francophone participants may have adjusted their responses to meet perceived linguistic difficulties on my part. Also, given my positionality as both a parent, school volunteer and former elementary educator, some interview participants were known to me and this may have impacted their responses. In acknowledging these limitations, I implemented a number of corresponding actions. These measures included the triangulation of data from interviews with the much larger online survey sample, careful attention to differences in online and in-person responses

in French, the avoidance of leading questions and the framing of interview questions as open-ended, in order to facilitate frank conversation.

3.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This outline of research methodology included details about recruitment, participant demographic information, selection rationale and an elaboration of how data was collected via interviews, online surveys and textbooks. Coding challenges and study limitations were primarily related to the nature of the chosen qualitative method. Due to the aforementioned access obstacles, the question of what do to with results which could eventually present a limited scope was an overriding concern during the project. However, data triangulation from three distinct sources, supported by my review of literature and analyzed through the lens of my conceptual framework, worked together to yield a useful contribution to knowledge of import to parents, educators and those working in education policy. Despite the ensemble of challenges, I was able to interview parents and educators who brought a breadth of life and professional experiences to our conversations. who generously took time from busy lives to in-depth interviews which I elaborate in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: LISTENING TO PARENTS AND EDUCATORS IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

“I think more important than learning in detail about specific religions, is that there are many different ways of viewing the world and different people will have different views.”

Barbara, 42, Government Policy Analyst

4.1 INTRODUCTION

On July 9, 2016, I presented my doctoral project at the Religious Literacy in a Plural Age - NEH Working Conference at the Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.¹⁰⁸ During the event, key scholars including Adam Dinham, Dianne Moore, Steven Prothero and others, addressed the diverse audience of academics and educators on the history and contemporary status of the field of religious literacy education; each, in turn, elaborating a range of theoretical and empirical research endeavors. Although Dinham brought in different approaches based on his research in the United Kingdom, the American context suffused the day’s conversations with many issues related to religious freedom, the U.S. Constitution and teachers’ reluctance to delve into potentially contentious gray areas about what type of content was permissible in public classrooms. (Notably absent were discussions of nones and non-religion or of how reconciliation with Indigenous peoples fit in with

¹⁰⁸ The announcement for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) "Religious Literacy in a Plural Age" Working Conference is found in the appendices. The event description situated the conference in the context of international debates on religious literacy: “Has religious literacy become a necessary component of citizenship? In England and Quebec, the state school curricula have been revised to include religious literacy. Do these programs share successful strategies [sic] that can succeed in the U.S.? Faculty experts [sic] and doctoral students from diverse disciplines and backgrounds will present on how to improve religious literacy education across ethnic, religious, and partisan lines” (NEH “*Religious Literacy in a Plural Age*” Working Conference, 2016).

religious literacy initiatives, topics I take up further on in this chapter). One of the most captivating presentations of the day however, was delivered not by a scholar, but rather by journalist Linda K. Wertheimer, author of *Faith Ed: Teaching about Religion in an Age of Intolerance* (2015). Wertheimer's was a highly personal and poignant address. As an education writer, member of a minority religious tradition and mother of school-age children, she described a school controversy in 2014 in Boston suburb in which first graders were discovered playing 'jail the Jews,' with swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti found on school grounds. The event brought back her own childhood trauma of growing up as a Jewish student in a predominantly Christian, public elementary school in the American Midwest. In recounting her early experiences of exclusion and discrimination, she expressed a parallel angst about how her own elementary age children might experience their school years as members of a religious minority. As an example, a chapter entitled 'The Church Lady,' in her memoir opens with this statement: "THE DAY Jesus Christ entered my fourth-grade classroom, my childhood forever changed" (2015: 135). She recounted her early experience with weekly Bible lessons in her classroom, a formal school board request by her parents for exemption, and the resultant trauma of ostracism as she was separated from her classmates during religion weekly lessons. "I felt my classmate's eyes follow me as I left the classroom and the Church Lady entered. It was hard enough being the new kid. Now, I was subject to regular interrogations by some of my peers" (137). She acted on the overt antisemitism and generalized religious illiteracy which plagued her 1970s era childhood in the American Midwest, and took on the mantle, so to speak, of advocate for religious literacy in American schools. I was quite moved by Wertheimer's presentation as it added a nuanced 'lived experience' to theoretical conversations about religion and education. Many aspects of the stories she told paralleled in interesting ways my experience in listening to interview participants in my own study. In the prologue of her book, she states

No longer are we arguing about whether teachers can lead students in the Lord's Prayer and recite Bible verses. The Supreme Court settled that about fifty years ago by ruling that it was wrong for schools to promote one religion over another. Today, many schools are sorting out the best ways to reduce ignorance about religion. Religion became a dividing line for some children in Bedford, a scenario that can and does happen in schools across America. Religious minorities have faced much worse than graffiti and prejudicial remarks, both inside and outside classrooms. Children have yanked off the turbans of young Sikhs as they waited to board a school bus, and they have taunted Muslim peers on anniversaries of the 9/11 attacks. Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus live in my community and in nearby towns. So do atheists. All of those groups can easily be targets because their beliefs are rarely understood. Can education soften the divisions? What can schools do and what are they already doing to ensure the next generation will not need to hold forums to confront religious intolerance? (2015: xi).¹⁰⁹

When I commenced my doctoral research, one of the most notable gaps in the Canadian literature was the lack of voices of parents and educators. Such was the genesis of a desire to learn about their first-hand experiences, in their own words. Engaging Wertheimer's prologue question¹¹⁰ about the place of education in "softening divisions," this chapter explores the experiences of the parents and educators and as such is an empirical study based on primary data. This chapter outlines findings from 22 face-to-face interviews conducted with participants living in the National Capital Region of Canada, which include the adjacent provinces of Ontario and Quebec. I begin the chapter with a demographic overview of participants, followed by a discussion of the primary findings which emerged from the interview data, and conclude with a summary of the outcomes.

¹⁰⁹ The landmark U. S. Supreme Court decision to which Wertheimer refers is *School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963). In this historic ruling, the Court held that "Public schools cannot sponsor Bible readings and recitations of the Lord's Prayer under the First Amendment's Establishment Clause" (*Abington v. Schempp*, 1963).

¹¹⁰ In her article "Volunteering as 'Hanukkah Parents' Lets Schools Off the Hook," Wertheimer critiques her own participation as 'Hanukkah Mom' during which she told the story of the tradition's origins and guided her son's kindergarten classmates in decorating dreidels. "When parents offer themselves as instructors of faith," she argues, "we let schools off the hook and leave education about religion up to chance. Learning about religion is an integral part of social studies and geography even in elementary schools, and it's especially critical now with hate crimes based on religion and race" (Wertheimer, 2016).

4.2 PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

I conducted in-person interviews with a total of 22 participants who were either parents of primary or secondary students, educators, or participants who were both parents and educators. All resided in the provinces of Quebec or Ontario, and for those who were educators, were either in-service or retired employees of school boards in one of the two provinces. Participants ranged in age from 33 to 75 years old, with an average age of 45. The majority had Christian backgrounds and self-identified as coming from variety of religious/worldview traditions including Anglican, Catholic, Latter-day Saint (LDS), and Lutheran, with varying approaches to their particular traditions. One participant was Muslim, and three self-described as nones (one of whom indicated being both Catholic and None). Of those who specified, five indicated they were practicing members of their tradition, three indicated non-practicing and 11 did not indicate. Of the total number, seven interviewees were Catholic and seven were LDS, attributable both to common outcomes of snowball sampling—in particular for the LDS participants, a tradition characterized by very close social ties—and for interviews conducted with educators from the French school board in Quebec where a majority of teachers come from Catholic backgrounds. Professions of those interviewees who were not educators included employees of the Canadian public service, homemakers, an entrepreneur, and a military lawyer. As for gender, the breakdown (18 women, four men) was unintentional, however likely attributable to the higher number of female educators at the elementary level. Participants were interviewed in their preferred language—eight interviews were conducted in French and 14 in English, and were transcribed in the original language. A detailed list of demographic information for interview participants is found in Appendix 16.

4.3 WHAT THREE WORDS?

Once the introductory demographic questions were asked and answered, I then queried participants with the following: What three words come into your head when you think about religion?¹¹¹ I initially considered this more of a warm-up of question, and therefore did not have any particular expectations for what might emerge. The ensemble of words offered by participants turned out to be quite telling, however, and were frequently thematic harbingers of streams of thought which unfolded during the interviews. The word cloud below, while not intended to be part of the qualitative analysis, offers a basic visual representation of the word collection, with certain words occupying more space according to the frequency of their appearance in the data. A list of words in table format is found in appendix 15.¹¹² In some cases where pertinent to the flow of my analysis, I have included selected words to introduce certain interviewees' contributions.

¹¹¹ Answers to the same question from the 190 online participants, of course, produced a much larger and more nuanced word bank. A detailed description is found in the following chapter.

¹¹² This word cloud is included for illustrative purposes only intended to provide readers a readily accessible visual map of the range of words used by participants. The visual was created using the online platform wordart.com.

analytical framework based on the Framework Method as described by (Gale et al., 2013a), worked well given the objective of my study was “shedding light on the phenomenon under investigation,” rather than “generating social theory” as is the case for projects that aim to produce grounded theory (Gale et al., 2013: 3).¹¹⁴ The following four significant findings emerged from the data:

1. The majority of participants were of the opinion that learning about religion, beliefs and worldviews was essential to fostering openness towards and respect for diversity and difference.
2. Religion, broadly speaking, was frequently perceived as a source of conflict in society. Misunderstandings about religion—particularly Islam— were thought to be among the root causes of societal friction.
3. Although they themselves did not learn about the topic during their early education, the majority of participants felt that students *should* learn about Indigenous belief systems as part of primary school curriculum.
4. Educators noted an increase in the numbers of ‘nones’ in their classrooms – or students with no religious tradition and the importance framing non-religious worldviews as equal to religious belief systems in the curriculum and classroom discussions.

Using my participants’ own words to elucidate findings, the following quotes and discussion (as Bloomberg and Volpe so eloquently articulate), “attempt to portray multiple participant perspectives and capture some of the richness and complexity of the subject matter” (2008: 111). These textual vignettes, combined with biographical details and notes taken during the interviews, offer a comprehensive view of participants’ experience, thoughts and opinions.

¹¹⁴ In their article on qualitative research, Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid and Redwood (2013) argue that the Framework Method “is not aligned with a particular epistemological, philosophical, or theoretical approach. Rather it is a flexible tool that can be adapted for use with many qualitative approaches that aim to generate themes” (Gale et al.: 3).

4.4.1 Fostering openness towards difference and diversity

The principal finding from the interview data was that a majority of participants considered learning about religion, beliefs and worldviews an essential part of inculcating openness towards difference and diversity in young Canadians. In response to the central research question ‘**What do you think students should learn about religion, beliefs or worldviews in schools?**’ parents and educators indicated knowledge about religious or worldview diversity was a building block of respect required for unity as a society. Teaching students to understand the diversity which typifies Canadian society was viewed as a crucial base for the development of respect as a basic value. These words from Sylvie, a 62-year-old Quebec elementary teacher and school psychologist, capture the essence of what formed the most common opinion among participants:

I think they should learn the basics of many different religions, especially the ones that compose Canada right now, which are a great diversity, so that it will give them more understanding of the world they’re living in right now and the diversity of the population we’re living in... Well, I think that’s the kind of content we need right now because I think it will help the kids respect the diversity in our society, but glue them together at the same time... Yeah, you know, bind us all together if you wish (P3).

Diversity and respect, intertwined with openness, understanding and unity (or harmony) as a society, formed frequent threads in commentary from participants. Some participants offered their thoughts framed in the context of religious belonging. Patricia, for example, a 58-year-old, sometimes-practicing Catholic and elementary school teacher in Quebec, expressed her thoughts on diversity and difference in terms of different religious ways of being:

So, it’s almost like having a doll, different people would have different kinds of dolls. Like different gods appeal to different people. In the Hindu religion they have like three goddesses and there’s one for this and one for that and the one that appeals to you is the one you worship and it’s not better or worse in my opinion than anything else. It just speaks to you and because we’re all so different, what appeals to one person is going to appeal to a completely different person. It makes sense that everyone would

be attracted to something different. You know, diversity is something we have in the world a lot of. Every snowflake is different (P2).

For some, diversity was often expressed as ‘difference,’ not necessarily religious difference, but a broader notion of variance in how people conceptualized and understood meaning and purpose in their lives. Geneviève, a 54-year-old fourth-grade teacher in a Quebec francophone school, who described her religious background as LDS, but with the disclaimer of “taking away tithing, taking away prejudice against homosexuals, against women, against [different] races, taking away all the restrictions when it comes to differences,” focused on openness towards difference. Her interview literally began with a treatise on discrimination as she had come to understand it in the context of her religious tradition, and on how she brought the evolution of her understanding of difference into her classroom discussions. In her description of how this unfolded in interactions with her students, she said:

often the children are surprised, because there they learn the ways of doing things, I give a little bit more, to tell them but we don't have that in Quebec, and it's different, it's not weird, it's different'. Yes, it's true that it's different, and then, all of a sudden, 'me, I've already seen that' and then, or 'me, I've already heard that' or 'me, my cousin is like that' 'or me...' so it's an opening instead of closing and making a judgment, they open up to the difference (P7).¹¹⁵

She too felt that learning about different religious traditions and worldviews prepared students for living in a diverse society and helped them to foster the understanding that different groups of people had different approaches to life. Exposure to the unfamiliar, for Geneviève, was a crucial preparation for adulthood. In her interview, she talked about what types of religious traditions she included in

¹¹⁵ « Mais, souvent les enfants sont surpris, parce que là ils apprennent les façons de faire, moi j'en donne un petit peu plus, pour leur dire 'mais on n'a pas ça au Québec, et c'est différent, ce n'est pas bizarre, c'est différent.' Oui, c'est vrai que c'est différent, puis là, tout d'un coup 'moi, j'ai déjà vu ça' puis, ou 'moi, j'ai déjà entendu ça' ou 'moi mon cousin est comme ça' 'ou moi...' alors ça fait une ouverture au lieu de refermer puis de porter un jugement, ils s'ouvrent à la différence ».

teaching the Ethics and Religion course, and how this helped to prepare students to think beyond religion to other aspects of difference. In her elaboration, she said:

Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, native spirituality, and then if there are others, we have also touched on the Taoists very little, among the Vikings, what they thought, among certain African peoples. The more they can be exposed, for sure I think the first five great religions that are recognized, but then when the subject is appropriate, to go towards the others, because there are other ways of doing it too, really, I think the more we can expose the students, the better it will prepare them to live in a diverse world.¹¹⁶

...it's a good start, because it's going to create an opening in a place where there are about thirty of us, including the teacher, the professor, it's going to open space where we can exchange, we can say, 'ah, but it's strange, it's a little different', 'yes, but I feel bad,' 'yes, but look at this,' so it is preparatory, and prepares them for all manner of diversity afterwards. Me, I compare it to 'you have blond hair, you have brown hair, it makes no difference' but it will open up for, in terms of sexuality, in terms of race, any difference we can have, size, weight, so it's removing those barriers. And I think it's good in a school environment, because we have 30 different families in one class. And they can express themselves.¹¹⁷

In a similar vein, Michael, a 37-year-old public high school teacher from Ontario and a practicing member of the LDS tradition, said “building understanding” about difference was important, and in his experience, was made possible in the quotidian mingling of students’ lives inside and outside the classroom. In this quote he compares the homogeneity of student populations in Ontario Catholic School boards, with the more diverse populations of (non-confessional) public school boards:

¹¹⁶ « Le judaïsme, l'islam, qu'est que c'est des hindou, des chrétiens, [la] spiritualité [des] autochtones, puis s'il y en a d'autres, on a aussi abordé des taoïstes très peu, chez les vikings ce qu'il pensaient, chez certains peuples africains. Le plus qu'ils peuvent être exposé, c'est certain je pense les cinq premières grandes religions qui sont reconnues, mais ensuite lorsque le sujet est approprié, d'aller vers les autres, parce qu'il y a d'autres façons de faire aussi, vraiment je pense le plus qu'on peut exposer les élèves, mieux ça va les préparer à vivre dans un monde diverse » (P7).

¹¹⁷ « ...c'est un bon départ, parce que ça va ouvrir une ouverture dans un milieu où est-ce que nous sommes une trentaine de personnes, incluant le professeur, l'enseignant, ça ouvrent un lieu où est ce qu'on peut échanger, on peut se permettre de dire, 'ah, mais c'est étrange, c'est un peu différent', 'oui mais je me sens mal à l'aise,' 'oui, mais regard ça,' alors ça prépare puis ça peut être pour n'importe quel diversité ensuite. Moi, je compare ça à 'toi t'as les cheveux blonds, toi les cheveux bruns, ça fait aucune différence' mais ça va ouvrir pour, au niveau de la sexualité, au niveau des races, toute différence qu'on peut avoir, les grandeurs, le poids, alors c'est d'enlever ces barrières-là. Puis je pense que ça se fait bien dans un milieu scolaire, parce que on a 30 familles différentes finalement qu'on retrouve dans une classe. Puis ils peuvent s'exprimer » (P7).

Yeah, I think students should certainly have an understanding of different religions and different religious beliefs. I think in Ottawa, one of the challenges or one of the unfortunate things is that we have two different boards: Catholic and public. I think when you put all of the kids at one school that have all the same ideologies or supposed to have the same ideologies, but reality is a lot of kids at the Catholic school aren't actually Catholic. When you put too many kids all together, they don't get to learn what it's like to live in the real world. So, I think public school, one of the best parts of being educated at a public school is that not only in the classroom but outside of the classroom, they get constant interactions with students and people of different ideas, different religions, different cultures, different foods, different languages, they have different ways of doing things, different culture, they listen to different music. I think that's all just part of building tolerance and building understanding and building the whole person as a student (P22).

Aminah (P13), a 47-year-old Project Manager, practicing Muslim, and mother of three school-aged children, expressed a similar thought process about how living in a diverse society allows for interactions which foster learning about difference and ultimately leads to increased openness. She did not understand diversity as coercive in terms of people needing to change to fit a pre-conceived ideal of citizenship, but rather as a space of discovery amid difference:

Having several cultures living together and then learning from each other. Not in the sense of convincing the other or changing, but opening up to a world of, to all kinds of differences that we didn't know before.¹¹⁸

The theme of openness towards difference continued to emerge when participants were asked about religious and worldview literacy and preparing students for their future careers and workplace interactions. The idea that religious literacy, introduced in school, and later projected to future workplace scenarios surfaced frequently among participants. For Barbara, a 42-year-old Canadian government policy analyst and mother of three school-age children, learning about religious diversity

¹¹⁸ « Avoir plusieurs cultures qui vivent ensemble puis qui apprennent l'un de l'autre. Pas dans le sens de convaincre l'autre ou de changer, mais de s'ouvrir à un monde de, à toute sorte de différence qu'on ne connaissait pas auparavant. » (P13).

and preparing students early to be open to difference laid a foundation for a number of outcomes. Possible results included learning not just about the prosocial aspects of religious traditions, but also about historical and contemporary violence. For her, future workplace relationality would benefit from “more sensitivity” and might also have the potential to displace (and least hypothetically) a deeply ingrained majority tradition (Christian) privilege:

I think they should learn about the diversity of religions and worldviews. I think they should learn about the history of abuses by religions towards their own members and other communities and about the need to acknowledge and reconcile those abusive practices going forward...I think a better understanding of different beliefs helps people to be more sensitive to the fact that their own beliefs aren't necessarily primary or most important, especially when it comes to holidays. Because in the workplaces, I think that's the one place where people's religious beliefs are more likely to become visible and talked about in the public sphere. And just to recognize that Christian holidays aren't the default or primary (P6).

In her assessment, increased understanding had the potential to provoke self-reflexivity about truth claims, suggestive of the “abandonment of ‘rightness,’” as described by Beaman in her framework of “deep equality” (Beaman, 2014: 98). Beaman details “the practice of agonistic respect” as the basis for relinquishing an ideological hold on “the truth through some sort of transcendent authority” (98).¹¹⁹ For Barbara, then, openness towards difference, and embracing the idea of equality among worldviews (rejecting the normative position of a majority tradition), could positively impact equity in future workplaces of current students. Aminah also had a workplace experience to share, in which she elaborated the importance for young Canadians to learn about religious diversity through trying

¹¹⁹ There are interesting connections to be made among Beaman's Deep Equality (2014), Streib & Klein's xenosophia (2019), Fowler's Stages of Faith Development (1981), Clarke and MacDonald's (2017) work on the decline of Christianity in Canada and the growing influence of nonreligious worldviews in plural societies. These connections are explored in more detail in later chapters.

to understand difference in respectful ways. For Aminah, asking questions and genuinely seeking to understand difference led to openness, to non-judgment and ultimately to respect:

It's practice. It's how, I'll say how the other one practices his religion. For example, someone who doesn't travel on Saturday, for example, I have had to work with people who don't travel on Saturday. Then, before, I didn't know each other. You had to be open to adapt to their requirements, not to judge. Then to say yes, for them, then to question, well, question in the sense of asking questions, 'from such and such an hour to such and such an hour,' because I didn't know, like, I thought it was Saturday, but no, it's Friday night afterwards, until -- so you really have to ask questions to understand, to be precise, there you go, to respect the other, and then it allows you to, yes... That's exactly it, to understand, the reason why, there you go. Then also, well, to respect. To understand but also to respect. He travels or he doesn't travel, he doesn't eat, he doesn't fly on Saturdays...(P13).¹²⁰

This finding also aligns with Beaman's conclusions from research with youth in several Canadian provinces with textual data from the Bouchard-Taylor Commission wherein "'respect' is a word that recurs over and over" (Beaman, 2014: 98). Although the idea of not flying on Saturdays was clearly unfamiliar to Aminah, she suspended judgement and described a space of respectful information gathering in order to sort out the working situation with her colleague. Streib and Klein (2018) would characterize this as an instance of "intellectual humility," which is a core component of xenosophia (15). "Xenosophia" according their definition "includes the recognition and admission that my own understanding is not the absolute truth" (15). Greta (P4), a 43-year-old a sixth-grade public school teacher in Ontario and parent of children in primary and secondary school, conversation and dialogue were essential aspects of learning about religious diversity.

¹²⁰ « C'est la pratique. C'est comment, je dirai comment l'autre pratique sa religion. Par exemple, quelqu'un qui, samedi ne voyage pas, par exemple, moi je eu a dans mon autre entourage, j'ai eu à travailler avec des gens qui ne voyagent pas le samedi. Puis, avant, je ne savais pas. Il fallait être ouvert pour savoir s'adapter à leurs exigences, de ne pas juger. Puis dire oui, pour eux, puis de questionner, bien, questionner dans le sens comme poser des questions, 'de telle heure à telle heure,' parce que moi ne savait pas, comme, je croyais que c'était le samedi, mais non, c'est le vendredi soir après, jusqu'à--donc il faut vraiment poser des questions pour comprendre, précise, voilà, respecter l'autre, puis ça te permet de, oui... C'est ça exactement, pour comprendre, le pourquoi voilà. Puis aussi, bien, pour respecter. Comprendre mais aussi respecter. Il voyage ou il ne voyage pas, il ne mange pas, il ne prendre pas l'avion le samedi... » (P13).

Well, I'm speaking from the Ontario School Board perspective and since I teach elementary, however, I think it's based upon conversations with student and having the many different kinds of students and from different cultures. I think it's very beneficial. I know in high school they do touch upon religions, but I think one should do it not just like one course in high school, I think it should be part of a general conversation. I find there's a bit of a view of 'It's best not to talk of anything,' just to make everything neutral. But I think it's best to talk about many different, to have a really open forum of different religions, different views so that everyone can feel accepted, included and that everyone knows that there's a voice from early on, not just that they already know. It's like throughout the grades or, 'oh no, can't talk about that because that's religion. Or even, as a teacher, 'I cannot read this book because it mentions Christmas' or to not be afraid to do that and that it opens up conversation and for people from all sorts of different religions to know that you can talk about anything.

Gretta's emphasis on creating opportunities for conversations and respectful dialogue as a path towards openness, echoes what principal investigators from the large-scale REDco study, Weisse (2010) and Jackson (2012), found in their research with youth across Europe. Their findings showed that inclusive classroom conversations about religious diversity had measurable positive impact on students' attitudes about and openness towards the religious 'other.'

4.4.2 Misunderstanding religion

The second main finding arising from the interview data was the perception of religion as a source of conflict. This question in particular: 'What three words first come into your head when you think about religion?' elicited a common stream of thought among participants – that religion or, more precisely the mis-understanding of customs identified with particular traditions, was among the root

causes of societal friction.¹²¹ Conflict connected to religion arose frequently at other junctures during the interview process. The following quotes capture the overall theme of conflict as it arose during the interviews. When asked about what three words came to mind when she thought about religion, Sylvie (62), said immediately, without any hesitation in her answer:

It's a French word I would say 'la Palomeque auteur'...yeah, all the complications, so there's a whole complication in Palomeque, there's like a conflict around the religions because some religions right now in the world, we don't understand them, and there's a lot of conflict right now in the world because of religion (P3).¹²²

42-year-old francophone, Catholic primary school teacher H el ene's first reaction to the same question was laughter:

[laughs]. My God. Right now, I'd say, uh, like fighting around the world, unfortunately, uh, disagreement, but also spirituality....with everything that's going on right now in the world, sometimes I almost feel like should get rid of religion, because of everything that's going on and all the fighting and I think that if you look at religions, I think that there's more things that we have in common than differences but what people seem to be doing right now is all they're doing is focusing on differences and I don't like everything that comes from that, all the fighting...(P1).

For Brooke, a 33-year-old LDS, homemaker and mother of four, and for Judith, a 56-year-old Anglican, Project Manager and mother of two, conflict was directly related to truth claims and the refusal to engage in what deep quality thinking would deem "abandonment of 'rightness'" (Beaman, 2014: 98):

¹²¹ This finding was not unexpected as it forms the basis of extensive bodies of literature in numerous academic disciplines. "Public space is riddled with negative stories about religion and difference that play on themes of conflict, diversity, demands for accommodation, and so on," according to Beaman's introduction to *Deep Equality as an Alternative to Accommodation and Tolerance* (2014). "Such stories represent the multiple layers of strain placed on societies by religious diversity, at the interpersonal, group and institutional levels. A core project of late modern societies has become to manage and respond to this 'troublesome' diversity (89).

¹²² The [Larousse dictionary defines pol mique](#) as a "more or less violent, lively and aggressive debate;" from the original French « D bat plus ou moins violent, vif et agressif. »

Well in terms of religious history... I mean anytime you bring humans together, there's conflicts and our history shows a lot of war and a lot of people blame war on religion. It's a fight over, "Who's right? Which religion is right? Which is wrong?" and things like that. So, I think the history of it is certainly nothing that needs to be hidden or made light. I think it's an aspect of it but I would say it's a very human response to anything. Humans are humans and we make mistakes (Brooke, P21).

Well, you know a lot of the world wars obviously stemmed from religion because everybody believes their faith is better than the other and that's the part about religion I dislike. I think that the most important thing is commonalities but thinking anyone is better than another I disagree with. There's different practices that benefit people for whatever their reasons are and it's not for individuals to judge basically. But some of the extremism, especially coming to the forefront in recent years is really troublesome for me and I think that is where religion is dangerous. And it almost seems like the circle is coming back and it's a big concern" (Judith, P8).

Ben, a 48-year-old public middle school teacher, parent of one and self-described 'none,' was more specific in his thoughts about religion and conflict, singling out misunderstandings of Islam (likely driven by the media) in his teaching experience in Ottawa:

Okay so in the Ottawa area, one of the bigger challenges that we run into will be understanding Islam and there are some conflicts that arise occasionally that are possible enhanced or influenced by media (P9).

Not unsurprisingly, Islam was the focal point of comments about conflict, and this despite having no specific queries about the tradition in my questionnaire. Misunderstanding and fear about the 'Muslim Other' was frequently mentioned as an obstacle to the pursuit of *le vivre ensemble* and was also seen as being exacerbated by the media. The following quote by Patricia illustrates a constellation of ideas about difference, the power of stories, finding similarity, how a particular belief system plays out in daily life and the role of early education in undoing widely held (and imagined) narratives about Islam; again—these are findings which align directly to Beaman's (2014, 2017) deep equality framework:

I think they should understand why those people, why their beliefs are important. It's not just, I mean to know other people's beliefs is interesting and it's good, but I think what's really important in training people to be multicultural and to accept differences is to see the deeper meaning, like why people do certain things. For example, Muslims, there's a lot of misunderstanding about the Muslim religion and I think if it was more humanized, if the stories talk about the children and why religion is important and what it does in people's lives, what it gives them, rather than just the dogma, I think that people can relate more. And I think that would be the goal of a whole religious program that people wouldn't seem so different, that you can break down that feeling that people are different and then having the problem of inequality, of one being better than another, or you know, prejudice, 'mine is better than yours because I know mine and I don't know yours.' So, I see a lot of children's books do that. They'll talk about some little kid that lives somewhere and has a different religion and they explain how the kid gets up and gets dressed and you know the kind of routines that every kid has (Age 58, P2).

Anne-Marie, (38, teacher/administrator, Catholic, parent) talked about how the ERC course created a conversational space for addressing stereotypes and how having a Muslim student in one of her fifth-grade classes evolved into an opportunity for the predominantly (culturally) Catholic students in her school to engage in respectful dialogue¹²³ about difference:

Among other things, for some years now, Muslim women have, unfortunately, identified very negatively. It is a gateway to make children understand that it is not because one is Muslim that one is a terrorist, as they think. That in all religions there have been some of the most beautiful stories and some of the less beautiful ones, that the values are all the same, they are all very similar, so it really opens the door to great discussions. Often children bring us things that we haven't thought about, things in the media that they've heard, are able to draw a parallel, things that they've experienced in their lives, things that they've seen, read or heard, it doesn't matter. Yes, are able to identify certain things, especially in relation to values and then different beliefs. But at the level of acceptance, acceptance of differences, that oh, yes. It takes up a lot, a lot of space (P17).¹²⁴

¹²³ Many participants in this study recounted stories of collaborative learning between teacher and student, and *among* students. Although this thesis is not focused on educational theory, the large body of work by scholars such as Piaget, (1970) and Vygotsky (1978), is considered foundational literature to understanding the cognitive construction of knowledge and meaning via social interaction in the classroom.

¹²⁴ « Entre autres, depuis quelques années, les Musulmanes sont, malheureusement, identifiées très négativement. C'est une porte d'entrée pour faire comprendre aux enfants que c'est n'est pas parce qu'on est musulman qu'on est terroriste, comme ils le pensent. Que dans toutes les religions il y a eu des plus belles histoires et des moins belles, que les valeurs

It happened to me, to have, my God, I had a student who was Muslim, and just at the beginning of the year I asked her privately if she would accept it if I asked her questions in the class to answer precisely to help educate her classmates, it's like I explained to her, yes, I am aware of what I taught and all that, and then I find out about it, and then I'm interested in all that, Except that it is not my religion, so I did not want to say something that, I warned her, for sure, that I was not explain some things well there, but I would not want to mislead others necessarily either, so I asked her if she was comfortable, then she said 'yes, no problem' even though others had asked permission for them to ask her questions. Yes, we had spent at least two afternoons the first week discussing her religion and then the children among themselves started to parallel everything that was going on around them, and then they realized that, look, it's very similar here. I have a few of them who were preparing for their first communion, and then they were able to draw parallels with what was going on with Muslims in their homes (P17).¹²⁵

Interview participants also told stories of meals shared with Muslim neighbors and of their children doing homework with Muslim classmates as moments of contact which brought them closer together and bolstered their openness to difference. Speaking about the ERC program in the Quebec school her children attend, Marilyn, a 42-year-old LDS, primary school teacher and homemaker said:

So, I'm happy that we have this new program in Quebec to teach religions in school. I'm happy because it helped Quebec peoples who had a very negative view of religion

se regroupent toutes aussi, elles sont toutes très semblables, alors ça ouvre vraiment la porte à des super belles discussions. Souvent, des enfants nous apportent des choses à laquelle on n'a pas pensé, des choses dans les médias qu'ils ont entendus, sont capable de faire un parallèle, des choses qu'ils ont vécu dans leur vie, des choses qu'ils ont vues, lues ou entendues, peu importe. Oui, sont capables d'identifier certaines choses, surtout en liens avec des valeurs, puis des différentes croyances. Mais au niveau de l'acceptation, l'acceptation des différences, ça-là oh, oui. Ça prend beaucoup, beaucoup de place » (P17).

¹²⁵ « Ca m'est arrivé, d'avoir, mon dieu, j'ai eu une élève qui était musulmane, et justement en début de l'année je lui avait demandé en privé si elle l'acceptait si je lui poser des questions dans la classe de répondre justement pour aider à éduquer ses collègues de classe, c'est comme je lui avait expliquer, oui, je suis au courant de ce que j'ai enseigné et tout ça, puis je me renseigne, puis je suis intéressé à toutes ça, sauf que ce n'est pas ma religion à moi alors je ne voulais pas dire quelque chose qui, la prononciation je l'a avise, c'est certain que, que je massacrait certaines choses-là, mais je ne voudrais pas induire les autres en erreur nécessairement non plus, alors je lui avait demandé s'il elle était à l'aise, puis elle avait dit 'oui, sans problème même que des autres avait demandé l'autorisation eux pour pouvoir lui posait des questions. Si, on avait passe au moins deux après-midis la première semaine à discuter de sa religion puis les enfants entre eux avaient commencé à faire parallèle avec tout ce qui connaissaient d'un peu partout, puis de se rendre compte que, regard c'est très semblable, là. J'en ai quelques un qui se préparaient à leur première communion, puis ils ont pu faire des parallèles un peu avec ce qui se vivaient chez des musulmans » (P17).

in general because of all that Catholicism has brought in some families here. So, there's a rejection of all religion. But I'm happy we bring this in because it helps Quebec to be better tied in with the rest of Canada and to accept better different beliefs and not just—I was shocked when my mother-in-law had expressed opinions about 'Oh those Muslims, we don't want any more of them here in Quebec.' I was like, [gasps] because I grew up to have best friends who were Muslim in high school and to this day, they're still the people I was closer to in values, in beliefs, in family values and value of talking to a one God and we have many things in common (P12).

Most interview participants felt that learning about Islam in school was a positive step towards embracing diversity, but that interpersonal contact had more potential to shift negative perceptions and undo dangerous stereotyping. "Doing things together' and the value of contact with those who are 'different,'" as Beaman has argued, is well supported in the literature from the REDco project (Weisse, 2012) and other endeavours which brought people from different walks of life together for meaningful exchanges (2017: 119).

As set out in chapter two, the socio-political context of my doctoral years was a time of heightened awareness, fear and public debate about Islam, both in Canada and in other parts of the world. In August 2018, I was reminded, in rather traumatic fashion, just how forceful the undercurrents of Islamophobia could be. Although not part of my interview data, I include the following anecdote in this chapter section as it describes a related event which transpired during the course of data collection. The incident underscores the reach and egregiousness of Islamophobia even in the context of sharing resources to rectify misunderstandings. As part of my effort to network with like-minded scholars and to also disseminate information about religion and education to publics outside of academia, I often posted links about religious literacy resources coming from numerous countries to my academic Twitter profile¹²⁶ [@CusackChristine](#). On August 16, 2018, I shared the publication *An*

¹²⁶ In parallel with the phase of data gathering, I began using the social media platform Twitter as a way to network with other scholars and research centres whose work focused on religious literacy. I discovered that

Employers Guide to Islamic Religious Practices, produced by the National Council for Canadian Muslims (NCCM), as one of many tweets with links to religious literacy resources I posted during my graduate studies (*An Employers Guide to Islamic Religious Practices*, n.d.). The guide’s objective was aligned with numerous other similar religious literacy compendiums with its goal “to promote better understanding between employers and their employees. In subsequent days, a literal explosion of hate targeting me and the NCCM, unfolded on my Twitter feed. The following are a selection of messages received in response to my posting of the link to the NCCM guide:

- “Maybe there needs to be a Muslim workers’ guide to Canadian work places...instead of this.”
- “Where is the Muslim worker’s guide on how we do things in Canada?”
- “AKA: How to submit to Islam and make your once tolerant #Westerncivilized company #ShariaCompliant”
- “How about a guide to how Canada was founded on hard work and Christian values and at the end of the one page it says ‘If you don’t like it get the FUCK OUT.’”
- “Here’s the Islamist’s guide to working for me: I don’t pay for you to pray. Show up, do your work. The first whiff of negativity in my crews I’m suddenly going to have no work for you. I am under no obligation to accommodate you or your goofy beliefs. #cdnpoli”
- “Is there a similar guide for Islamic beheading?”
- “Pork in the smoker, is only about 4 months away, cheers!”¹²⁷

These messages are a small selection of some of the most egregious posts, with the full list of original tweets and offensive images detailed in Appendix 15. I was shocked and profoundly troubled by the

#religiousliteracy had its own hashtag in social media (on Twitter, in particular) which linked to a large body of published research and activity by a diverse constellation of scholars, policy makers, associations, and other organizations.

¹²⁷ Individual quotes are from individual tweets.

level of hate which continued to arrive with every ‘ping’ notification. I promptly deleted the post as the flood of verbal violence accelerated. Afterwards, I contacted several Muslim academic colleagues to share my disbelief at the vehemence of the online hatred; they confirmed it was widespread on all social media platforms, with frightening spillover into their everyday lives. *They were surprised that I was surprised.* It was an eye-opening moment of sudden self-awareness about privilege I had theretofore taken for granted. To say that fear and suspicion of the Muslim ‘other,’ is prevalent in North American society and beyond is, of course, an understatement. Indeed, special attention to the contemporary sources and manifestations of Islamophobia are accorded a place of importance throughout the literature on religious literacy. Speaking about the contested 2017 American ban on immigration from “Muslim-majority countries,” Diane Moore from the Harvard Religious Literacy Project, indicated that this act of state-sanctioned religious discrimination was “based on an association of Islam with violence and terrorism” (Laidler, 2017). Likewise, qualitative data from Dinham and Shaw’s 2015 RE for Real project showed how the topic of religious diversity elicited specific references to Islam and violence. Quotes such as “*they need to know about Jihadi John, and that sort of thing*” or “*there’s a lot of ignorance around Muslims. People don’t know the difference between being a devout Muslim and blowing people up,*” were similar in refrain and voice to those which emerged during my own data collection (21). Jackson (2014), citing findings from the REDCO project, also showed how media-driven animosity towards Muslims was present in school discussions wherein “students were especially affected by ‘dominant’ media representations of Islam” and “in the classroom they drew on this media discourse, tending to be more negative about Islam and Muslims” (60). As much as the complex issue of Islamophobia is omnipresent in the literature on religious and worldview literacy however, the same cannot be said for education about Indigenous traditions and worldviews as discussed in the next section.

4.4.3 Education about Indigenous Worldviews

When asked the question ‘What sort of knowledge should students have about the religion, beliefs and world views of Canada’s indigenous peoples?’ numerous participants acknowledged not having learned about Indigenous histories or cultures during their own early education. They recognized that negative stereotypes about Indigenous peoples were likely the result of misunderstandings and lack of adequate attention in school curriculum, but nevertheless considered it important that students learn about about Indigenous worldviews as they themselves had become more aware about First Nations, Inuit and Métis issues in Canada during the previous years.¹²⁸ Participants often linked Indigenous worldviews to pro-environmental stances and speculated that a deeper understanding and appreciation for this knowledge might help future generations to proactively engage with climate change initiatives. Some interviewees, when asked about what range of religions or beliefs should students learn about in schools, put Indigenous worldviews as a priority learning objective over other traditions, and also emphasized that they should occupy an equal space terms of class time and coverage in the curriculum. Brooke, for example, articulated a commonly held sentiment among participants that knowledge about Indigenous traditions had been purposefully erased and that this erasure had engendered a collective (and willful) ignorance, despite the fact that First Peoples were on this land long before the successive generations of settlers’ arrivals:

I think it’s important. I mean, it’s part of our history. It’s part of our culture. I know that they feel like they’ve been silenced in a lot of ways and misunderstood and again, coming back to understanding where people come from and learning from them, I think is good because it fosters understanding and it fosters a sense of love towards one another, respect, compassion --all of those things, and community because they’re part of our community. So yeah, I would say it’s important because they’re the first,

¹²⁸ The Blanket Exercise was mentioned as an initiative which had brought awareness about the ongoing impacts of colonization to educators and students in Ottawa public schools (*KAIROS Blanket Exercise*, n.d.).

they're the foundation of our country and I think learning about our Indigenous people is important. It's part of our heritage (Brooke, P21).

Again, the thematic threads of understanding and respect positioned as preconditions for compassion and belonging continued to emerge from the data. Both Aminah and Sylvie took these threads beyond the idea of simply including Indigenous worldviews in a religious literacy curriculum by suggesting that such curricular content should be should not only occupy an equal space terms of class time, but be prioritized, coming before teaching about other religious traditions. For Aminah, herself a newcomer to Canada, the logical starting point for religious and worldview literacy began with learning about the continent's original inhabitants, emphasizing even-handedness in coverage of other religious/worldview imports

Of course, you shouldn't favor one religion more than another. I would start, as I said, with the beliefs of the Indigenous peoples, out of respect for those peoples, who have welcomed us, as all religions must be, treated the same (Aminah, 47, P13).¹²⁹

Sylvie also echoed the notion of learning about Indigenous worldviews as a starting point for not only increasing understanding, but also undoing faulty interpretations of history rooted in settler viewpoints:

... my priority would be to the Aboriginal religion to give us a much better grasp of the Aboriginal people here that I fell have been judged and misjudged...because right now our Aboriginal people, I feel that we don't understand them and there's a lot of judgement given about our Aboriginal people and I feel that they themselves have lost a lot of their own spirituality because in our society right now we just don't accept it. Each society has their shame and I feel us, what's happened with the Aboriginal, that's the Canadian people's shame to carry. So, we better start with our own basic problem that we've created...if you know what I mean and we have to address that. And the way to address that is to change people's perspective on it (Sylvie, 62, P3).

¹²⁹ « Bien sûr, il ne faut pas que tu favorise une religion plus qu'une autre. Je commencerai, comme j'ai dit, par les croyances des peuples autochtones, par respect pour ces peuples-là, qui nous ont accueilli, comme il faut que ça soit toutes les religions, pareils » (P13).

From this particular question about Indigenous worldviews also came significant concern about the ongoing impacts of colonization. Pushing back against the forced conversion of Indigenous peoples' particularly during the era of residential schools, participants drew attention to harms of Christian evangelization on Indigenous Peoples. The importance of including Indigenous worldviews in the curriculum was closely tied to education about nature, and how traditional knowledge systems had been disrupted by forced conversion, according to Richard, a 45-year-old Federal Government manager, French-speaking Catholic, father of two adolescents:

But, to give a little context to religion, their approach to nature and all that. Historically they were forced to go, at the level of culture, not culture but the Catholic religion, and then it wasn't in their morals, they had to live with it. It's not to explain it, there are not many people who know that, and it should be part of the teaching, because they are more, the contact with nature, that's practically their religion, it's important (Richard, P18).¹³⁰

On the topic of forced conversion, Barbara emphasized the diversity of worldviews among Indigenous Peoples pre-contact and the many contemporary expressions of worldviews which are tied to place and time:

That's a good question because I don't know that much about them either myself but I think certainly it would be important to recognize that Indigenous people did have spiritual practices and worldviews prior to colonization and the introduction of Christianity and the kind of conversion of people to Christianity. And that those belief systems are still important and valuable and it's necessary to support the renewal or revival of them. And that those beliefs that were kind of pushed aside with colonization don't necessarily have to be stagnant that as they're revived in contemporary times it's the prerogative of Indigenous people to adapt those to fit their communities and cultures now. Their traditions doesn't [sic] have to only be revived as it was that it can be viewed as kind of a living and growing thing... also I think important to recognize

¹³⁰ « Mais, donner un peu le contexte de la religion, tsé leur rapprochement de la nature et toute ça. Historiquement ils étaient forcés à aller, au niveau de la culture, non pas la culture mais la religion catholique, puis ce n'était pas dans leur mœurs, ils ont dû vivre avec ça. Ce n'est pas expliquer ça, Il n'y a pas beaucoup de monde qui savent ça, puis ça devrait faire partie de l'enseignement, parce qu'eux c'est plus, le contact avec la nature, c'est pratiquement ça leur religion. C'est important. »

that there's many, many different Indigenous ways of seeing the world that it's not just because you're Indigenous from Canada that you all have the same spiritual practices... Yeah, diversity there too and just like all religions you'll see commonalities but also things that are different across the different tribes and groups. Maybe also just really the importance of elders and oral storytelling I think is probably another thing (Barbara, P6).

Judith's thoughts on the question about Indigenous worldviews included a thorough indictment of the role of Christianity in colonization, along with a discussion of the clinging to rightness as a source of conflict, the power of understanding, and an espousal of difference:

I think that is of primordial importance. There is so much damage that happened when they tried to impose Christianity on First Nations and I think that was a horrific time in history. And so, there's so many social problems as a result of that. That continues from generation to generation and it's having an understanding of what was done to them, trying to raise their actual beliefs and understanding their beliefs because I think they were... I mean they did fight amongst different tribes but that's one part of history I would like to know a little bit more because I really wasn't that interested in history when I took it in high school. And it's something I've got in my bucket list also is to freshen up on some of that knowledge because what were the different beliefs of the different tribes? Why were they fighting? You know, going back hundreds and hundreds of years. So, I think we would be able to understand more where they're coming from and not be so judgemental to the Native population. I mean they've been really hard done by and I find it really hard to take. In a way some of my pushing back has been feeling really belonging to a certain church is because of some of the injustices that resulted from trying to push the belief on someone else. That's why I say that forcing someone's religion on another is wrong. It's totally wrong and thinking one's religion is better than another is totally wrong too, but I think that's society. Everybody thinks their culture, their religion, their language is better than another and that's what causes so much strife in the world. Instead of accepting each other and again, part of that is learning the different points of view, right? (Judith, 56, federal government project manager, P8).

Not only did Judith's comments echo key threads found throughout the Calls to Action on forced conversion to Christianity and the lasting impacts of colonization, her thoughts on the 'wrongness' of believing one's ideological commitments were superior to another's were revealing. Within her

thought process on how to remedy societal “strife,” we can see a mingling of the conceptual intersections of pluralism (the moment of encounter with different points of view), xenosophia (the wisdom which might emerge from learning about other viewpoints) and deep equality (relinquishing ‘rightness’ or superiority of one’s belief system).

4.4.4 ‘Nones’ and the Nonreligious

A fourth finding from the analysis of interview data confirmed current research foci in the contemporary sociology of religion: non-religious worldviews are gaining traction in Canada. A number of interview participants directly referenced not having a religion or religious identity as an important point for teachers to consider during classroom discussions.¹³¹ They expressed concern that in the context of a course about religion, that the status of ‘having’ a religion, or ‘being’ religious would be perceived as better than ‘being’ nothing at all. Or that there would be an unspoken hierarchy of religions as some being more legitimate or acceptable than others. Likewise, concern was expressed about the importance of making sure that ‘none’ students in a classroom understood their worldviews were on par with other worldviews, religious or otherwise. For example, when asked the question: *In terms of content, what do you think students should learn about religion, beliefs or worldviews in school?* Anne-Marie, a sixth-grade, French primary school teacher from Québec said:

That all religions are equal. That there isn't one better than the other, that it's the same everywhere, and that no matter which one you identify with, it's nothing different from one place to another, that it's everyone's choice to practice or not, to adhere or not, it doesn't matter, and that you're not a better person because you choose to adhere to a religion or not...It's important that they know that even if you're an atheist, it's not, it's

¹³¹ For the most part, only educators (and not parents in other professions) talked about noticing waning or absent religious knowledge and or affiliation. Perhaps this was due to teachers simply having early daily contact, year after year, of a large range of demographics among their students in public school classrooms.

not a problem there. Yes, they are all equally important (P17, Catholic, female, teacher/administrator, parent, age 38).¹³²

Educators near the end of their careers had the advantage of hindsight in comparing several decades of student cohorts. Data gleaned from interviews with teachers from Quebec schools was especially revealing when it came to details about confessional religious courses taught in the province prior to 2008, and the transition to teaching about religious culture in the years that followed. One Quebec teacher pointed out the fact that she had seen significant shift in religious knowledge in her student cohorts over the nearly three decades of her teaching practice. She stated:

What I see as a difference is that children no longer identify with anything, that at the beginning, at the beginning of my practice, 29 years ago, children were already going to church, they had already heard the word, the word 'priest' [she says emphatically] just that word, the words related to the church that we now have, you see a representation of a child doing a prayer, and they're going to say the word 'namaste' and then he's doing yoga, so there's no more connection, there's more recognition, they say that school is an extension of home, but I have a very strong feelings about this, we've relegated everything to school, and then deal with that, and then everybody has a clear conscience (Mylène, 53, first grade teacher, non-practicing Catholic, P5).¹³³

Nadine (P19), a 49-year-old primary school teacher for 25 years, parent of four adolescents and practicing Catholic, also expressed how challenging it was to teach the ERC curriculum in her classroom because, as she said:

...for children of ten, eleven years old, it is difficult for them because often they have, they have no basis, there is no basis at home anymore. What makes them start from,

¹³² « Que les religions sont toutes égales. Qu'il n'y a pas une meilleure que l'autre, que ça rejoint un peu partout et que peu importe à laquelle on s'identifie, c'est rien de différent d'une place à l'autre, que c'est la choix de tout le monde de pratiquer ou non, d'adhérer ou non, peu importe, et qu'on n'est pas une meilleure personne parce qu'on choisit d'adhérer à une religion ou pas... C'est important qu'ils sachent que même si on est athée, c'est pas, c'est pas une problème, là. Oui, ils sont tous de la même importance ».

¹³³ « Moi ce que je vois comme différence, c'est que des enfants ne s'identifier plus à rien, qu'au départ déjà, au début de ma pratique, il y a 29 ans déjà, les enfants allaient quelques-uns à l'église, ils avaient déjà entendu le mot, le mot 'prêtre' [elle dit avec emphase] juste ce mot-là, le mots reliés à l'église que maintenant on a tu vois un représentation d'un enfant qui fait une prière, et il vont dire le mot 'namaste' puis il est en train de faire du yoga, donc il n'y a plus de lien, il y a plus de reconnaissance, on dit que l'école est la prolongement de la maison, mais on j'ai beaucoup l'impression dans ce domaine-là, on a tout relégué à l'école, et puis arrangez-vous avec ça puis tout le monde à la bonne conscience ».

they start from nothing, so it's difficult to bring them because at some point I find that to understand the religious phenomenon, it's necessary to be able to compare it to something else.¹³⁴

...we see that with the trends, if we take, let's say a little bit like yoga, well children, there are many students that their, parents, moms are going to do yoga, and they know certain things so we come to talk about Hinduism. And that's a little bit more for them, because there are things they make a connection with.¹³⁵

As for Colette, a 55-year-old Francophone primary school teacher for 26 years, parent, and 'none,' put it:

If I talk about the Torah, the Jews, then the Koran among Muslims, the young people don't even know what the Bible is because the majority don't practice it, so I find it very difficult.¹³⁶

Because, not that I want to write off all religion when they are little, but I find that I do more ethics in the first/second cycle. You know, I'm going to talk about situations, I'm going to reflect on situations, and then I'm going to talk about religion in the third cycle, because when I talk about religion, at the age of 6 or 7, it doesn't go well. Most of them don't practice. They go to church when there is a baptism, for ceremonies, very specifically, otherwise they don't even know what a church is. The majority don't know what a church is (P16).¹³⁷

¹³⁴ « Et pour des enfants de dix, onze ans, c'est difficile pour eux parce que souvent ils n'ont, ils ont aucune base, il n'y a plus de base à la maison. Ce qui fait qu'ils partent de, ils partent de rien, alors c'est difficile de les amener parce que a un moment donne je trouve que pour bien comprendre le phénomène religieux, il faut que soit capable de le comparer a quelque choses d'autre » (P19).

¹³⁵ « On voit qu'avec les tendances, si l'on prend, mettons un peu comme le yoga, ben les enfants, il y beaucoup d'élèves que leur, les parents, les mamans vont faire du yoga, et ils connaissent certain choses donc on vient parler d'hindouisme. Puis là, cela leur un petit peu plus, parce qu'il y a des choses qu'ils font un lien avec » (P19).

¹³⁶ « Moi si je parle de la Torah, des juifs, puis du Koran chez des Musulmans, les jeunes ils [ne] savent même pas c'est quoi la Bible parce que la majorité ne pratique pas, donc je trouve ça très difficile. »

¹³⁷ « Parce que, non pas que je veux radier toute la religion quand ils sont petit, mais je trouve que je fais plus d'éthique au premier/deuxième cycle. Tsé sur des situations, apporter la réflexion sur des situations, là j'aborderai ensuite la religion rendu au 3ième cycle, parce que quand je parle de religion moi, à 6, 7 ans, ça ne passait pas. La majorité ne pratique pas. Ils vont à l'église quand il y a un baptême, pour des cérémonies, bien spécifique, autrement ils ne savent même pas c'est quoi une église. La majorité ne savait pas c'est quoi une église. »

Returning to the guiding question of this project: *What, if anything, should Canadian public-school students learn about religions, beliefs and world views in order to best prepare them for citizenship in a diverse society?* The wording “if anything” was a clause intended to give pause for and space to the idea that perhaps some parents or educators might think that such learning was not necessary. Since Canadian survey data in North America, following similar trends from the UK and Australia, demonstrate that nearly a quarter of populations now indicate “no religion” when asked about religious identity, ‘nones’ and people espousing non-religious worldviews are an evolving fact of the social landscape. As Clarke and MacDonald’s findings from their study of the Canadian religious landscape demonstrate, the downward trend in “Christian affiliation, membership and participation” has been ongoing for nearly six decades. They argue that youth, in particular, make up a growing portion of this population who will have had no association with Christianity, specifically (Clarke and MacDonald, 2017: 11). It is therefore probable that the makeup of some public classrooms in Canada will include students with little to no exposure to cultural traditions nor family memory of religion. How then would a teacher teach about worldview diversity without also including the idea of ‘non-religious’ as another way of being and meaning-making in the world, on par with other belief orientations? Despite the small pool of interviewees, the experiences of my participants suggest that the assumption that students have a religious background or practice may no longer be a given in public school populations in the national capital region. Indeed, as this description of creed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (ONHRC) attests, there is a notable societal shift when it comes to belief and religious belonging in Canada. In the section entitled ‘Social trends: Secularization and the evolving nature of beliefs,’ of the 2013 Human Rights and Creed Research and Consultation Report, the report indicates:

Another main argument for expanding the definition of creed to include secular ethical and moral beliefs concerns transformations in society and belief in the contemporary era. How people make sense and meaning of their lives and the world today has changed significantly in the modern era, particularly since the 1960s. Observers argue that religion is no longer the only, or primary, arbiter of morality and identity, but rather one among many others in the contemporary era. These observers think it is particularly important to equally recognize religious and non-religious bases for belief and moral action in the current social environment of diversifying and individualizing belief systems, declining significance and centrality of religion for, and the growing numbers of people professing deeply held non-religious belief (2013: 53).

Findings from Clarke and MacDonald's research on waning Christianity in Canada (2017), along with those from the ONHRC's report on creed (2013), were reaffirmed in conversations with my participants, particularly those who were educators. The religious make-up of Canadian society has undergone what could be characterized as perhaps a silent, yet seismic shift in the past half century.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter is an analysis of the main findings from my face-to-face interviews with parents and educators, based upon data collected with 22 participants from the National Capital Region of Canada, (Southern Quebec and Ottawa, Ontario). The first and foremost key finding from the data was that learning about religion, beliefs and worldviews was considered by participants to be a crucial part of elementary public-school education in order to inculcate openness towards and respect for diversity and difference. Participants articulated the interconnections of knowledge and understanding as essential foundations for young Canadians to become open to difference. The second finding was that that societal conflict in Canada and beyond was assumed to be often related to religion. In particular, Islam was cited as a tradition which was associated with conflict on small and large scales. The third major finding was that participants expressed the need for students to learn about Indigenous worldviews, as they themselves had not been exposed to Indigenous history or the

truth about residential schooling in their own early education. Participants also described Christianity as a harmful driver of colonization which resulted in the erasure of Indigenous traditions and knowledge. The fourth finding from the interview data was that participants felt that non-religious worldviews should be taught as equally legitimate as religious worldviews in classroom discussions. Long-time educators who taught in Quebec schools noted a significant uptick in the numbers of primary school students who had no knowledge of the vocabulary, rites, and customs of religion—in this case Catholicism, historically the majoritarian tradition in Quebec. Taken together, these findings point to a need for a reframing of sorts, about what may constitute religious and worldview literacy in today's Canada.

CHAPTER FIVE: VIEWPOINTS OF PARENTS AND EDUCATORS FROM FIVE CANADIAN PROVINCES

“The more knowledge, acceptance and understanding that children have the more tolerant Canadian society will become. Adults fear what they do not know as a basic instinct of self-preservation. Children are open to diversity and will become more tolerant and accepting of these social differences. Therefore, the future of Canadian society will benefit.”

Online survey participant

“...Teach Humanism. Eradicate religion and it's [sic] dangerous ways of thinking. This world is all that matters, not the next.”

Online survey participant

“Religion does not belong in our schools.”

Online survey participant

« Je crois que tout enseignement qui concerne la religion devrait se faire ailleurs qu'à l'école ».¹³⁸

Online survey participant

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues and develops the analysis about Canadian parents' and educators' perspectives on learning *about* religion, beliefs and worldviews. I begin this chapter as I did the previous one, with a demographic overview of participants, followed by a discussion of the primary findings which emerged from the online survey data, and conclude with a summary of the outcomes. In expanding the exploration of parents' and educators' thoughts on learning *about* religion, this

¹³⁸ “I believe that all teaching about religion should be done elsewhere than in schools.”

chapter brings together responses from participants (N=190) from five different Canadian provinces.¹³⁹ In total, 145 respondents completed the survey in English, and 45 completed the identical survey in French.¹⁴⁰ Early on in the research design process, I opted to include this online component in order to incorporate the views and perspectives of educators and parents from outside Canada’s National Capital Region. As part of a triangulation strategy put in place at the outset of the research project, I collected data through using an online equivalent of the same questionnaire used for in-person interviews. The two identical surveys (in French and English) were hosted on the institutional Survey Monkey account of the Religion and Diversity Project (RDP), were featured on the RDP website and were promoted on the project’s Facebook and Twitter accounts. Direct email invitations were sent to people who expressed interest at academic conferences and through referrals from professors or face-to-face interview participants. Social media proved to be an effective recruitment tool with the majority of participants learning about the study through Facebook. The following table shows the breakdown of how participants learned about the study:

Table 1. Q27. Comment avez-vous eu connaissance de ce sondage ?
How did you hear about this study?

Participants	French Survey Answered (N=32) Skipped (N=13)	English Survey Answered (N=125) Skipped (N=20)
Facebook	59%	60%
Twitter	0%	6%
Email	28%	9%
Another parent	0%	2%

¹³⁹ Two versions of the anonymous online survey—one in English, one in French were created and hosted on the online data collection platform Survey Monkey. Participants were first invited to read a research study preamble and a statement about consent. Those who agreed by clicking on ‘yes’ to the consent statement, were able to proceed through the survey questions.

¹⁴⁰ Online survey participants were not obligated to answer all questions, some opted out of answering certain questions. The tables which follow indicate the number questions answered and skipped.

A work colleague	6%	0%
A friend or relative	6%	9%
Other	0%	14%

Interestingly, over 14 percent of the respondents in English specified that they had heard about the study not on social media, but through an association, blog, society or another website. Some specifically mentioned the Canadian Secular Alliance, a Canadian Atheist RSS feed, the Canadian Freethinkers Association, and the Canadian Atheist blog. One participant indicated they had heard about the study from the webpage of their Catholic Parish. Broadening the participant pool through a Canada-wide online survey became a more important undertaking following the unanticipated challenges of recruitment through school boards mentioned in previous chapters.

Translation issues of preparing an online survey in two languages were similar to those of doing interviews in both English and French, however the data collected offered diverse perspectives which enriched (and in some ways redirected) findings from the face-to-face interviews. Though I did not meet any of the online participants in person, pouring through their rich textual answers added detailed, varied and often unexpected perspectives to the research findings. The online interview was structured purposefully to allow for participants to elaborate certain questions. In order to preserve the original voice of the francophone survey participants, I have kept highlighted quotations in French, with English translations in footnotes. The survey began with an electronic consent agreement followed by basic demographic questions about age, gender identity, occupation, and participation status (educator, parent/guardian or both), and place of residence. Participants who self-described as in-service or retired educator were directed to a series of questions about the number of years worked in education, current or last position and teaching grade level, subjects taught, province or territory in which they worked. Participants who indicated that they were parents or guardians were asked about

the age of their school-age children. Participants who indicated taking the survey as both educators and parents were invited to answer all demographic questions. Findings from the online survey are elaborated in the sections which follow, aggregating participants' responses to demonstrate the major themes and using textual excerpts to underscore the story their answers tell. *Ici, par contre, je dois mettre un bémol.*¹⁴¹ Given the bilingual nature of my study, I take the liberty of injecting this Quebecois expression—which in its figurative sense, means to 'add nuance to a statement or assertion' or to indicate a 'discordant factor'. *Voici le bémol:* Some interesting divergences emerged between data collected from the French and English surveys, which added nuance to the narrative participants collectively created. Granted, there were nearly four times as many respondents for the English language survey; nevertheless, details from the smaller number those who participated in the French language survey, expanded my understanding of this research. The linguistic divergences are noted throughout the chapter.

5.2 PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

While I do not attempt any formal comparative analysis in the sense of a 'tale of two linguistic communities,' the selected the responses added depth to the findings. I first present the demographics of French and English survey participants separately, bringing them back together for discussion throughout the rest of the chapter. First, an overview and relevant details about those who contributed to the study via the French online survey, and second those who contributed via the English survey.

¹⁴¹ The literal definition of the French word *bémol*, is a 'flat' in musical notation. 'Causons musique, comme,' elaborates the word's common usage in Québec (Melançon, 2014).

5.2.1 Online Survey in French

Who participated in the online French language survey? 45 respondents in total, ranging in age from 31-75, all residing in the province of Québec. The majority were women (71% female; 29% male) and worked primarily in (or were retired from) education (teachers, professors, school administrators) and in other fields such as the arts, journalist, homemaking, information technology, law, and research. Participants who mentioned professions related to religion included eight pastoral agents, two religious ministers, and one nun.¹⁴²

5.2.2 English Online Survey

Who participated in online survey in English? 145 respondents from nine Canadian provinces, ranging in age from 19 to 79. The majority of participants identified as female (56.94%), 41.67% as male, and less than 2% identifying as an unspecified gender, trans female, or two spirit. Most participants lived in Ontario (71%), followed by Alberta (8%), Quebec (8%), British Columbia (6%), New Brunswick (2%), Saskatchewan (2%), Manitoba (1%), Nova Scotia (1%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (1%). No responses were received from other provinces or territories. Participants came primarily from the education sector (teachers, professors, librarians) and a wide range of other employment fields such as financial services, health professions, homemaking, information management, law and the public service. Participants who mentioned professions directly related to religion included a religious studies professor, two spiritual care counselors and one hospital chaplain.

¹⁴² According to ‘*L’Inventaire du patrimoine immatériel religieux du Québec*,’ (Inventory of Quebec's Religious Intangible Heritage) hosted by the *Chaire de recherche du Canada en patrimoine ethnologique* at Laval University in Québec City, Quebec, Canada, a pastoral agent (*agent/agente ou animateur/animatrice pastorale*) is a person who cares for the spiritual and emotional needs of Catholic parishioners (*La Mission de l’agente de Pastorale*, n.d.).

5.2.3 Participant self-description

Differences were evident in the way respondents thought about personal religiosity or spirituality. Table 2 shows these divergences between the two linguistic groups emerged when it came to self-description about religiosity and spirituality. Half of participants in the French survey described themselves as ‘religious’ whereas only 16% said the same for the English survey. Similar percentages of respondents on both surveys considered themselves to be not religious but spiritual, but a higher level of participants in the English survey (37%), said they were not religious or spiritual. 18% of English survey respondents 16% of respondents self-described as religious, 27.20 % as not religious but spiritual, 36.80% identified as not religious or spiritual, 2.4% were not sure and 17.60% self-described as ‘other’.¹⁴³

Table 2. Q13. Vous reconnaissez-vous dans l’une des descriptions suivantes ? Si oui, veuillez préciser. Would you describe yourself as any of the following? If so, which?¹⁴⁴

Participants	French Survey	English Survey
	Answered (N=36)	Answered (N=125)
	Skipped (N=7)	Skipped (N=20)

¹⁴³ Of the 25 participants who self-described as ‘other,’ 13 participants took the extra step of writing in ‘atheist’ or ‘anti-theist.’ While this is merely anecdotal, there is a growing body of literature which suggests growing social acceptance of atheist worldviews. See nonreligionproject.ca

¹⁴⁴ Of those who responded ‘other,’ numerous respondents added interesting comments. On the French-language survey, two people indicated the following:

« Wow, il vous manque bien des catégories ! Je suis libre penseur, humaniste et je n’adhère à aucun dogme je suis pour la raison en toutes choses ». (“Wow, you are missing a lot of categories! I am a free thinker, a humanist and I don’t adhere to any dogma, I am for reason in all things”).

« Le terme « spirituel » étant polysémique, je ne peux me catégoriser selon votre grille ». (“The term ‘spiritual’ being polysemous, I cannot categorize myself according to your grid”).

Religious	50%	16%
Not religious but spiritual	21%	27%
Not religious or spiritual	21%	37%
Not sure	0%	2%
Other	8%	18%

In answering the question ‘Do you identify with a particular religion, belief or worldview? (Q14), 46% of English survey participants said ‘no’ and 54% said yes. However, of those who answered ‘yes,’ nearly 40% specified their worldview as ‘non-believer,’ ‘atheist,’ ‘secular humanist,’ or a combo ‘humanist freethinking atheist.’ **Table three** shows the breakdown of participants’ self-identification.

Table 3. Q14. Vous identifiez-vous à une religion particulière, une croyance ou une représentation du monde ? Do you identify with a particular religion, belief or worldview? If so, which?

Participants	French Survey Answered (N=38) Skipped (N=7)	English Survey Answered (N=125) Skipped (N=20)
No	39%	46%
Yes	61%	54%

5.3 WHAT THREE WORDS?

The online survey participants, as with in-person interviews, were invited to consider this question: What three words first come into your head when you think about religion? Opening the survey in this manner, offered a fascinating window onto participants’ framing of the concept of religion and belief. No instruction was given about the order or priority; some participants selected three positive words, some only chose negative words and some offered word choices which reflected

inherent tensions about the concept of religion. Word selection essentially fell into three main categories as positive, negative, institutional, and neutral. Evidently, I have coded these responses according to my own interpretation of what meaning participants may have ascribed to the terms, and I acknowledge that they may have categorized their own words differently. The negative words far outweigh the other categories. I can only speculate as to why the word content thus unfolded – perhaps a larger percentage of nonreligious who participated, the anonymous nature of the online survey or no in-person interaction with a live interviewer. Participants could not see what others posted in their surveys. Whatever factors coalesced into the list’s eventual content, therefore, represent a snapshot of a disparate group’s thoughts at the time of the survey. The word cloud below, while not intended to be part of the qualitative analysis, offers a simple visual representation of participants’ initial thoughts, with certain words occupying more space according to the frequency of their appearance in the data.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ This word cloud is included for illustrative purposes only intended to provide readers a visual map of the range of words used by participants. A list in table form is found in appendix 15. The visual was created using the online platform wordart.com.



5.4 FINDINGS

Six main findings emerged from the online survey data, and I discuss each one in turn in the sections that follow:

1. Participants were of the opinion that learning about religions/worldviews *could* be accomplished in public school classrooms, but were opposed to indoctrination and concerned about evenhandedness in curricular content.
2. Participants felt that the history of religion, beliefs and worldviews was the most important aspect of this type of learning and should be taught as an integrated subject in history and or social studies courses.
3. Many participants indicated that learning about religion, beliefs and worldviews should be the domain of families and religious communities, and not part of public-school curriculum.
4. Participants indicated that nonreligious worldviews such as atheism and humanism should be taught on par with other religious traditions.
5. Though not expressly sought after in the ensemble of research questions, Islamophobic attitudes surfaced in some participant commentary.

6. There was no consensus about standardized religious and worldview curriculum in public schools.

5.4.1 ‘No’ to indoctrination and religious privilege; ‘yes’ to evenhandedness

The **first major finding** from online survey data is that participants felt learning about religions and worldviews *could* be accomplished in public classrooms, but should be taught without indoctrination, from a non-confessional perspective. Participants were very concerned about potential proselytization and there emerged an overall concern about evenhandedness when it came to teaching *about* a range of religions and belief systems. The data demonstrated a concern for equity, fairness and apprehension about the overrepresentation of one tradition such that it could be interpreted as normative. Participants overwhelmingly leaned towards learning about the history of religion and worldviews; the number one response to the question *Q18 ‘In terms of content, what, if anything, do you think students should learn about religion, beliefs or world views in public school’* was history (77% in the English survey, 70% in the French survey). This was followed by learning about the sociological context: how religion operates in society (68% English, 70% French); and debates and controversies: occasions where religion is seen as a possible source of conflict (67% English, 38% French). Table four shows the breakdown of all responses; participants were instructed to select all answers that applied and had the option to elaborate answers in the ‘other’ category.

Table 4. Q18. In terms of content, what, if anything, do you think students should learn about religion, beliefs or world views in public schools? En termes de contenu, que pensez-vous que les élèves devraient apprendre à l’école à propos des religions, des croyances ou des représentations du monde?

Categories	French Survey Answered (N=37)	English Survey Answered (N=124)
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	Skipped (N=8)	Skipped (N=21)
Beliefs	39%	40%
Practices	39%	40%
How religion is lived by individuals	54%	40%
History	70%	77%
Debates and controversies	38%	67%
Sociological context	70%	68%
Contemporary religious landscape	51%	40%
Engaging questions about truth claims	35%	40%
Other (specified answers)	24%	40%

Observing patterns which emerged from detailed answers in the ‘other’ (specified answers) category, was a clear notion of **positivity**. “Religion is very important to many kids' lives, and a huge part of the worldviews of many,” said one respondent emphatically, “we shouldn't be ignoring it in schools!”

Other positive responses were specific about what they thought that learning should include:

“Faith as a source of inspiration for ethical action; faith as inspiration for positive change in the world.”

“How do engage in dialogue about beliefs or world views that are not their own.”

“A study of world religions should be optional in every school system.”

“How religions try to explain natural phenomena across the globe.”

« Dialogue et developement [sic] de l'esprit de tolérance selon la définition de l'Unesco. »¹⁴⁶

« j'ajouterais : religion et politique religion / tradition principe de tolérance et religion ». ¹⁴⁷

Numerous participants offered nuance about their positivity towards students learning about religion and worldviews in schools, by emphasizing the need to avoid indoctrination:

“I think it's important for kids to know these religons [sic] exist..but to be careful not to promote religious Beliefs.”

¹⁴⁶ "Dialogue and development of the spirit of tolerance as defined by UNESCO."

¹⁴⁷ "I would add: religion and politics religion / tradition principle of tolerance and religion."

“Children [sic] should learn about religion in a way that allows them to reject it if they wish without any blowback from schools or parents who are religious.”

“Learning ‘about’ various other religions is good. However, it would be important in a non-religious public school that this information is not indoctrination.”

“Students should learn about religion and beliefs from a secular vantage point. So as to not portray the alleged truth of one over another.”

Students who are interested should be able to learn about all religions, but be taught in a way that does not suggest superiority of any. I don't know if students should be forced to learn about any religion.”

“They should be learning about these subjects from an objective, sociological perspective only. They should not be indoctrinated in any particular religion.”

In addition to wariness about indoctrination, the age of students (in the context of certain curricular content) was also a consideration for some respondents. Learning about critical thinking at the secondary level was important for this participant, but they also felt that teaching about religion at the primary level was not appropriate because of students’ young age and the possibility of being interpreting it as a social obligation to ‘have’ or to ‘be’ part of a religion. They specified:

« Au niveau secondaire seulement, en encourageant leur pensée critique. Pas au primaire, ils sont trop jeunes, ils peuvent en venir qu'à penser que c'est obligatoire d'avoir une religion ce que je considère RIDICULE ». ¹⁴⁸

For some, concern about youth identity construction was less about the perceived normativity of ‘being religious,’ and more a statement about the generational transmission of religion within families. Thus, learning about religion and worldviews through a religious studies or cultural studies lens, was preferred to a theological (doctrinal) approach:

¹⁴⁸ "At the secondary level only, by encouraging their critical thinking. Not at the elementary level, they are too young, they may come to think that it is obligatory to have a religion which I consider RIDICULOUS.”

« Je crois qu'il ne convient pas de 'trop informer' des jeunes sur ces sujets alors qu'ils sont à un âge de maturation et de détermination d'une identification. Cela est d'autant plus vrai, je crois, dans une société où la transmission de la foi et des valeurs ou réalités religieuses est déficiente au sein des familles. Je crois qu'avant un certain âge, les jeunes ne sont pas aptes à tout décoder es nombreux concepts dogmatiques ou de croyances de toutes ces religions. C'est pourquoi je préconise une approche se situant du côté des sciences de la religion. Pas de théologie... ».¹⁴⁹

« la culture religieuse permet de comprendre la religion sous différents aspects: sociologique, historique, phénoménologique, géographique, culturel, etc. »¹⁵⁰

Still under to the topic of avoiding indoctrination, but nevertheless teaching *about* religions and worldviews, other participants indicated that a more transparent, critical approach to teaching about the negative, non-prosocial aspects of religion was needed:

“That religion is not always a source of good. That religion is a source of hatred. That religion discriminates against women.”

“Teach the bad parts about religion. Stop sugarcoating the truth about the perpetual lies upon lies religion teaches.”

« L'universalité proposé à l'intérieur de "chaque" religion ! Faire la différence entre secte, religion et gagne ! »¹⁵¹

Not all who expressed positivity towards religion in the curriculum, however, were on board with a non-confessional course. Critical of the ECR'S cultural studies approach, this participant commented

¹⁴⁹ "I believe that it is not appropriate to 'over-inform' young people on these subjects when they are at an age of maturation and of establishing an identity. This is all the more true, I believe, in a society where the transmission of faith and religious values or realities is deficient within families. I believe that before a certain age, young people are not able to decipher all the numerous dogmatic concepts or beliefs of all these religions. That's why I advocate an approach that is on the side of science of religious studies. Not theology..."

¹⁵⁰ "Religious culture allows us to understand religion under different aspects: sociological, historical, phenomenological, geographical, cultural, etc."

¹⁵¹ "Universality proposed within 'every' religion! Making the difference between sect, religion wins!"

that a return to the tradition of public-school confessional instruction was desirable. The idea that teachers were not trained to teach the topic was emphasized and sense of unease that teachers made light of Catholicism (likened here to a socio-national identity) when teaching *about* religion was evident:

« au Québec, le cours ECR n'est pas confessionnel et les enseignants ne sont pas habilités à enseigner ce cours. Au primaire on fait un survol des grandes religions en mettant tous sur le même pied d'égalité et en ayant peur de parler de l'identité catholique des québécois. Au secondaire, les enseignants donnent leur opinion en ridiculisant particulièrement la religion catholique. Il devrait y avoir des cours confessionnels ».¹⁵²

The suggestion of a need to return to a confessional approach was not commonly found in the data, (nor was it an intended focus of my research). However, the question of teacher training and specifically impartiality, is present in the literature. For example, this issue is taken up in detail by Gravel in a 2019 study on the “professional stance of impartiality” among teachers in public (non-confessional) and private (confessional) schools in Quebec (191). Her study found that teachers in both confessional and non-confessional school settings experienced similar difficulties when it came to impartiality (Gravel, 2019).

¹⁵² "In Quebec, the ECR course is not denominational and teachers are not qualified to teach this course. At the elementary level, they give an overview of the major religions, putting everyone on the same footing and being afraid to talk about the Catholic identity of Quebecers. In high school, teachers give their opinion by ridiculing the Catholic religion in particular. There should be confessional courses."

Evenhandedness

Along with concern about indoctrination, a pattern of commentary about **even-handedness** and religious privilege emerged. Participants were in favor of the idea of religious/worldview literacy curriculum, but were against privileging one tradition over others, or any sort of teaching about truth claims or value judgements made about particular traditions. They articulated opinions about what should be taught in the following ways:

“maybe just a general overview / survey of all major religions, however being that there is much intolerance and supremacy by one group this might be a bad idea now.”

“They should be taught as much as possible about as many religions as possible without bias.”

“No single religion should ever be taught as being the one truth.”

“that we all have a right to our own beliefs.”

“as myths or legends; Jesus/Moses/Mohammed should be introduced to students in the same way that Zeus or Hercules or Thor are, as legends with interesting stories, NOT as truths.”¹⁵³

« tout est dans la façon de livrer ce contenu sans jugement de l'une ou l'autre des religions tout en demeurant conscients des dangers de tout fanatisme religieux, toute religion confondue... ».

“If the child is not from a major religion, they should have the opportunity to share about their belief.”

“It would be difficult to find teachers who are capable of teaching all religions. I believe an elective course in high schools on world religions would be appropriate.”

¹⁵³ The notion of teaching *about* religion in the same way that myths or legends would be presented in a lesson

“They should be taught that there are many gods dreamed up by humans over the ages and that all of these gods are just make-believe.”

“Teach everything, but preface it with: ‘This is what these people believe, but like all religions, there is no proof of any of these claims.’”

Historic and continued public funding for confessional schoolboards in Ontario and relatively recent shift away from confessional courses in Quebec public schools, may have been a factor into the specificity of these perspectives on bias, privilege and truth claims. Problems with even-handedness in the representation of religions and worldviews, however, is not exclusive to Canada, as scholars Bouma (2011, 2012), Byrne (2014), Halafoff (2015) and Maddox (2014) have all pointed to similar issues in the Australian context. With its educational institutions deeply rooted in the ‘Judeo-Christian’ history of the country, it is now in the process of confronting this majority religious privilege even as its population continues to diversify. This evolving religious landscape combined with the significant rise in numbers of non-religious citizens in both Australia and in Canada also put into question current approaches of dedicated curriculum about religious and worldview literacy.

5.4.2 Integrating religious literacy into history and social studies curriculum

Participants overwhelmingly pointed to ‘history’ as main focus of learning about religion, beliefs and worldviews. (As previously mentioned, nearly 78% of respondents on the English side and 70% from the French side so indicated). One participant summarized the prevalent sentiment in a single sentence: “I think it could be incorporated into history curriculum.” Another participant had a similar take (with some added shade), saying that “religion will naturally be included in any history course and can be covered in that context. Without a doubt, no curriculum is required that supports

the teaching of fairy tales as truth.” Others went much further in their elaboration of why the topic needed a more all-inclusive approach and was better situated in the context of social studies or history courses:

“I would define some of these issues as 'historical and sociological' understanding of world society. In that context, faith and religious conviction are important inspirations for human endeavor, as are secularism, humanism, atheism, environmentalism, feminism, etc. I believe that all these should be part of the school curriculum as an integrated part of their curriculum. Further, while some of these issues fall naturally within the discipline of social studies, I believe that we should explore how other disciplines can incorporate these so that the student has a more integrated and holistic idea of human civilization.”

“Information about religious expressions should be rooted in their sociological impact; how has a particular faith movement changed and impacted a particular moment in time. By concretizing these more philosophical ideas, students are more likely to see them as pertinent and relevant. What's more, by giving teachers the tools to root religion back to concretized examples relevant to their students, they will be able to better teach. Of course, this is a dream in which teachers have an actual background and grounding in religious studies.”

“Students should not learn ‘about’ specific religions, but if mentioning religion or [sic] its influence in the context of history, social studies etc. is fine.”

“None out of context of other studies.”

“I see no need to learn specific beliefs. I'd much prefer they learn about religion itself, through means of anthropology and psychology. This may need the student to learn of a specific belief, but that should be not the primary goal of the education and only as a means to illustrating a point.”

“Not in significant detail but enough to be informed of historical, social significance.”

« Ce n'est jamais à l'école publique d'aller au-delà de la véritable histoire des principales religions et non des versions édulcorées promues par ces mêmes religions ». ¹⁵⁴

« Les élèves ont besoin de cours d'éducation à la sexualité (misère sexuelle des jeunes sur internet, entre autre), d'économie (pour se bâtir un avenir sans pauvreté), d'éducation à la citoyenneté, des cours d'art. L'aspect religieux doit demeurer une

¹⁵⁴ "It is never the role of the public school to go beyond the true history of the major religions and not the watered-down versions promoted by those same religions.”

affaire privée. À l'école le religieux doit se retrouver dans le cours d'histoire comme phénomène de société ». ¹⁵⁵

The idea of learning about religion, beliefs and worldviews in the context of history or social studies curriculum (rather than a discrete course on religious literacy) is also taken up further on in this chapter, in the section devoted to Indigenous worldviews.

5.4.3 Leaving religious literacy to families and faith communities

Another major theme emerged among participants who honed in on the nuance of the **'if anything'** clause in the question **'In terms of content, what, if anything, do you think students should learn about religion, beliefs or world views in public schools?'** Of those who elaborated their thoughts, a range of strong opinions were evident. For example, these three people indicated that students needed "More resources for encouraging free thought and the absurdities of religion;" that "Children [sic] deserve and need freedom from religion;" and that "they should learn all of the ridiculous beliefs that still govern their lives based on nonsense." One of the most common perspectives shared by those who offered detail, was the view that learning about religion should not be the domain of public education, but rather left to families and religious communities. Participants expressed these views in the following ways:

"religion should be taught for what it is: 'beliefs' not facts. Religion does not belong in publicly funded schools.

"I am not opposed to my children learning about others' beliefs, but to teach a specific religion should be done by parents/churches/etc."

¹⁵⁵ "Students need courses in sexuality education (sexual misery of young people on the internet among other things), economics (to build a future without poverty), citizenship education, art courses. The religious aspect must remain a private matter. At school, religion must be included in the history course as a social phenomenon."

“Religion has no place in public schools, NONE!!”

« Je crois que tout enseignement qui concerne la religion devrait se faire ailleurs qu'à l'école ».¹⁵⁶

« Absolument rien. Que les parents qui sont croyants, pratiquants, ou les deux, enseignent à leurs enfants à la maison ou qu'ils les envoient en classe de religion les week-end. Mon enfant n'a pas à subir ce lavage de cerveaux à l'école ».¹⁵⁷

« Les élèves ont besoin de cours d'éducation à la sexualité (misère sexuelle des jeunes sur internet, entre autre), d'économie (pour se bâtir un avenir sans pauvreté), d'éducation à la citoyenneté, des cours d'art. L'aspect religieux doit demeurer une affaire privée. À l'école le religieux doit se retrouver dans le cours d'histoire comme phénomène de société ».¹⁵⁸

« Rien, laissons cela aux parents ! ».¹⁵⁹

« Les élèves ne devraient pas apprendre de religion à l'école. Le cas échéant, ils pourraient recevoir de l'information factuelles sur les religions ».¹⁶⁰

Responding to the same question, one participant was clearly surprised that teaching about religion in public schools was even a consideration, asking derisively: « C'est une blague ? »¹⁶¹ There was a clear rejection of confessional religious education in their responses; though some seemed to be open to religious and worldview literacy education. Nevertheless, there was an overall message that Canada's historical church-state partnership in education was no longer viewed as justifiable and that religion was understood as in the private sphere of families, not in the domain of public education.

¹⁵⁶ “I believe that all teaching about religion should be done outside the school.”

¹⁵⁷ “Absolutely nothing. Let parents who are religious or religiously inclined or both teach their children at home or send them to religion classes on weekends. My child does not have to be brainwashed in school.”

¹⁵⁸ “Students need courses in sexuality education (sexual misery of young people on the internet among other things), economics (to build a future without poverty), citizenship education, art courses. The religious aspect must remain a private matter. At school, religion must be included in the history course as a social phenomenon.”

¹⁵⁹ “Nothing, let's leave it to the parents!”

¹⁶⁰ “Students should not learn about religion in school. If they do, they could be given factual information about religions.

¹⁶¹ “Is this a joke?”

5.4.4 “They should learn that atheism is a valid world view.”

In responding to the question Q19 ‘*What range of religions, beliefs and world views do you think students should learn about in schools?*’ participants were in favour of students learning about the major world religions, (defined in the survey as 6/9 - Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Baha'ism, Jainism, Shinto). They were similarly positive towards students learning about Indigenous traditions in Canada, with 75% of English survey participants and 65% of French survey participants who thought this should be part of the range of traditions covered. Less than half thought it important for students to learn about forms of contemporary informal religion, and even fewer thought it necessary for learning to include legally-defined beliefs such as veganism or environmentalism. When it came to non-religion (with survey prompts of humanism, atheism and secularism) however, 77% of English survey participants considered it quite important for students to learn about non-religious worldviews and 57% of French respondents indicated the same. The following table shows the breakdown of prompts and responses:

Table 5. Q20. What range of religions, beliefs and world views do you think students should learn about in schools? Quel éventail de religions et/ou de croyances, de spiritualités, de convictions et/ou des représentations du monde, pensez-vous que les élèves devraient apprendre à l'école?

Categories	French Survey Answered (N=37) Skipped (N=8)	English Survey Answered (N=122) Skipped (N=23)
The 6/9 major world religions	76%	79%
Indigenous traditions (in Canada)	65%	75%
Contemporary informal religion (spiritualism)	49%	42%
Nonreligion (humanism, atheism, secularism)	57%	77%
Legally defined beliefs (veganism, environmentalism)	19%	67%
Other (specified answers)	16%	24%

It was in the open-ended option for ‘other,’ where some respondents took the time to offer more detailed commentary on nonreligious worldviews such as atheism, humanism, and secularism; explaining their thoughts in the following ways:

“They should learn that atheism is a valid world view.”

“Atheism is a mainstream worldview. Balance teachings based on proportion of practicing. It is usually disregarded.”

“Secularism, since we are a secular state and humanism as to being good to fellow man.”

“What atheism and humanism mean.”

“You got your 6/9 wrong. Very biased. Do your research. You forgot to include Atheism: 3rd largest. Judaism doesn't even figure in top 6 world-wide.”

Though relatively few added any commentary to this question, it is notable that in the English survey data, nonreligion (77%) was nearly on par with major world religions (79%) in terms of what respondents thought students should be learning about. This finding resonates with what scholars of religion and education have increasingly emphasized in recent years: the importance of including nonreligion in religious and worldview literacy curriculum. For example, in Jackson’s (2014) influential policy guide *Signposts: Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Nonreligious World Views in Intercultural Education*, he suggests that “as with ‘religions,’ non-religious convictions are considered as ‘cultural facts’ within the larger field of social diversity” and therefore can be “covered in a framework of intercultural education” (68). In his overview of the complexity of nonreligious worldviews, Jackson also cites the work of Wallis (2013) whose research with youth points to a need to more fully consider “the diversity within the ‘silent majority’ of nonreligious/areligious

pupils” (2014: 68). Ellis’ work in secularism studies is likewise relevant to the consideration of nonreligion in policy conversations about religious literacy in plural societies (2020).

5.4.5 Indigenous history

When asked the open-ended (non-multiple choice, non-obligatory) question *Q21 ‘What sort of knowledge should students have about the religion, beliefs or world views of Indigenous Peoples in Canada?’* a large proportion of survey participants (115 in English, and 36 in French), readily offered forthright suggestions. Disconnecting the category of religion, for this respondent was important:

“Any serious and culturally sensitive tackling of this topic must begin with the breaking down the westo-centric meaning of the work religion as a singular monolithic 'thing'. When applied to indigenous beliefs, our conceptions of 'religion' are rooted in western language, and the inclusion of words and the expanse of such word usages must also be included in this topic.”

One of the most frequent responses specifically pointed to history and culture (in the context of other subject courses, rather than part of a religion/belief course) as the starting points for student learning about Indigenous peoples, beliefs, and cultural practices, including rites and ceremonies. The following quotes emphasize this view about what sort of knowledge respondents thought students should be presented with:

“As much as is required to help people understand the culture and lived experiences (contemporary and historical) of Canada's Indigenous Peoples.”

“Indigenous traditions should be taught in the overall context of a course on Indigenous culture.”

“Background history How it changed the world Residential schools Statistics and culture Language The history of the development of the beliefs.”

“Historical roots.”

“An historical approach, the similarities between Indigenous beliefs/values and current general values shared by everyone (respect for the environment, matrilineal tradition/respect for women/mothers.”

“-History - diversity of beliefs as opposed to being taught as uniform and one dimensional – taught from the perspective of the believer - modern, contemporary forms of worship, history, traditions, overview of different regions and beliefs, important figures, stories, patterns, similarities to each other, similarities/differences to other cultural traditions.”

“They are important to view in history and social studies to combat stereotypes.”

“History and how it is weaved into their daily lives.”

“Full knowledge. History, variety among tribes, mythology, etc.”

“Religion will naturally be included in any history course and can be covered in that context. Without a doubt, no curriculum is required that supports the teaching of fairy tales as truth.”

« Connaissances culturelles intégrées à des cours d'histoires générales. »

« L'Histoire des peuples autochtones peut inclure un minimum d'information sur l'essentiel de leur croyance[s] ». ¹⁶²

« Introduire ces connaissances dans un cours d'histoire tout en n'occultant aucunement les violences, l'homophobie, le sexisme des religions ». ¹⁶³

« Informations factuelles dans le cadre des cours d'histoire ». ¹⁶⁴

« Il faut d'abord une connaissance historique, ce sujet est vaste et ferait l'objet d'un cours en soi ». ¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² "The history of Aboriginal peoples can include a minimum of information about the essence of their belief[s]."

¹⁶³ "To introduce this knowledge in a history course while not hiding the violence, homophobia, sexism of religions."

¹⁶⁴ "Factual information in history classes."

¹⁶⁵ "You need historical knowledge first this subject is vast and would be the subject of a course in itself."

« Tout! L'histoire des peuples, les croyances, les pratiques... »¹⁶⁶

« Histoire, culture, le bon et le moins bon de chaque approche, capacité à remettre en question la doctrine. »¹⁶⁷

« Leur force, le lien avec la culture, l'histoire qui s'y trouve chants, danses, croyances, récits, pow wow, etc. »¹⁶⁸

Others more specifically connected teaching about Indigenous beliefs worldviews to the potential for betterment of the natural world, fostering greater understanding of environmental issues and ecology.

Notions of respect for nature emerged in comments such as:

“A good amount. It’s an earth religion so that would be ok.”

“Students should learn about Indigenous worldviews along with other worldviews. In many ways, these worldviews mesh really nicely with key beliefs about environmentalism and the place of humans in the world. If we truly wish to be a Metis nation, we should be able to look at various perspectives and embrace them.”

“I would focus on basic principles and what they can teach us about how to live well, then illustrate them with specific myths/practices. What I like in particular about North American indigenous culture is the respect for the environment - it's something we could borrow from and build on.”

“Origin of nature-based myths. Protection of natural resources and life. Historical accounts of forced religious conversions by the churches.”

« Que leur sagesse ancestrale est très riche et importante pour la survie de notre humanité. Les valeurs de respect de l'environnement. Ces premières nations meritent consideration et grand respect ». ¹⁶⁹

« Les valeurs écologiques, de partage, le sens communautaire ». ¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ "Everything! The history of the people, the beliefs, the practices..."

¹⁶⁷ "History, culture, the good and bad of each approach, ability to question doctrine."

¹⁶⁹ "That their ancestral wisdom is very rich and important for the survival of our humanity. The values of respect for the environment. These first nations deserve consideration and great respect."

¹⁷⁰ "Ecological values, sharing, sense of community."

« Leur faire comprendre leur respect de la nature ». ¹⁷¹

Some participants went further on the question of inclusion in the curriculum and were of the opinion that the teaching of this particular subject be done by Indigenous peoples, saying that:

“Authentic teachings, from elders and helpers representing First Nations and Inuit, about various worldviews and how these apply to our relationships in life, healthcare, environment etc. First peoples' history/culture/belief needs to be more authentically integrated into Canadian education.”

“It would be ideal if Elders could come and share ~ using their format of stories to help students understand the background and then be able to place it in terms of where we are now in history. In terms of some specifics the concepts of smudging would be important. Also explore how many of the stories actually line up with other world religions i.e. flood.”

“Ask Indigenous people that.”

Others said learning about Indigenous worldviews should be given the same treatment as the current religions and worldviews in the curriculum. Continuing a common theme of evenhandedness, they communicated this view in this way:

“similar to all others in the curriculum.”

“In line with other religions. No special treatment.”

“It should be taught as a full-time partner with the other world religions. i.e. It should be given the same status and same content.”

“There should be no difference between the sort of knowledge students should have about the religions, beliefs or world views of indigenous peoples and the religions, beliefs and world views of non-indigenous peoples.”

“We live along indigenous people, in some cases on non-ceded land. We should learn about their world views to the same extent (and in the same manner) as other world faiths and traditions.”

“The same as what they're getting about all the other religions.”

¹⁷¹ "Make them understand their respect for nature."

« Pas plus que les autres religions. »

« Pas plus que pour les autres groupes au Canada. »

Several ideas arising from the data demonstrated deep contradictions. For example, this participant suggested Indigenous beliefs and worldviews ought to be the first topic introduced in the course, stating that “this information should be presented first and foremost above all other beliefs and religions.” For another, it was the exact opposite, saying that Indigenous beliefs and worldviews were not ‘special,’ though should be included in the curriculum. They said:

“The Indigenous Peoples of Canada are not special. The simple fact is they were in (what is now North America) before the people they were conquered by. Every nation on the planet has been conquered by one group of people or another. They have their own spiritual beliefs which also cannot be proven, just like any other religion. They do not deserve special treatment. That being said, I think we should learn about their beliefs; the good AND the bad. What acts did they commit in the name of their religion.”

Relatively few respondents were of the opinion that Indigenous beliefs and worldview should not be taught in public schools. Opinions varied from the subject matter not being applicable to some students, as this respondent said: “I do not think this is necessary for non-indigenous students. There are many more important things they need to learn to equip them for the lives they will lead;” to the more generalized sentiment of no-religion at all in schools. This participant said “as in all religions it should be as an elective outside the public-school system and has no place in basic education;” while this participant was more blunt, indicating: “not taught at all.” Echoing the viewpoint of ‘no religion’ in schools and concern about influence on younger students, this person elaborated stronger sentiments about ‘secular’ education:

“just brief, introduction to religions. students time and energy needs to be focus on science and reasoning. religion should stay totally separate from schools. children have no religion. Their parents might have a religion but it is not a child's religion. religion can be taught as a subject at universities. if a student chooses to learn about a religion then she/he can take the course. No religion should be taught at elementary or secondary schools. there should be one secular school system for all. all children should have access to one school system. state should not allow any private religious schools either. all children up to age 18 should go to secular schools.”

Some respondents focused on the importance of teaching about colonization, Indigenous history and ongoing impacts of the residential school system and intergenerational trauma. Comments were dense with intersecting issues of religion and cultural erasure. This participant conveyed both the idea of Indigenous ecological knowledges, as well as a sharp critique of the coercive force of religion as an obliterator of such knowledge:

“They should learn about mother nature and what Indigenous Peoples believed before they were forced into Catholicism and into religious schools that beat them, tortured them and killed their spirits and tore them away from their roots and families - this caused generations of hardship and PTSD - religion and the power it was used to wield over them was the main cause.”

Others went further in their commentary on student learning about pre-contact belief systems and systems of governance, how they were reshaped by colonization and how they manifest in contemporary public policy and societal debates:

“Several streams here: First, history: what did the various major ethnic groups in pre-colonization times believe? Second: how did that inform their political, legal and environmental policies as nations? Third: What happened to those social forms and the ideas that informed them under colonization? Fourth (but probably not last): How do those ideas relate to today's political, legal and environmental policies in Canada?”

“Local First Nations history and current status (numbers, reserves, languages and language users, cultural traditions including sacred beliefs and rituals, concrete examples of how the land and human relations to it is conceptualized) – national

overview of First Nations/Métis (as above) – some global context – colonial history, including abuses (residential school system etc.).”

“Students should be learning about the social, economic and political history of the First Nations, Metis and Inuit. That could include learning about religious beliefs, culture, world views, ways of life, etc. They should be learning about contemporary issues like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission findings, inequality/inequity for FNMI peoples, reading FNMI literature, studying the works of contemporary FNMI leaders and movements (e.g., Idle No More), etc.”

Increasing understanding, bridge-building and nurturing empathy through learning about Indigenous peoples, for this participant, was at the heart of learning about Indigenous peoples’ history, traditions and lifeways. Reaffirming the theme of learning (including personal interactions) as a pathway to openness which consistently emerged both during interviews and in the online survey data, this participant said:

“There should be an appreciation of Indigenous culture and religious beliefs. Practices, history, philosophy and ceremonies to aid in understanding and building bridges to Indigenous communities. My children participate in Indigenous after school programs to gain empathy and learn new ways of seeing the world.”

In a simple, yet immensely poignant statement on inculcating openness, this participant summed up the recurrent theme of how increased familiarity and understanding can lead to more openness: « Quand on connaît, on juge moins et on a plus d'ouverture. »¹⁷² Indeed, this theme was central to the empirical research with youth in the REDCo project mentioned in the literature review, which showed that students were more open to difference after learning about ‘other’ lifeways and worldviews (Weisse, 2010; Jackson, 2012). The interconnections of pluralism’s “encounter” (Eck 2006), xenosophia’s cultivation of a “culture of welcome” (Streib and Klein, 2018) and deep

¹⁷² “When you know more, you are less judgmental and more open.”

equality's "relinquishing of rightness" (Beaman, 2017) are all also evident in the straightforwardness of the claim: "When you know more, you are less judgmental and more open."

5.4.5 Islamophobia

It is notable that few specific references to Islam emerged from the online survey data. Contrary to in-person interviews in which several participants mentioned Islam, spoke about Muslim friends or related stories about Muslims in general, Islam was rarely mentioned by online survey participants. The sentiments expressed ranged from ideas about differentiating extremism from lived practice and animosity towards Islam for taking up too much space in public discussions, to making distinctions between culture and religion. For example, this participant conveyed how openness towards difference begins with learning how to distinguish stories of extremism from narratives about Islam in general:

A basic understanding of other major religions will help students to be more accepting of diversity. They have grown up in a world that is increasingly linking terrorism and Islam. I believe they need to know basics about Islam so they understand that this is an extremist problem, not Islam itself.

Another offered a comparison of the relative 'openness' of religious traditions, articulating frustration about students having to learn about Islam:

Most children today have an open view of what they think of the world it is when we force the study of something that is not!! I doubt very much Christianity would be allowed in schools since it was forced out many years ago and find that Islamic [sic] children would not have to study other beliefs but other would have to theirs!!

Using the specific (and contentious) issue of veiling in Islam, this participant, indicated that more in-depth learning about divergences between culture and religion might afford students increased understanding of custom versus religious obligation:

Les gens mélangent culture et religions. En connaissant les religions, les enfants pourraient faire la différence entre une obligation religieuse et une coutume (par exemple: le voile islamique est une coutume et non pas une obligation religieuse) .¹⁷³

It was in the final, and most open-ended question of the online survey ‘**Q28: Is there anything you would like to add?**’ that the longest comment made by any participant on any topic was submitted.

It was a diatribe on Islam. This respondent stated:

I am against Islamic prayer being allowed in schools. We are making concessions for one religious group only. Islamic prayers are not said in schools even in Saudi Arabia. I was raised in a home that was respectful of all religions/cultures and thought that Mohammed was like Jesus and the Qur'an was like the bible. I have studied Islam quite intensively for the last two years and Mohammed was a pedophile, polygamist, rapist, murderer and war lord. Everything the Islamic State has done, Mohammed has done or approved of. That is why the Al-Azhar University in Egypt (Sunni Sect - 90% of Muslims) refused to denounce the actions of the Islamic State as to do so would be to denounce Mohammed. The Qur'an splits people into two groups, believers and non believers. Non-believers are not treated well at best and at worst are humiliated, tortured, raped and murdered. Islam is a violent, totalitarian ideology and a disproportionate number of its adherents are predisposed to violence because children and women are devalued. Islam has a 1400-year history of violent and cultural conquest. Canada is a secular country and there should be no prayer in schools. The Lord's Prayer was taken out of schools years ago and I am in favor of that. I worry about young impressionable non-Muslim children being intrigued by this faith for all the wrong reasons. I don't think any Canadian school children should observe or participate in Islamic prayers where the boys are separated from the girls and menstruating girls cannot participate. Look at the countries who allow this in the Middle East, Europe and Africa and observe the relative status of women and children in those countries. We should stress integration and respect for Canadian values. Religious practices are private, said quietly and discreetly to oneself, in your home or place of worship. I am not saying that all Muslims are bad, but a disproportionate

¹⁷³ "People mix up culture and religion. By knowing about religions, children would be able to differentiate between a religious obligation and a custom (for example: the Islamic veil is a custom and not a religious obligation)."

number are prone to intolerance esp of Jews and violent acts. Mohammed is the perfect example and the Qur'an is the perfect word of God. 30% of the Qur'an teaches intolerance and hate especially for Jews. A tolerant Muslim chooses not to follow the violent, intolerant parts of the religion but you can't assume that all Muslims do. The evidence is inescapable that this theology is destructive at its core.

(Online survey respondent)

I include this comment in its entirety because it immediately stood out during the data collection process as a distressing congruence with the Islamophobic Twitter storm, explained in the previous chapter. This finding's significance to the study is not based on its frequency, but on its vehemence. Startled as I was, it should not have been unexpected. As outlined in the threads of watershed events throughout chapter one, combined with chapter two's review of literature, the field of religion and education shifted dramatically in the aftermath of the World Trade Centre attacks on September 11, 2001. Fear and distrust of the religious 'other' was firmly focused on Muslims, with religious illiteracy feeding global social anxiety over perceived threats.

5.4.6 A standardized curriculum across Canada?

Participants were divided on whether there should be a standardized curriculum about religion, beliefs and worldviews across Canada, however there was a wide linguistic gap in data. On the English survey, 43% of respondents said yes to the question about having a standardized curriculum, 37% said no, and nearly 20% said they were not sure. On the French survey, nearly 70% said yes, 28% said no and only 3% were not sure. Recurrent themes of concern over indoctrination, rejection of majority religious privilege and even-handedness were all present in the responses as were continued emphasis on teaching about religion as integrated into history courses. Questions were

raised about the likely challenges in teacher training as well as the issue of provincial management of education, rather than at the federal level, which is the case in other countries.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presents the main findings from an online survey data collected from 190 participants in five Canadian provinces. 145 people responded to the survey in English and 45 to the survey in French. The first major finding from online survey data showed that participants felt learning about religions and worldviews *could* be accomplished in public classrooms, but they rejected all possible learning which could be considered indoctrination. They emphasized the importance of even-handedness when it came to representation of the range of belief systems and worldviews in the curriculum, such that no one tradition would be viewed as the privileged (or ‘true’ or ‘baseline’ belief system. The second finding was the sentiment learning about religion, beliefs and worldviews would be best accomplished not as a separate subject, but as a topic integrated into history or social studies. A third (and somewhat contradictory) finding was that many participants scorned the idea of schools teaching about religion, beliefs and worldviews, indicating that this was the domain of private spheres such as families and faith communities. The need to include atheism, humanism and other non-religious worldviews alongside other traditions was a fourth major finding. Although specific questions about Islam were not included in the questionnaire, Islamophobia emerged as an anecdotal, but nonetheless troubling fifth finding in both interview and survey data. Finally, as the sixth finding, no consensus emerged about a standardized curriculum across Canada, although the data showed a consistent emphasis (as previously indicated) on integrating learning about religion, beliefs and worldviews into other subjects such as history or social studies.

CHAPTER SIX: TEXTBOOKS AND ‘OFFICIAL’ KNOWLEDGE(S)

6.1 ERC TEXTBOOK CONTENT ANALYSIS

When the province of Quebec removed confessional religious courses from its public-school system and replaced them in 2008 with the single compulsory curriculum known as the Ethics and Religious Culture Program,¹⁷⁴ it was both a significant and contested educational policy shift.¹⁷⁵ It also marked the beginning of a large, international scholarly focus on Quebec’s social experiment with compulsory religious/worldview literacy curriculum. For Benjamin Berger, York University Research Chair in Pluralism and Public Law at Osgoode Law School, the move was a reflection of broader changes in Quebec society stretching over multiple decades. Summarizing this chronological transition, he indicated

the ERC was to be taught from an impartial and neutral perspective. It thus sits in the arc of a particular Québec history: in the 1960s, during what is referred to as the ‘quiet revolution,’ a theretofore highly Catholic society pushed back on the power and influence of the Church. Education was the focal point of this radical social reorientation towards religion. The government took control over public education, previously provided by religious communities. By the end of the 20th Century, denominational schools only operated as private institutions. The ERC was to be the coup-de-grâce, replacing all remaining programs of denominational education in high schools (Berger, 2015).

On the ground, it was indeed an abrupt change for many in-service teachers at both the primary and

¹⁷⁴ A provincial government brochure (intended for parents) announcing the implementation of the ERC, described the shift in this way: “Over the course of the last 50 years, training in the area of moral and religious questions has evolved tremendously. For example, at one point French schools used the *Petit catéchisme*, comparable to the *Baltimore Catechism* taught in English Catholic schools. But then there was a shift to catechesis, and subsequently to confessional moral and religious instruction open to other religions. Schools also offered moral education.” *Ministère de l’éducation, loisir, et du sport* (2008).

¹⁷⁵ Berger has written extensively on the intersection of religion, education and the state in the Canadian context. In a commentary on two Supreme Court of Canada cases having the ERC program as their central focus, *SL v. Commission scolaire des Chênes*, 2012 and *Loyola High School v. Québec (Attorney General)*, 2015, Berger suggests that “the deep interest that both state and community hold in the cultivation of the child – is why education has persisted as such a fertile ground for the emergence of issues of law and religion” (Berger, 2015).

secondary levels who had previously taught confessional Catholic or Protestant curriculum. The suddenness of the transition resulted in very limited teacher training for the new course in schools across the province, although the implementation of the ERC did bring with it a plethora of new pedagogical materials which positioned the study of religion within a so-called ‘secular’ framework.¹⁷⁶ For many educators, ministry-approved textbooks became the only source of ‘official’ guidance beyond their own autodidactic efforts to learn how to teach *about* religion.¹⁷⁷ Although the aims of the program included an emphasis on religious literacy, an introduction to ethical reasoning, and a focus on dialogue, early critiques of the new course came from those who denounced the program as an exercise in relativism and an affront to the Catholic and Protestant heritage of Quebec. Other critics deplored the conflation of religion with ethics. Drawing on content from a press review of articles published in Montreal’s French language newspapers from 2005 to 2017, Tremblay elaborates the main types of critique which characterized debate about the ERC. The first type of critique came from pro-Catholic opponents who felt that there was “potential confusion or the risk of relativism arising from an early exposure to multiple religious traditions delivered,” and “objections...linked to the disappearance of the Catholic religion in schools, perceived as a cultural matrix for Quebec society.” The second was based on “laicity/secularism,” and opposition to “virtually any and all expressions of the religious in the public sphere.” The third category of critique

¹⁷⁶ I acknowledge that there is no scholarly consensus on the definition of ‘secular’ and that the term is used and understood differently depending on the academic field. In the context of this thesis (focused on religious literacy, or learning *about* religion), I use it (as it is described in the ERC curriculum) to denote a non-confessional approach to teaching about the diversity of religious traditions and worldviews.

¹⁷⁷ Hirsch and McAndrew emphasize this unique, context-specific rollout of the ERC and the importance of textbooks to the program’s debut in classrooms across the province. “The context in which these textbooks were published should also be mentioned,” according to the authors. “Since the program was implemented at the same time at all levels, most teachers could not be specifically trained to teach it. They therefore relied heavily on the textbooks for planning and teaching the course. Thus, the authority of the textbooks has been considerable amplified. Thus, studying the ERC textbooks gives us concrete access to the programme’s teachings in the classroom” (2014: 89-90).

was based on a “nationalist laicity/secularism” stance and was “born out of a nostalgia regarding French-Canadian identity,” and preoccupied with “the dilution of the majority culture in Quebec.” Lastly, Tremblay’s investigation showed “another group defining itself as feminist” which was “distinguished by its focus on equality of the sexes” (Tremblay, 2018: 288-289). Suffice to say that contestation – political, academic and legal – has fueled debate about the program since its inception, including two cases argued in Canada’s highest court.¹⁷⁸ It is with this backstory as context that triangulating interview data with a qualitative content analysis of ERC student manuals, offered another vantage point from which to ‘see’ and to understand this research project more holistically. In this chapter, I briefly outline the history of textbook research, review a selection of studies specific to the ERC, and explain data collection and analysis. I then discuss how the evolution of research on worldview diversity and consideration of the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, challenge previous debates about religious literacy and create new points of reference for the study of curricular resources.

6.2 TEXTBOOK RESEARCH AND ‘OFFICIAL KNOWLEDGE’

The literature on textbook research puts the chronological starting point of the discipline as the early 20th century, when, according to Grever and van der Vlies “the League of Nations encouraged comparative textbook research on stereotypes and portrayals of the ‘Other’ in order to bring about international understanding” (2017: 289). During this pre-United Nations era, political

¹⁷⁸ In his post on the Blog of the International Journal of Constitutional Law ‘The Supreme Court of Canada on Religious Freedom and Education: *Loyola High School v. Québec (Attorney General)*,’ Berger details some significant differences between two separate ERC cases. He indicated that the Court’s adjudication of the *Loyola* case “carries on this pattern of looking to the classroom to sort through constitutional questions regarding freedom of religion under section 2(a) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, state neutrality, and the character of the modern ‘secular’ state” (2015).

leaders and educators combined efforts “to search for ways to combat mutual xenophobia” as a response to the repercussions of World War I (Pingel, 2010: 9). Two decades later, in the aftermath of World War II and amidst the tragic impact of large-scale social ‘othering,’ organizations such as UNESCO and the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research were impelled to engage in more in-depth exploration of school curriculums (Grever and van der Vlies, 2017).¹⁷⁹ Under the assumption that generations of students were taught from the same texts in jurisdictions where universal education was the purview of the state, each postwar period saw more intensive critical engagement with textbook research (Pingel, 2010).

Unsurprisingly, the study of textbooks in subsequent decades focused on peace education and international understanding; later in the 2000s, intercultural education gained traction as the guiding framework for research in response to the “growing multicultural composition of classrooms worldwide and [to] underscore the need to foster understanding of cultural traditions” (Pingel 2010: 16).¹⁸⁰ In this decade, the question of how national narratives are deployed in the service of the citizen-shaping remains a preoccupation of textbook research. For Grever and van der Vlies, these national narratives are the “(often canonized) stories about a nation’s origin and achievements, and

¹⁷⁹ The work of the [Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research](#) is ongoing (*International Textbook Research*, n.d.).

¹⁸⁰ In the chapter ‘Education and Religious Diversity,’ Halafoff and I discuss post-war education policy in the context of evolving social diversity. Our overview shows how schools have long been considered as workshops for nation building, with “social scientists from multiple disciplines look[ing] to a nation’s classrooms as crucial sites for the construction of citizenship, as do education policymakers who strive to anticipate the pedagogical needs of increasingly diverse student cohorts.” We also discussed how historical responses to growing levels of diversity in societies and as a natural corollary, in schools, almost always include calls for revisions to textbooks. “Increased immigration in post-World War II Europe and the United Kingdom, for example, compelled significant revisions to education policy as a response to shifting dynamics of religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. The classroom was considered a crucial locus for easing social tensions, with teacher interactions and textbooks as foundational building blocks for improving intercultural understanding” (Halafoff & Cusack, 2020: 243).

the perceived characteristics of a national community, produced to make sense of past events and to create cohesion in the present with a view to the future” (2017: 287). Curriculum theorist Michael W. Apple provides a formula for how such national narratives are often put together in textbooks. What gets taught in a classroom, according to Apple, is the end result of a careful and purposeful curation of a certain vision of how things both were and are. He describes how “official knowledge” is constructed and portrayed in textbooks, framing the process in this way:

Education is deeply implicated in the of culture. The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize a-people. As I argue in *Ideology and Curriculum and Official Knowledge*, the decision to define some groups’ knowledge as the most legitimate, as official knowledge, while other groups’ knowledge hardly sees the light of day, says something extremely important about who has power in society’ (Apple, 1993: 222).

The relevance of Apple’s work to the discussion of official ERC textbooks lies in his explanation of how the “*politics* of official knowledge” brings to the fore the narratives of the certain groups and obscures or omits those of others (1993: 222). He argues that “all curricula...[should] *explain themselves*...it must ‘acknowledge its own roots’ in the culture, history, and social interests out of which it arose” (1993: 232). Far from being outdated, Apple’s work has significance for current public debates over textbooks, in particular those texts which are positioned as a response to the religious and cultural “evolution of Quebec society” and an instrument for the advancement of ‘*le vivre ensemble*’ (MELS, 2008: 292). In the next section, I offer a brief outline of scholarship on textbook research in Quebec, wherein themes from Apple’s discussion of inclusions and omissions in the creation of ‘official knowledge (s)’ are found throughout.

6.3 TEXTBOOK RESEARCH IN QUEBEC: FRENCH, MATH, HISTORY AND MORE

The examination and critique of the construction of ‘official knowledge’ in textbooks has long been the focus of education research among Francophone and Anglophone scholars (and education policy makers) in Quebec. While a comprehensive review of this literature is outside the scope of a single chapter (particularly given that studies are often only available in one language or the other and rarely published bilingually), a few notable examples illustrate the convergence of ‘*les grandes lignes*’ of inquiry which inform the present study of ERC texts. In 1975-76, for example, Lise Dunnigan carried out a large-scale review of 225 primary and secondary-level student manuals in various subjects including French, mathematics, science, and religion (Dunnigan, 1976). In her study ‘*Analyse des stéréotypes masculins et féminins dans les manuels scolaire au Québec*,’ she found gender roles depicted throughout the volumes perpetuated damaging sexist stereotypes. She argued that the overrepresentation of men in positions of authority and leadership in work and home life, conditioned students to understand the subordination and submission of females as part of an unquestioned, natural social order.¹⁸¹ The project was commissioned by Quebec’s *Conseil du statut de la femme* (CSF) and was based on the “urgency to introduce into our education system, the concepts of equality and respect of the individual, beyond the limited roles attributed to each sex”

¹⁸¹ “Let us recall once again that stereotypical images of men and women are pervasive in all aspects of our society, and are only one of the factors by which the education system orients boys and girls towards two separate lines of development, complementary if you like, but particularly limiting for girls. The analysis of the textbooks will therefore only be a first step that must lead to further questioning.” « Rappelons encore que les images stéréotypées de l’homme et de la femme sont imprégnées dans tous les aspects de notre société, et ne constituent qu’un des facteurs par lesquels le système d’éducation oriente les garçons et les filles dans deux lignes de développement séparées, complémentaires si on veut, mais particulièrement limitatives pour les filles. L’analyse des manuels ne sera donc qu’un premier pas qui devra mener à d’autres remises en question » (Dunnigan, 1976 : 2).

(Dunnigan, 1976: 1).¹⁸²

Most recently, similar charges of harmful stereotypes, gaps of inclusion and inequality were at the heart of calls for major revisions to official Quebec history textbooks (Copp, Lonergan and Zucchi, 2018).¹⁸³ When the Quebec Ministry of Education issued textbook revisions for obligatory history courses at the secondary level in 2017, the English Montreal School Board was swift to contest (Copp et al., 2018). The ESMB commissioned an independent content analysis of the textbooks and found that the curriculum offered a singular “ideological bent” of history through a Quebec-centric lens, in addition to the following conclusions cited by the authors:

- the program is driven by a particular view of the past and its connection to a specific vision of the present and the future. Such an approach does not support the liberalism which the program upholds as a hallmark of 21st century Québec;
- The Indigenous throughout are presented as ‘other’ and antagonists, rather than original inhabitants whose place was colonized by outsider, and whose own history became inextricably linked to the history of Quebec and Canada;
- There is no development of Black history, which dates back to the French regime, and the issues of Black Aboriginal slavery are conspicuous by their absence;
- There is no indication that immigration transformed Montreal into a complex multi-cultural city. There is virtually no discussion of the Irish cultures of Montreal Quebec. The arrival of thousands of Jewish immigrants and the creation of new Jewish community institutions is an important story, totally neglected in the text. Other ethnic and religious immigrants are also barely mentioned (Copp et al., 2018: 4).

¹⁸² « L’urgence d’introduire dans notre système d’éducation les concepts d’égalité et de respect de l’individu au-delà des rôles limitatifs attribués à chaque sexe » (Dunnigan, 1976 : 1).

¹⁸³ The ERC was not the only course under scrutiny in Quebec Education in recent years. The English Montreal School Board issued a 2018 report which criticized the content of the obligatory (secondary level) curriculum for the ‘History of Quebec and Canada’. The report highlighted many significant gaps in textbook content indicating that “students are not taught to see the complexities of history and exercise their critical thinking skills” (Copp et al., 2018: 3).

CBC News commentary following the release of the EMSB report indicated that “the review, conducted by three historians, concludes the textbooks, used to teach students in Secondary 3 and 4, cannot be ‘salvaged’ through minor changes” (Shingler, 2018). These examples illustrate past and present debates about textbooks used in Quebec schools, broadly speaking. Critiques of ‘official knowledge,’ or the ‘truths’ about Quebec society as presented specifically in ERC textbooks, have been ongoing since its implementation, elaborated in the next section.

6.4 TEXTBOOK RESEARCH IN QUEBEC: ETHICS AND RELIGIOUS CULTURE

Once launched in Quebec schools in 2008, the ERC program was immediately put under intense scrutiny from a variety of stakeholders. Student manuals became a focal point of both public and scholarly enquiry with examination of the texts through various lenses carried out by scholars in Quebec and beyond. Much of this specific body of literature has notably focused on questions of exclusion/inclusion, representation, privilege and the construction of a national narrative from a singular viewpoint. In this section, I highlight a curation of scholarly critiques of the ERC textbooks such as issues around gender equality (Conseil du statut de la femme, 2008), the representation of traditions other than Christianity (Hirsch and McAndrew, 2013; Abdou and Chan, 2017), the unique situatedness of religion in Quebec (Boisvert, 2015) and criticism in the popular media.

In the same year the ERC curriculum was introduced, the CSF once again entered the textbook conversation by restating its prevailing objection to the near absence of gender equality in the textbooks. In this communication issued at the time of the program launch, “A letter about the Ethics

and Religious Culture Program,” the CSF reiterated the same critical assessment, (ongoing from three decades prior):

There is no clear indication of the principles and values that teachers will need to address in the classroom. Rather, the program provides illustrative examples for reflection. For example, although equality between women and men is one of the fundamental values shared by all citizens and an inescapable principle in the democratic life of Quebec, this value is found in the program only as an example among other themes that could be addressed by the teaching staff. The value of gender equality does not clearly emerge as a fundamental value underlying Quebec society (Conseil du statut de la femme, 2008).¹⁸⁴

Once the program was in place for eight years, the CSF disseminated a follow-up opinion based on their continued curricular review. Lack of focus on the value of gender equality, for the CSF, remained a sticking point. According to the report *L'égalité entre les sexes en milieu scolaire*, the CSF maintained that ERC texts emphasized the role of religious institutions in Quebec's history, but did not acknowledge the “sexist practices at the heart of religions” (Conseil du statut de la femme, 2016: 57).¹⁸⁵ The ERC “makes no room for criticism of inequalities within religious practices and doctrines,” according to the report, “and paints a very favorable picture of religious experience and leaves a very marginal place for feminine figures - individual or collective - in the different religions”

¹⁸⁴ *Lettre à propos du programme d'éthique et culture religieuse* (2008) : « Il n'y pas d'indications claires quant aux principes et aux valeurs que le personnel enseignant devra aborder en classe. Le programme propose plutôt des exemples indicatifs pour susciter la réflexion. Ainsi, bien que l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes constitue l'une des valeurs fondamentales partagées par l'ensemble des concitoyens et des concitoyennes ainsi qu'un principe incontournable dans la vie démocratique du Québec, cette valeur ne se retrouve dans le programme qu'à titre d'exemple parmi d'autres thèmes qui pourraient être abordés par le personnel enseignant. La valeur d'égalité entre les sexes ne ressort pas clairement comme une valeur fondamentale qui sous-tend la société québécoise. »

¹⁸⁵ « L'accent est mis sur l'influence des institutions religieuses sur la société et la culture québécoise, où les congrégations de religieuses ont joué un rôle majeur dans l'organisation des institutions sociosanitaires. Toutefois, il n'y a pas de remise en question des pratiques sexistes au sein des religions. Parmi les exemples indicatifs, on trouve les fonctions et les statuts différenciés des femmes et des hommes, mais pas d'indication sur la critique des inégalités dans les pratiques religieuses » (2016 : 57).

(2016: 58).¹⁸⁶ The CSF has been the principle voice for gender-based critiques of the program.

Other scholars approached their investigation and analyses of ERC textbooks using tradition-specific lenses. Hirsch and McAndrew, for example, published several studies about the representation of Judaism in ERC textbooks. In their examination of the textbooks, they found that in general, content lacked context-specific stories of Jewish life, practice and integration in Quebec society (Hirsch and McAndrew, 2013). Judaism did, however, occupy a certain amount of space in the texts, which the authors' reasoned "owes its presence to its influence on Christianity, and also to its relatively long presence in Quebec" (Hirsch and McAndrew, 2014: 89).¹⁸⁷ Despite this long, well-documented Jewish history in the province, their findings showed that

Jewish practices are often presented as timeless and 'anonymous,' without signs of a specific place or context. At other moments, they are represented as existing elsewhere, and more specifically in Jerusalem and at the Western Wall. Finally, when Jewish practices are presented in the context of Quebec, it is by referring to this community's most stereotypical representation, namely the Hassidim (2014: 91).

Some scholars focused on how non-Abrahamic traditions are positioned as 'other' in the texts. Abdou and Chan (2017), for instance, used a critical multicultural approach to analyze the construction polytheistic and monotheistic traditions in the texts, concluding that Abrahamic monotheistic traditions were valorized, while polytheistic traditions were either absent or depicted as "exotic" (Abdou and Chan, 2017:16). Their research also demonstrated how various forms of Christianity were

¹⁸⁶ « D'autre part, le contenu concernant la culture religieuse ne fait aucune place à la critique des inégalités au sein des pratiques et des doctrines religieuses, dresse un portrait très favorable de l'expérience religieuse et laisse une place très marginale aux figures féminines – individuelles ou collectives – dans les différentes religions » (2016 : 58).

¹⁸⁷ Their analysis was not intended as a critique of the amount of Jewish references in the texts. According to Hirsch & McAndrew "Judaism's place in the ECR textbooks is safeguarded by the programme's requirements, which determine to what extent each religion should be covered. Our objective has therefore not been to quantify its appearance in textbooks, but rather to analyse the portrayal found in this treatment of Jewish practice and its presence in Quebec's social landscape" (2014: 95).

elaborated and differentiated, but that worldviews of Indigenous groups were depicted as monolithic (2017).¹⁸⁸

Other scholars situated their critique of the ERC and its texts, in the context of Quebec's troubled relationship with religion. For Boisvert (2015), the socio-historical complexities ran much deeper than scholarly, legal or popular debates about how to approach teaching *about* religion in Quebec's classrooms. In his article, Quebec's Ethics and Religious Culture School Curriculum: A Critical Perspective (2015), Boisvert traces the historical place of Catholicism in the province and his own lived experience growing up in a society in which the faith tradition and institutions it controlled was the "dominant cultural force in Quebec for close to 200 years" (381). His reflection and analysis positioned the debate over the ERC program within a larger arc of collective memory about church-state relations, national identity, and evolving diversity:

The long demise of the Catholic Church in Quebec, cultural anxieties around the principles and practices of reasonable accommodations for cultural and religious minorities, nationalist aspirations and understandings of secularism and of one's own faith – all these issues, and undoubtedly several others, have become entangled with the unique pedagogical vision and innovation embodied by the ERC programme. It seems that whenever there is an attempt in Quebec to deal with religion in any serious fashion, especially through government initiative, old insecurities and concerns invariably emerge. Religion, in Quebec, remains unfinished business (386).

Boisvert's observations also revealed tensions within the program, which, on the one hand aimed to advance *le vivre ensemble* by teaching about religious diversity in Quebec, while on the other hand, maintained the majority tradition privilege which overshadowed that same diversity (2015). Citing the conundrum of Quebec's Charter of Values, Boisvert pointed out the irony of ongoing

¹⁸⁸ In their 2019 article 'Addressing Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Indigenous Peoples through Religious Literacy and Spirituality: Unexpected Pathways to Peace Education', Chan, Akanmori & Parker discuss religious literacy and Indigenous spirituality in the context of Ontario's World Religions courses.

discrimination of Muslim women who wear hijab (perceived “as a public sign of oppression and humiliation for women”), when “veiled Catholic nuns were such an obvious and omnipresent feature of the public landscape in Québec” (382). “It was as though Quebeckers were now dealing with their own ‘troubled’ religious past,” argued Boisvert “by transposing and refusing to others what they perceived as problematic or pre-modern for themselves” (382). In his assessment, Boisvert foreshadowed a number of future flashpoints for the controversial program and the ironies of its objectives in light of political rhetoric about the Charter of Values; points of contention which Quebec (and Canadian) media have continually called attention to.

Media criticism of the ERC curriculum, since its inception in 2008, has paralleled many of these same sticking points—such as stereotypical or monolithic representations and problematic privilege in the program—brought up by Quebec scholars cited thus far. A shift in recent years, however, has veered the public conversation towards another trouble zone in the Quebec political scene: religious symbols worn in public and in the workplace. Reporting on the debate about wearing certain items of clothing or jewelry deemed ‘religious,’ Lecomte (2019), articulated two very interesting facts about chronological situatedness of the ERC program at this particular socio-political juncture in the province’s history. First, that continued calls for changes to the program is “a revision which falls within the scope of another debate, that of the possible ban on the wearing of religious signs, especially for teachers and school principals.”¹⁸⁹ Second, that the timing coincides with the first graduating ERC cohort: “2019 is a kind of anniversary for the Ethics and Religious Culture

¹⁸⁹ « Une révision qui s'inscrit en marge d'un autre débat, celui sur l'éventuelle interdiction [du port des signes religieux](#), notamment aux enseignants et directeurs d'école. Décidément, la place du religieux au sein de l'école québécoise est plus que jamais remise en question. Voyage en terrain miné » (Lecomte, 2019).

program, since the graduates of Secondary V are the first to have followed the program throughout their schooling” (Lecomte, 2019).¹⁹⁰ I address these two points—the irony of teaching about religious diversity while being obliged to remove personal symbols of diversity; and a decade of inculcating the principles of *le vivre ensemble*—in the conclusion.

6.5 FINDINGS

As I mentioned in the opening of this chapter, *les grandes lignes* of inquiry about textbooks in general, and ERC textbooks specifically, are about privilege, exclusion, inclusion, and representation. I therefore approached this analysis through the same conceptual framework which informs the overall direction of this thesis. The building blocks of pluralism, xenosophia and deep equality—openness towards difference and non-hierarchical engagement with diversity—converged to form a prism through which I sought to ‘see’ (to understand) what emerged during the data collection for this chapter. Given the by-design privileging of Christianity in the textbooks, I did not approach data collection with any quantitative objectives. Using categories of religions and worldviews (as demarcated in the texts themselves) as units of analysis, I conducted a qualitative exploration of how the ‘story’ of religious diversity is represented in the textbooks. I also drew upon previously published work around gender, reconciliation and nonreligion to help guide my inquiry (Beaman and Cusack, 2020).¹⁹¹ Combining Fairclough’s thinking about “the effects of texts in inculcating and sustaining or

¹⁹⁰ « 2019 est une sorte d'anniversaire pour le programme Éthique et culture religieuse, puisque les finissants de cinquième secondaire sont les premiers à avoir suivi le programme durant toute leur scolarité » (Lecomte, 2019).

¹⁹¹ From our chapter entitled “*Étudier l’éducation sur la religion : ce que l’on peut apprendre du Québec*,” (Studying education about religion: What we can learn from Québec), Beaman and I elaborate several issues regarding the future of religion *about* education: “In our estimation, there are three emergent issues which complicate ongoing debate about future directions for religion and education in the Quebec education system, and which are likely to attract the attention of Quebec scholars in the ongoing project of assessing and debating issues in religion and education, particularly around

changing ideologies,” with Apple’s contention that textbooks are always “some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge,” were helpful touchpoints as I dove into the content of the textbooks (2003: 9; 2009: 3).¹⁹² The principle findings which emerged from the content analysis are the following:

- 1) Majority religious privilege is the scaffolding upon which the texts are built, with content in every volume filtered through a Christian lens;
- 2) Post-contact Christian evangelization is upheld as an unproblematic, benevolent driver of progress, devoid of discussion about the historical and contemporary impacts of colonization on Indigenous lifeways;
- 3) Gender inequality in traditions is acknowledged, but accorded negligible development;
- 4) Nonreligious worldviews are discussed, but have only a nominal presence in the curriculum.

This chapter is intended as general view and analysis of the religious culture sections of ERC texts, with a focus on examples which are most relevant to the overarching research questions of this study.

6.5.1 Christianity: The protagonist of the ERC Story

Two images of large Christian crosses above five smaller images representing Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism introduce the first textbook’s explanation of ‘Religious Culture’ (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 3). While the present analysis was based on textual content rather than visual,

the content of the curriculum. They are: First, nonreligion; second, gender equality and third, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples” (Beaman & Cusack, 2020: 429).

¹⁹² In his work on discourse analysis, Fairclough emphasizes the “ideological effects” of text. “One of the causal effects of texts which has been of major concern for critical discourse analysis,” Fairclough stresses “is ideological effects – the effects of texts in inculcating and sustaining or changing ideologies. Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation” (2003: 9).

this opening page set a symbolic precedent for what emerged during the examination of all five volumes — Christianity *is* the primary protagonist of the ERC narrative.¹⁹³ This is not unsurprising, as the architects of the ERC were clear at the inception of the program that Christianity (in particular Catholicism and to a lesser extent, Protestantism), would occupy a place of privilege in the curriculum. In all volumes, Christianity is the fixed constant of the ERC universe around which the ‘other’ traditions and worldviews circle. In this constellation of religious culture, Catholicism is at the top of an understood hierarchy, followed by Protestantism, and to a much lesser extent Christian Orthodoxy. Detailing the primacy of Christianity in the ERC curriculum could occupy the space of an entire thesis. Critique of this by-design preeminence, however, is not among the goals of this study. Rather, I seek to make evident the tensions between the objective of the ERC—*le vivre ensemble*—and how the architecture of the program maintains a hierarchy wherein other worldviews (religious or non-religious) beyond Christianity are positioned as ‘other.’ In the religious culture section of five volumes analyzed in the present study, a reference to Christianity is found at the beginning of every opening chapter, as the following extracts demonstrate:

From *Living in Society, Secondary Cycle One, Student Book A, Ethics and Religious Culture*:

Heritage is the history, traditions and accomplishments of the past that we enjoy in the present and pass on to future generations. Seventeenth century houses in Old-Québec are an example of buildings that tell a story of what life was like back then. Did you know that the **Judeo-Christian** values written in the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms are also part of Québec’s heritage? (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 92, emphasis in original).

¹⁹³ An interesting avenue for future research would be a visual content analysis of a larger sample of ERC texts. Although beyond the scope of this chapter, I did notice that with the heavy privileging of Christianity in the texts, there was also a notable visual emphasis on a ‘white’ Christianity. Relatively few visual examples of people of colour were evident in the volumes.

From *Living in Society, Secondary Cycle One, Student Book B, Ethics and Religious Culture*:

A 400-year presence. The Family, a person's first social circle, is especially influenced by religious traditions. In fact, family values and traditions were forged over the centuries by those who came before us. A major force in society. The history of the Québec family has been marked by very close ties to religion. When New France came first came into being, religion was a very large part of the lives of its inhabitants, both for Catholics and, for Protestants, at the beginning of the late 18th century. The Catholic Church shaped beliefs as well as attitudes and value of individuals and the community alike. The reason for this enormous influence was in part due to the omnipresence of the Church in education, healthcare, and the care of the poor, elderly and orphans. The Catholic Church and its clergy were also invested in other major spheres of society. During the 19th century and the entire first half of the 20th century, the Catholic Church had a major influence on trade unions, journalism, the social economy and politics (Bélanger et al., 2009b: 92).

From *Weaving the World, Secondary Cycle Two, Year Two, Student Book A, Volume 1*:

Religions can be described and defined in many ways. Yet it is generally believed that they originate in key events or experiences that have touched the historical or mythical characters that lived them. There are pivotal moments when religions are founded or consolidated. Moreover, religions are the focus of tensions and transformations that over time lead to their renewal, division and sometimes, disappearance. Religions exist within a geopolitical framework and often have long, sustained relationships with each other. In this chapter, we will pay special attention to the connections between Judaism and Christianity, to the events that led to their emergence and to the consolidation of the main Christian denominations, including Catholicism (Deraspe et al., 2010: 57).

From *Weaving the World, Secondary Cycle Two, Year Two, Student Book A, Volume 2*:

According to the Christian tradition, the tree of knowledge of good and evil is connected to the mystery of life and death: Its fruit must die and rot, which is generally associated with evil, to enable the seeds it carries to germinate and produce new life, which is associated with good (Deraspe et al., 2011a: 82).

The fifth and final volume of the series, *Weaving the World, Secondary Cycle Two, Year Two, Student Book B*, is the only the volume in the series which does not mention Christianity in the opening paragraphs, but rather begins with sections entitled “Religions in Transformation” and “The Spread

of Religious traditions” Deraspe et al., 2011b: 79-80). In this section, highlighted by visual imagery of fertility goddess statuettes from Africa, Asia, and the Americas, students first read:

From prehistoric times to the modern era, through ancient civilizations and the Middle Ages, religious traditions around the world arise, develop, undergo periods of stress, divide, unite and sometimes become extinct.

When a religious tradition spreads to a new place, it does not arrive on virgin territory. Native peoples have their own beliefs or religious traditions. Sometimes different traditions can live side by side without major conflict. Belief systems can even mix together to form a new religion. However, in some cases, the religious tradition of the newcomers may be imposed on the indigenous population (Deraspe et al., 2011b: 80).

The use of the verb ‘imposed’ prepares the reader for a subtle rhetorical shift on the next page wherein Christianity becomes the central focus of the text—as the belief system that “replaced” Indigenous traditions (Deraspe et al., 2011b: 81). The following 13 pages describe the rise of Christianity from the 1600s onwards, the missionizing of Indigenous peoples in north and south America, the diversification of Christian traditions and the growth of Christianity in Canada. The chronological history of Quebec begins with a reference to Columbus:

Following the exploration of the New World by Christopher Columbus, many Europeans seeking wealth (including some with few scruples) sought adventure in the new territories. The work of the first missionaries in Central and South America was therefore very difficult because of the strained and mistrustful relationships between the Europeans and the local populations (83).

The texts are unambiguous in their message: The mission to civilize the land and the original inhabitants of New France, the taming of its wild landscape, the building of its institutions and the organizing of its political infrastructure, was made possible because colonizers were united in establishing a nation based on Christian principles. The textbooks position the founders and builders of New France as temporal and spiritual ‘saviors,’ so to speak, of the land and its original inhabitants. The primary finding of the content analysis revealed that Christianity-driven colonization was situated

as an unproblematic, natural-order progression of society/nation building. This one short phrase, offered in isolation, encapsulates the overall narrative of the ERC with regard to colonization:

On his first expedition to Canada in 1534, Jacques Cartier planted a cross at Gaspé, as a testimony to his religious faith and to take possession of the land on behalf of Francis I, the King of France. Today, a monument in Gaspé commemorates this historic event (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 95).

This singular paragraph foreshadows the most predominant thread in all volumes wherein the enmeshment of Christian religion, governance and territorial possession is positioned as the courageous achievement of intrepid adventurers, with little mention of the First peoples displaced and dispossessed of their lands, lifeways and freedoms. It accompanies an illustration in which an immense cross is being erected onto the shore, tall-sail ships in the background, Cartier dressed in full formal European-styled attire of the epoch, with only torsos and heads of two half-clad, Indigenous men looking onto the scene from the sideline. It situates colonization as the benign (and in the eyes New France settlers ‘divine’) beginning and building of a ‘civilized’ society. On this page entitled “Key figures who founded Québec,” we read:

The Quebec that we live in today was shaped by men and women who dedicated their lives to the development of this French colony in North America. Some were Catholic while others were Protestant. They were dedicated to their king, to their religion and attached to this land of America where everything needed to be built (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 95).

As we have seen in the preceding pages, Quebec’s religious heritage is a reflection of Quebec’s history and has been since the 16th century. This heritage is marked primarily by the Roman Catholic Church, which has been present in Québec for more than 400 years. Protestants and Jews, who arrive well after the Catholics, also left a significant religious heritage. Over the past few decades, new immigrants of different religious denominations have also made their contributions. All of these early settlers helped to enrich society and make Québec what it is today (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 101).

To the same degree that Christianity is omnipresent in the texts, the near complete disregard for historical and contemporary impacts of colonization on Indigenous Peoples is ubiquitous. As detailed in thread three of the watershed events which informed my study, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and objectives of "Education for Reconciliation" pose a direct challenge to this type of erasure.

6.5.2 "Sometimes a religious tradition may be replaced by another."

The second principle finding of this content analysis is that post-contact Christian evangelization is upheld as an unproblematic, benevolent driver of progress, devoid of discussion about the effects of colonization on Indigenous lifeways. Explanations about uncomfortable historical and contemporary facts reveal ongoing tension between acknowledgement and essential elaborations. An emphasis on the 'success story' of Christian evangelization and a parallel absence of commentary on its harms to Indigenous peoples permeate the texts. The oversimplification of the birth of 'New France' and establishment of its religious culture omits crucial details about the consequences and lived experiences for Indigenous peoples. Such problematic omissions and oversimplifications are typified by passages such as this one:

Sometimes a religious tradition may be replaced by another. For example, today Catholicism and Protestantism are the major religions in North America, but this presence of Christian faiths is relatively recent, since before the arrival of the explorers many Native People's belief systems co-existed. Disruptions in Europe help explain to explain the rapid spread of Christianity in the New World (Deraspe et al., 2011b: 81).

Information about Indigenous peoples' creation stories, worldviews traditions and rites *are* present in the texts. However, they are overshadowed by an ubiquitous Christianity and nearly always preceded

and followed by an elaboration of its influence. For example, in section entitled ‘Québec’s religious heritage’ the first page is entirely devoted to establishing Québec’s historical identity as a Christian society:

PAST HERITAGE

Heritage is the history, traditions and accomplishments of the past that we enjoy in the present and pass on to future generations. Seventeenth century houses in Old-Québec are an example of buildings that tell a story of what life was like back then. Did you know that the **Judeo-Christian** values written in the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms are also part of Québec’s heritage?

Religious Heritage

Over the centuries, the Catholic Church has been very influential on many continents. The French who founded New France reproduced French society, which was officially Roman Catholic in the 17th century. From the first years of the colony, the Church took charge of spirituality, education, healthcare and the arts. It built churches, schools, hospitals and numerous monuments.

In 1763, New France was ceded to Great Britain, whose population was primarily protestant including Anglican. At first, British leaders limited the rights of Roman Catholics in an effort to apply British laws. To survive in the Province of Québec, the Catholic **clergy** vigorously defended the French religion culture and language. That is why, in Québec, cultural heritage and religious heritage are so closely linked. Until the end of the 1960’s, the Catholic Church was **omnipresent** in Québec life. In areas where the English presence was felt more strongly, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists (which were the main Protestant denominations at the time) contributed in their own way to enriching Québec’s religious heritage (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 92).

On the next page, an introduction on toponymy and explanation of the “Origins of names” is introduced, with an entire page devoted to Indigenous names of geographic locations and natural landmarks:

Everywhere in Québec, like elsewhere in the world, it is common practice to name streets, municipalities and institutions. Have you even noticed that these names are often of Aboriginal, religious, cultural, geographic or historical origin? Do you know why?

ABORIGINAL NAMES

When Europeans arrived in North America in the 16th century, the continent was already inhabited. Aboriginal peoples had named the places where they lived and with which they held spiritual ties. The names they chose often described a physical entity, a particular natural feature or a reference to spirits. Many places still bear their original Aboriginal name. In many cases, these names are translations or adaptations of Amerindian or Inuit names.

The first occupants

Québec has one Inuit nation and ten Amerindian nations that are grouped into two larger linguistic families—the Algonquian and Iroquoian. Algonquin tribes include the Abenaki, Algonquin, Atikamekw, Cree, Malecite, MicMac [sic], Montagnais, and Naskapi. The Huron-Wendat and Mohawk are Iroquoians. To the right are a few place names of Aboriginal origin that indicate the nation from which the name is derived and its meaning.

TO KNOW MORE +

In Amerindian mythology, when great spirits want to make their way to the source of a waterway, they destroyed the **dams** built by giant beavers. That is how rapids were created. Mohawks claim that this is the mythical explanation of the origin of the Lachine Rapids. This is why the name of Hochelaga, the village located near the rapids, has two meanings: large rapids and beaver dam (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 93).

The following page, then, continues the lesson on toponymy, once again interweaving the influence, and predominance of Christianity into the narrative:

RELIGIOUS AND HISTORIC NAMES

When the French began to settle in North America, they gave their villages names with which they could identify. When they gave a religious name to a location, it was their way of asking for divine protection. At times, they added the name of a saint to an existing Amerindian name such as Saint-Anne-de-Yamachiche or Saint-Roch-de-Mekinac. In Québec, many cities and villages are named after saints.

Québec's **toponymy** is a reflection of our history. Today, Québec society remains deeply imprinted by Catholic and Protestant influences, as well as those of Aboriginal traditions.

TO KNOW MORE +

In the 16th century, many Catholics questioned the authority of the Pope, as well as certain Roman Catholic beliefs and practices. Since the Church refused to change, new religions were established and these were referred to as Protestant. In countries such as France and Spain, where the population remained faithful to the Pope and his authority, there was a resurgence of religious fervour as Catholics sought to **convert** the newly-discovered inhabitants of North America. This was the goal of the missionaries (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 94).

Indigenous contributions to Québec (and more broadly to Canadian society) are auxiliary snippets to the main body of ERC narrative. Other passages work together to relate a victor's saga; acknowledging Indigenous peoples' beliefs while simultaneously obscuring them. I have chosen to keep the textual excerpts that follow together, reserving commentary for the end. In this way, the uninterrupted content curation tells the narrative, according to the ERC, of the relationship between Christian founders and Indigenous Peoples:

Look at the map above and take a close look at the continents of Australia, Africa the Americas and the Arctic. Since ancient times, Aborigines have had common religious beliefs. In Québec, for example, well before the arrival of the Europeans, there were Amerindians living here who were practicing their own form of worship. Though they are fewer today, their religious traditions are still very much alive (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 9).

New France continued to grow throughout the 17th century. In 1642, Jérôme le Royer de la Dauversière organized an expedition with the goal of converting the Amerindians to the Catholic faith. Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve and Jeanne Mance were put in charge of this expedition to colonize the island of Montréal. They built a fort and named it Ville-Marie in honour of the Virgin Mary. However, the Amerindians were not interested in converting. (96)

The preaching of the gospel by Catholic and Protestant missionaries explains why nowadays, many Amerindian and Inuit communities are Christian. However, traditional spirituality is still present; in fact, it is seeing a resurgence in many communities (Bélanger et al., 2009: 99).

When they discovered the Americas, the Europeans encountered societies that had their own beliefs. These were replaced by Christianity, which influenced the development of the arts and culture over the centuries. (Deraspe et al., 2011: 131).

The French who came to New France often sought to escape the violence and persecution at home because of their beliefs. United by laws of survival and commerce, these colonists established good relations with the Aboriginal nations (84).

When a religious tradition spreads to a new place, it does not arrive on virgin territory. Native Peoples have their own system of beliefs or religious traditions. Sometimes different traditions can live side by side without major conflict. Belief systems can even mix together to form a new religion. However, in some cases the religious tradition of the newcomers may be imposed on the indigenous population. (Deraspe et al., 2011: 80).

The Christian missions had little success at the outset of the colony. The missionaries had difficulty accepting the customs and behaviors of Native Spirituality, which were often animist traditions. Most importantly, the spiritual importance of dreams, the veneration of objects and phenomena for their intrinsic strength, and the many forms of expression of the Divine seemed incompatible with traditional Christian beliefs. For their part, the Natives did not always appreciate the behavior and teachings of the missionaries.

Further, when missionaries were welcomed and accepted by an Aboriginal nation, they became enemies of the adversaries of that nation. The slightest success in evangelizing one group of nations brought the systematic impossibility of evangelizing an antagonistic group (Deraspe et al., 2011: 84-54).

The preceding textual excerpts weave a storyline that is central to the ERC curriculum: Christian missionizing of Indigenous Peoples was a natural, logical and necessary process in the civilizing and colony-building project of claiming both land and inhabitants for the Christian king. Omitted from the 'story' is forced erasure of Indigenous lifeways, language, traditions and ritual. Positioning the hierarchy of belief systems with Christianity at the apex and animism at the bottom accomplishes the ideological objectives of the ERC program, while minimizing the impact of the erasure for the reader who may not be familiar with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. As detailed in the first chapter of this thesis, the Calls to Action, particularly those regarding education and indigenous spiritual practices and beliefs, posit significant challenges to the pedagogical objectives of the ERC program and its texts. The conception and publication of ERC

textbooks were accomplished years before the publication of the TRC Calls to Action; this is a fact. Nevertheless, at this current juncture in Canadian history, in which there are commitments to the Reconciliation project at all levels of government, it is crucial to enact the following Calls to Action which specifically mention the education sector:

62. We call upon the federal, provincial and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for kindergarten to Grade Twelve students (7).

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above (7).

64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with aboriginal elders (7-8).

Considering these Calls to Action together with the textual excerpts I have highlighted, the current ERC manuals do not meet even a minimal standard for acknowledging the relationship between residential schools and religious orders. Much like what Copp et al. concluded about Quebec's history textbooks, from the perspective of Reconciliation, ERC textbooks are not "salvageable" through minor changes (2018). Furthermore, the Christian framework upon which the ERC was explicitly created, is precisely the type of hierarchical privileging a xenophobic/deep equality approach would

seek to counter (Streib and Klein, 2018, Beaman, 2014, 2017).

6.5.3 The Narrative Arc of the ERC: An (Almost) All-Male Cast

The ERC texts go to great lengths to highlight and to honor religious leaders and notable adherents. Not unsurprisingly, the majority of those featured are men in various positions within their respective patriarchal traditions. Given the texts' grounding in these patriarchal traditions, it follows that there are few female figures mentioned in any of the five ERC volumes, relative to the number of males. The absence of discussion about women in the texts is the most conspicuous finding of my review. Women are ancillary figures in the grand narratives of Christianity which predominate, but also appear as secondary figures in the other traditions such as Judaism and Islam. To be fair, women *are* mentioned in the context of the early colonization of Canada, primarily in their roles as caregivers or as subordinates in the leadership structure of their traditions. Women are present in the text from the beginnings of the colonial period, in citations such as this:

Upon their arrival, the nuns and priests took charge of the spiritual life of the colony. The members of the male religious orders **officiated** at mass, administered the sacraments and education of the boys, while the female religious orders cared for the sick and oversaw the education of the girls (84).

In a section entitled 'Women and Prohibitions,' for example, brief statements touch upon gender inequities, but do not develop any counternarratives about or from women from within the unspecified religious traditions:

- "In more than one religion, the role of women is not the same as that of men. Women's rights and behavior are governed by a large number of rules and prohibitions which vary from one religion to another".
- "Some religious groups require that men be separate from women in their place of worship,

especially during prayers”.

- “Though it is not entirely unheard of, the presence of women in the various clergies is rare or is generally confined to areas of secondary importance, such as religious communities”.
- “In Judaism, a woman can become a rabbi, that is, the spiritual leader of a Jewish community. However, this is not the case in all branches of Judaism.”
- “In many religions, the place held by women is not the same as that held by men. Depending on the religion, various rules and prohibitions dictate women’s rights.” (108).

A few early Catholic women in the history of Quebec were referred to in relation to art, education and healthcare, however no clarification is given that their roles were subject to male leadership, nor that their accomplishments were limited by assigned gender roles. Certain passages, such as this one, position women as leaders, but fail to acknowledge how patriarchy organized women’s lives. In a section entitled ‘The Role of Women in Early Christianity,’ students read:

Women played such an important role in the formation of the first churches that early Christianity is often seen as a religion of women. Likewise, women were the first to introduce Christianity to the wealthy, to intellectuals and to the leaders of Roman society. Many taught the religion to their husbands and children, spawning the first generations of Christians.

Furthermore, woven into the Catholic narrative about women is an emphasis on an expectation of women’s service, (although self-denial as a value for men is never mentioned):

The influence of the Catholic religion on the values and norms of Quebec society is brilliantly illustrated in Louis Hémon’s novel *Maria Chapdelaine*. It is a story of female sacrifice – self-denial: devotion and voluntary self-sacrifice (104).

In the sections on Protestantism, however, female leadership is given more attention and development:

A few religions give religious responsibilities to women, like certain Protestant churches that allow women to be ministers” (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 127).

The title of spiritual leader is no longer reserved only for men. In some Protestant churches, the term pastor also refers to female representatives. In fact, for several decades now, women can become pastors or religious ministers within the various ecclesiastic ministries. For example, the United Church of Canada has been ordaining women since 1936.

A single example given any development highlights the life of Lydia Gruchy, “the first woman to be ordained a pastor in the United Church of Canada.” “As soon as the United Church of Canada was created in 1926, Mrs. Gruchy put in her request to be ordained. She had to repeat her request many times because at the time, the rules of the United Church banned women from holding this office. She was finally ordained on November 4, 1936, the same year the United Church of Canada permitted women to hold the position (Bélanger et al., 2009b: 103).

Overall, the representation of women in the texts is quite limited. Yet, no discussion or elaboration of the many well-documented equality movements within various traditions is included, confirming what Quebec’s *Conseil de la statut de la femme* has argued in their longstanding critique of the program:

As for the content of the Ethics and Religious Culture course, few of its elements are related to the issue of equality or inequality. For the Council, several aspects even pose a problem: the naturalization of differences, the symmetrization of gender groups and the confusion between de jure and de facto equality. The link between ethics and general culture contributes to children's belief that sexist religious discourse is a valid ethical response (Equality, 2016).¹⁹⁴

Women’s place in the ERC narrative is, at best, a minor role. In an era where equality, equity and inclusion are at the forefront of conversations, and of course makes no of challenges to gender binaries

¹⁹⁴ Original citation in French: « Quant au contenu du cours d’éthique et culture religieuse, peu de ses éléments sont liés à la question de l’égalité ou des inégalités. Pour le Conseil, plusieurs aspects posent même problème : la naturalisation des différences, la symétrisation des groupes de sexe et la confusion entre l’égalité de droit et l’égalité de fait. L’arrimage de l’éthique et de la culture générale contribue à faire croire aux enfants que les discours religieux sexistes sont des réponses éthiques valides » (L’égalité, 2016).

or a gender spectrum.

6.5.4 Nones, nonreligion and deficit terminology

Jackson's classic text *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach*, published over two decades ago, remains an essential reference point for scholarly conversations about religion and education (Jackson, 1997). It formed the foundation of his later work *Signposts: Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Nonreligious World Views in Intercultural Education*, published in 2014, and considered a compendium of best-practices for educators, policy makers and scholars. Its publication, with the notable inclusion of 'nonreligion' in the title, signaled a terminological shift from previous analogous guides, putting nonreligious worldviews on par with religious ones.¹⁹⁵ In the *Signposts* chapter 'Non-religious convictions and world views,' Jackson sets out its objective: "The present chapter aims to raise a variety of issues concerning the integration of 'non-religious convictions' with religions" (Jackson, 2015: 67). The chapter goes on to establish that "the right to hold non-religious convictions" are "equally respected" in the context of "intercultural education." Two years later in 2016 (and with the perspective of two decades worth of scholarly reflection on and evolution of teaching about religion and education), Jackson announced this new introduction for his original 1997 book:

I would now also have added something about the value of understanding world views such as secular humanism, alongside religions, and would have talked about the relationship between personal world views and organised world views, as I have done in my recent book *Signposts*, written for the Council of Europe. (Jackson, n.d.).

¹⁹⁵ These guides (elaborated in chapter two) include the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* (2007); *Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States* (2010); Religious Literacy Guidelines for College Students (*Toledo*, 2007; *Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools*, 2010; American Academy of Religion, 2019).

I open this section with Jackson's explanation for the new introduction to his classic text, speculating that contributors to ERC texts may have followed suit if the curriculum were to undergo a revision. Published between 2008 and 2010, ERC texts were conceived and produced prior to the significant proliferation of research on nonreligion. With deconfessionalization and religious literacy education as the main ambitions of the ERC program, the inclusion of non-religion in the curricula was not a primary focus. Nevertheless, it is evident that ERC authors *were* attuned to the burgeoning importance of nones and nonreligious worldviews even a decade ago. The first volume in the series opens with a reference to a given percentage of Quebec's population who have "no religious affiliation at all" (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 11), situating the group as part of a social evolution towards diversity. Scattered throughout the texts are a handful of references to this burgeoning slice of the province's social landscape. In these passages, the ERC texts position non-religion as part of the larger diversity of beliefs and worldviews found among its peoples:

At the beginning of the 20th century, Quebec's population was nearly all Catholic or Protestant. One hundred years later, the population is still largely Catholic, but there is a wider diversity of religions being practiced. Closed to 5.8% of the population has no religious affiliation at all, and this group is the second largest. This means that we have a richer and more diverse set of values and beliefs that you will get to know better through *LIVING in society* (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 11).

In Canada, for many people, it is no longer an essential characteristic for an individual to belong to a religious tradition, a faith or a belief (92) weaving book b

As we have seen in this chapter, the influence of religious traditions affects many aspects of our society. What's more, spirituality is no longer limited to the major religions, and nowadays, our representations of the world take various forms. Many people have developed an interest in beliefs and practices that are non-religious and that, sometimes, are based on ancient traditions (Bélanger et al., 2009b: 130).

Among the “non-religious” traditions listed are yoga, Tai chi, Asian martial arts, Astrology and Feng shui, though no elaboration of how the lived nonreligion of people who engage these traditions is provided. In another volume, nature takes a central role in the (very brief, but nevertheless present) discussion of non-religious worldviews and the concept of ‘awe’. In a section entitled ‘The Nature of Religious Experience’, the subject is introduced with a large image of a full moon rising above a body of water, with the subtitle “Nature and its wonders. The feeling of awe can touch all human beings.” The section is focused on describing prayer, contemplation, meditation, and the transmission of religious experience. Under the heading ‘The Wonder of Nature’, it reads:

“A sense of wonder or awe does not necessarily depend on a particular system of belief and practices even though that may also be the case. It can come from the beauty or power of nature, like a sudden awareness of belonging or interdependence that links us to all beings in the universe” (Deraspe et al., 2010: 90).

Intertwined with these rare passages about non-religious experience, practice or worldviews, are what can be characterized as ‘death’ definitions of atheism such as “the attitude of a person who denies the existence of any god and does not practice any religion” or “someone who denies the existence of any deity” (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 139; 80). It is here where the conflation of atheism (defined using deficit terminology), with the ensemble of non-religious worldviews, combine to diminish and narrow a wide, growing, and complex segment of the Canadian population:

The religious landscape of the modern world is in constant evolution. The social transformation of the 19th and 20th centuries encourage the emergence of new religious groups and movements. Some people still adopt and develop the religious tradition of their parents, while others practise a different religion. Others have no religious affiliation, being either atheists or people who choose their practice and beliefs from a variety of different traditions (Deraspe et al., 2010: 80).

...people from all around the world come to live in Quebec and bring with them their culture, customs, values and beliefs. This increases the presence of different religious traditions. We have also seen the development of new religions and atheism. Did you

know that 6% of Quebec's population and 16% of Canada's population are atheist? (Bélanger et al., 2009a: 139).

Though the content analysis revealed relatively few mentions about non-religious worldviews, compared to religious ones, it is a pertinent finding for future research on religious and worldview literacy education, and shows that nonreligion was already on the radar of ERC curriculum creators in the early 2000s. Its pertinence for future education policy-making, curricular design and teacher training can be seen in the dramatic increase of nones and the nonreligious in populations around the world, as well as increased research activity in the field over the recent decade (Lee, 2012; Jackson, 2014; *The Nonreligion in a Complex Future (NCF) Project*, n.d.). Jackson's work in bringing the vocabulary of nonreligion (such as 'non-religious convictions' (7); 'non-faith-based belief and values systems' (8); 'non-religious worldviews' (9); 'non-religious philosophies'' (12); 'non-religious stances' (21); to the policy-making endeavours of bodies such as Council of Europe, suggests movement toward inclusivity in education *about* religion and worldviews.

6.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter describes the main findings from a content analysis of ERC curriculum. Specifically, it outlines the findings from a content analysis of five, Quebec Ministry of Education-approved ERC student manuals published by Les Éditions CEC, one of the principal purveyors of textbooks in Quebec public schools. The content analysis is limited by scope, and purposely so. Limiting the analysis to textual excerpts only from one series of manuals made for a manageable data set, ample for the research objectives of this single chapter. Nevertheless, the five textbooks do cover

all years of the Quebec secondary school curriculum and thus offer a general, sequential portrait of how the curriculum unfolds over five years.

The principal finding was not by any means unexpected, given the explicit pedagogical objectives of the ERC program. Christianity – specifically Catholicism, Protestantism, and Christian Orthodoxy – occupied a position of privilege in all five volumes. The cited passages, however, do draw attention to how this privileging of one tradition, situated other traditions as exactly that – ‘other.’ The primacy of Christianity throughout the texts acts as a prism through which through which the story of ‘other-than’ Christian religious cultures is reflected. Specifically, Catholicism operates as an omniscient narrator (to borrow a term from literary studies), which moves between broad historical views of the spread of Christianity and specific junctures of import to the cultural, political and social life and evolution of Quebec society. This hierarchy of partiality set the stage for the second finding that the ERC depiction of Christian evangelization minimized and normalized the forced conversion of Indigenous peoples, glossing over the generational loss of Indigenous languages, traditions, and other knowledges. This second finding can be characterized as a Quebecois version of ‘manifest destiny’ wherein the evangelization of Indigenous peoples and *l’apprivoisement* (taming) of “no-man’s land” or *terra nullius*, is upheld as a natural, uncontested and benevolent civilizing project. The third major finding was that examples of women in leadership positions are limited and critique of gender-based discrimination in the religious traditions elaborated in the ERC was all but absent. The fourth finding from the textual analysis was that ‘nones’ and non-religious worldviews, though present in the texts, were not accorded adequate emphasis nor development in line with their importance in Canadian society. In the next chapter, I gather these findings and analyses together

with those from the previous chapters, interweaving them as strands which form the basis of conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CITIZENSHIP-BUILDING IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Greetings! I just had the opportunity to complete the survey and I want to applaud you for exploring this key and critical issue! I have just received word from my school administrator that the World Religions and Belief Traditions in Daily Life course (Grade 11, Open Level) has been given the go ahead as a course offering for next year. I have been fighting to get this course back on the course calendar for two years now. We live in a small town that has little exposure to different cultures which results in misperceptions and opinions that are biased. I am hoping that enough students are interested in taking the course to help open lines of communication and explore alternate ideas than what is the base norm in our community. Fingers crossed!! I would really love to read your report once it is completed (I know that is way down the road). I have signed up to follow along via Twitter and on your electronic mailing list as well. Best wishes as you complete your research.”

**- Online survey participant
(Message from a teacher in a small Ontario town)**

Shortly after I started recruitment for interviews and launched the online survey, I received this message from a teacher who had heard about the research project through social media and participated via the online questionnaire. Contacting me directly through my university email, I was delighted to receive such an unexpected, enthusiastic note about my study. She described her own reasons for advocating for a religious literacy course in her small-town Ontario secondary school and her comments felt like familiar thought territory. She outlined *the problem*: Lack of knowledge about or experience with the religious ‘other’ leading to misunderstandings at the root of prejudicial attitudes. She saw potential in religious literacy curriculum for *a solution*: Learning about lifeways and belief systems different from one’s own and engaging with new ideas as a way of opening towards religious and cultural difference. I read in her message of encouragement, many notions and ideas which mirrored my own background, interest and approach to the topic. I said to myself: this was

surely a confirmation (albeit anecdotal), that I was on the right track. The message (from an actual teacher in a small, non-diverse community, with a demonstrated interest in religious literacy, no less), pointed to a need for a dedicated religious and worldview education curriculum. My study (or so I thought) would contribute a novel conceptual framework and empirical research and thus extend an already large and growing body of knowledge. It would not add to the ‘why’ of learning about the topic (since I was under the impression consensus on the ‘why’ had already been achieved), but on the ‘how’ to formulate best practices approaches to teaching and learning *about* religious and worldview diversity in a dedicated curriculum. However, as I moved through the phases of reviewing literature, refining the conceptual framework and collecting, triangulating and analyzing the data, it became clear that my suppositions going into project would be challenged. What follows is a discussion of these findings and conclusions as well as recommendations for future research.

7.1 LEARNING ABOUT DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

In this qualitative study on learning about religion, beliefs and worldviews in public-school, my enquiry focused on what parents and educators thought students should know and understand about this specific aspect of diversity in Canada. As research based on the premise that public education is a citizen-building project, I expressly sought to explore what participants considered essential knowledge for Canadian public-school (primary and secondary) students growing up during an era of rapid social change, in one of the world’s most multicultural countries.¹⁹⁶ To this end, I

¹⁹⁶ A 2003 CBC report based on census data at the time, declared “the newest figures from Statistics Canada show that Canada is one of the most multicultural countries in the world” (“Census Shows Canada Truly Multicultural,” 2003). In 2016, census data on immigration and ethnocultural diversity confirmed that “over one-fifth (21.9%) of Canada’s total population” was born outside of the country (Government of Canada, 2017b).

explored the guiding question: *What, if anything, might Canadian public-school students learn about religions, beliefs and worldviews in order to best prepare them for citizenship in a diverse society?* Throughout the project, I pondered how results from the study might contribute to public conversations on learning about diversity and difference, specifically as it pertained to religion and worldviews, in public school classrooms.

7.2 UNFOLDING

Opening the **first chapter** of this thesis with a personal narrative about my own Canadian immigration experience was a ‘slice of life’ account from a first-time parent navigating the conundrums of choice about confessional religious education. This story of an ‘othered’ first-grader and her newcomer classmates, was an apt starting place for a project aimed at understanding questions of learning *about* religion and worldviews in public school. My daughter’s recollection of isolation and marginalization foreshadowed a number of key issues which unfolded in the process of conducting this research. Exclusion, othering, and religious majority privilege were all in play in the social setting of her small, suburban Quebec classroom. The continuation of faith-based courses, and the classification of students according to religious affiliation in order to deliver confessional curriculum revealed a growing disconnect between education policy and the evolving diversity of student populations. The year was 2002 and the province had yet to completely transition away from confessional instruction. It would not be until 2008, that she would experience learning *about* religion in the context of the newly launched ERC program. Such was the genesis of this doctoral research. My graduate school journey, however, was also punctuated by a number of defining moments, incidents and controversies which became watershed events informing my thought processes throughout. Chapter one explains these incidents of religious ‘othering,’ situations of hate-based

violence and the passage of discriminatory public policy measures aimed at visible religious minorities. Although many other events, debates and political storms related to religious intolerance occurred during my graduate studies, this curation of examples collectively emphasized the scope and depth of xenophobia-infused targeting of people from minority traditions. From the introduction of the so-called Charter of Values in Québec, the niqab debate in Ontario, and the Québec City Mosque murders, to the ban of religious vestments for employees in Québec's public sector and the subsequent removal of a hijab-wearing teacher from her classroom, I positioned this study in the socio-political context of my own situatedness (Moore, 2018, 2019; Laird, 2019). As a resident of Québec and a doctoral candidate pursuing studies in the province of Ontario, all of these significant events and controversies (re)shaped my perspectives on social life amidst the evolving diversity in Canada.

The 2015 release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action also precipitated another unexpected turn in my doctoral research reflections and a reassessment of my own situatedness. New words and definitions entered my vocabulary and catalyzed significant shifts in my thinking. From terms like 'reconciliation,' 'UNDRIP,' 'terra nullius,' and 'Doctrine of Discovery' (particularly with its religious origins), learning about the Calls to Action was very much a threshold experience (Meyer and Land, 2003). Specifically, the numerous Calls to Action about education, the role of churches and their ideologies in the colonization of this land and the suppression of Indigenous spiritual traditions was new knowledge which spoke directly to my own learning and unlearning about education in Canada. I came to understand how numerous articles in the Calls to Action summarily cast doubt upon the ideas, values, and norms which commonly scaffold religious/worldview literacy curriculum such as the ERC.

Chapter two opened with the story of Gurbaj Singh Multani’s boyhood saga of his experience as an appellant in of Canada’s most well-known Supreme Court cases focused on religious freedom: *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys, 2006*. My intent in leading with this story, was to show a range of real-life issues related to religious and worldview *ill*iteracy, which became manifest during the legal battle — foremost among them was ignorance about the ‘religious other,’ which ultimately led to a protracted legal battle and intense public debate on the limits of religious freedom within a school setting. With ignorance situated at heart of that case and education posited by Mr. Singh himself as a key site of intervention to mitigate misunderstanding, the review of literature elaborated in this chapter is an extension of this school of thought (increased understanding = less discrimination) about the aims and aspirations of religious and worldview literacy education. Taking a regional approach to reviewing the literature I opted to begin with the epicenter, so to speak, of research on religion and education, which is Europe and the United Kingdom, followed by scholarship from Australia, the United States and finally Canada. In this review, I also brought together concepts drawn from a range of research on pluralism, xenosophia and deep equality; these ideas together forming the conceptual framework for this study. Using such a conceptual framework “as the overarching argument for the work—both why it is worth doing and how it should be done,” Eck’s definition of pluralism as “an energetic engagement with diversity” provided a fitting starting point from which to explore my research questions (Ravitch and Riggan, 2016: 8; Eck, 2006). Chancing upon the unfamiliar (to me) concept of xenosophia for the first time in my multiple-year study of the literature on religion and education, further expanded my understanding of Eckian pluralism’s emphasis on the “encounter of commitments” (2006). Indeed, Streib and Klein’s introduction of the concept of xenosophia into the conversation on religious and worldview literacy positioned the “encounter with the strange and the strange religion” as having the potential to lead to

a “culture of welcome” founded upon mutual respect and civic neighborliness (2018). Reading Streib and Klein’s explanation of xenosophia as the “wisdom, creativity and inspiration that emerges from the encounter with the strange and the strange religion,” the conceptual resonance with Beaman’s deep equality was immediate (Streib and Klein, 2018; Beaman, 2017). In the deep equality model, everyday interactions with the ‘religious other,’ find diverse actors successfully negotiating difference based on principles of agonistic respect, recognition of similarity and sharing space as equals (Beaman, 2017).

My experience as a student member of the Religion and Diversity Project at the University of Ottawa set the stage for the discussion in **chapter three**. During my time with the Project, I had frequent opportunities to attend lectures and conferences given by many of the key international thinkers in religion and education. Interactions with seasoned scholars who had devoted entire careers to the field and cross-disciplinary expertise in adjacent domains afforded me many occasions to think about how to approach my study. It is in this third chapter wherein I give a comprehensive explanation of the research background and methodology including an explanation of my research approach rationale, access challenges, and sampling techniques. During this study, I interviewed parents and educators (and some who were both parents *and* educators), conducted an online survey, and did a textual analysis of secondary student manuals used in Quebec’s ERC program. My objective in triangulating data from three sources was to deepen my understanding of what participants thought students should learn about diversity in Canadian classrooms and learn about the curricular content of the much acclaimed (and debated) ERC program. **Chapter four** was devoted to listening to parents and educators in the National Capital region of Canada during face-to-face interviews (N=22), and in **chapter five**, I outlined the shift from in-person interviews to gathering data from online survey. In

this phase of my study, I gathered and analyzed contributions from participants residing in five Canadian provinces (N=190). Plentiful and thoughtful commentary from both in-person interviews and online responses further expanded my understanding of the research questions. By triangulating data collected from in-person interviews and online survey responses, with a content analysis of ERC textbooks (N=5) explained in **chapter six**, I gained a deeper comprehension of how actual curricular content intersected with participants' perspectives and broader debates about religious and worldview literacy. In this final **seventh chapter**, I discuss the unraveling and reweaving of the many threads of thinking which have contributed to my perspective on and understanding of education *about* religion and worldviews, and offer conclusions and recommendations for future research.

7.3 UNRAVELING

When I think back about the early stages of designing this project, and to formulating research questions, I came to this endeavour with a certain set of assumptions, as articulated in the beginning of this chapter. I was very much steeped in academic literature on the planning and approach of the ERC— that as an evolution of confessional religious education, it was a responsive shift to teaching *about* religion and worldviews amidst a new and fluid diversity in student populations, and in larger society. It appeared, from my study of the progression of education policy in the province, to be the next logical next step in this type of literacy education, deserving of its international esteem among scholars in the field. I dutifully shared my research project at numerous academic conferences, eager to spread my exploration and analyses of the ERC with like-minded researchers outside of Canada. I envisioned this doctoral research project would unfold as a contribution to the body of literature on best practices in teaching and learning through a dedicated curriculum of religious/worldview literacy. Essentially, I thought this empirical study would add to the scholarly conversation about the

next iteration of ERC 2.0, solidifying Quebec’s reputation as pedagogical innovator of cutting-edge curriculum designed to shape citizenship in this plural democracy. As Beaman and I wrote in our (2020) chapter ‘Studying Education about Religion: What We Can Learn from Quebec,’ “rationales for **why** to teach *about* religion and diversity from a non-confessional standpoint have long been supplanted by the quest for **how** to do so in diverse societies wherein the continuous mutability of pluralism is the norm” (2020, emphasis added). Since its inception, the ERC has been held up as a ‘how to’ model for teaching about religion. However, the program came to a somewhat unexpected ending in 2020 when it was shelved as a curriculum and as an educational policy experiment. In January 2020, the Québec Minister of Education announced the abolition of the program. To some observers, this move may have appeared as a rather abrupt change of course in the wake of prior positioning of the program as a response to the evolving religious diversity in Quebec society. The seemingly hasty decision, in fact, culminated over a decade of simmering (sometimes boiling-point) political and scholarly debate. Since its launch, the ERC had been an ongoing flashpoint in a province where issues related to religion reach deep into collective and competing societal anxieties (Boisvert, 2015). Making its debut in classrooms in 2008, numerous legal challenges and sustained public debate (primarily in Québec) confirmed a generalized lack of consensus about the objectives, teacher preparation and delivery of the course. In Canada, scholars from numerous disciplines including education, law, political science, sociology and many others, have devoted substantial research resources to exploring the many issues raised by ERC program. The debate over teaching *about* religion here has been continuous – among policy makers, parents, scholars and even in challenges brought to Canada’s highest court. During its ‘tenure’ as the model of religious literacy learning for in a diverse society, the ERC was a polarizing magnet for both praise and critique. In a rather ignominious dénouement, the program ended with an ‘abolished’ status (a term used widely in the

media during 2020), with its replacement curriculum intended to “make way for ‘21st-century themes’” (Marchand, 2020). I found the words of the Quebec Education Minister, Jean-François Roberge, particularly pertinent for this thesis—he said « le cours d’ECR donne une ‘trop grande place à la religion’ » (McQuade, 2020).¹⁹⁷ His blunt commentary about ‘too much emphasis on religion’ in a course designed specifically to educate about religion, is indicative of major policy shift which transpired in a relatively short time span; perhaps unexpected to many observers. The replacement curriculum, according to the Minister of Education, would instead focus on “citizen participation and democracy, legal education, eco-citizenship, sexuality education, self-development and interpersonal relationships, ethics, digital citizenship and societal cultures” (Pilon-Larose, 2020).¹⁹⁸ His reasoning echoed what many critics had long called for—a greater emphasis on the ethics content of the ECR, and less on the religious content. Discussing a new replacement curriculum, he stated:

"We're abolishing it to replace it with something new. But there are going to be elements of the current course that are going to stay, like ethics, practicing dialogue, respect for self and others, fighting stereotypes. That's called a profound reform" (Pilon-Larose, 2020).¹⁹⁹

It is a fact that in North America, and in many scholarly circles around the world, the ERC was hailed as model for religious literacy education. It was *the template* to follow for plural democracies looking to bring school curriculum in line with shifting religious diversity in their populations. Still, Christian

¹⁹⁷ “The ERC course places too much emphasis on religion” (McQuade, 2020).

¹⁹⁸ « Le ministre de l’Éducation a déjà déterminé huit thèmes qui guideront l’élaboration du cours devant remplacer le programme d’éthique et culture religieuse au primaire et au secondaire. Il s’agit de la participation citoyenne et la démocratie, de l’éducation juridique, de l’écocitoyenneté, de l’éducation à la sexualité, du développement de soi et des relations interpersonnelles, de l’éthique, de la citoyenneté numérique et de la culture des sociétés ».

¹⁹⁹ « On l’abolit pour le remplacer par quelque chose de neuf. Mais comme il va y avoir des éléments du cours actuel qui vont rester, comme l’éthique, la pratique du dialogue, le respect de soi et des autres, la lutte contre les stéréotypes. On appelle ça une réforme en profondeur » (Pilon-Larose, 2020).

privilege permeated the program. Recognizing the inherent dilemma of the Christian framework of the ERC, Québec Religious Studies scholar Donald Boisvert wrote:

It is highly doubtful if the ERC curriculum would or could instil a critical appreciation for religion in primary and secondary school students. One of the persistent problems remains the hierarchy of religious traditions being proposed, with Roman Catholicism topping the pile. Can this patrimonial argument safely carry the day? In what ways does citizenship in the Quebec of today and that of tomorrow move beyond religion, whilst still retaining a foot in its Catholic past? Is this even viable? (2015: 393).

Highlighting the dual questions of “moving beyond religion’ and “citizenship,” Boisvert’s analysis touches upon both ‘difference’ as a broader category than just religious identity, and the requirements of citizenship in contemporary society. Deep equality, with its emphasis on displacing hierarchies, also resonates here in challenging the notion that there need be a particular tradition or worldview at the top of the “pile,” when it comes to construction curriculum (Beaman, 2017). Although he did not advocate for the outright elimination of the course, Boisvert’s critique of the ERC’s Christian scaffolding also takes on a much different scope when considered in light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, most notably those which are direct calls for education reform.

7.4 THE CALLS TO ACTION

The triangulation of data in this research project allowed me to see a broader view of the scholarly conversation on education *about* religion. From listening to interviewees, reading commentary by survey participants and diving into textbook content which perpetuated the erasures and harms of colonization, I eventually saw the scope of incompatibility between a dedicated curriculum such as the ERC, and education in Canada in this era of reconciliation. Finishing this

thesis at such a juncture Canadian history has been a time for sorrowful contemplation. Demands for apologies from the Catholic church for the residential school system amidst a wave of tragic discoveries in 2021 (starting with 215 graves of children at the site of a Kamloops, BC residential school), has given pause for a national reckoning about the specific religious roots of colonization (Dickson and Watson, 2021). Canada day celebrations were cancelled and turned into public and private time for reflection. When a papal apology finally did happen, many Indigenous public figures rightly indicated it was not enough. One such response from an Indigenous journalist offered this powerful précis:

Nobody expects Canada to dismantle itself and return to precolonial conditions. But people do expect this country to acknowledge its past, confront its racist foundations and abide by UNDRIP. To begin, it must disavow this Doctrine of Discovery as the foundation for its national policies and laws. Decolonization, true reconciliation, demands nothing less. Canada must understand that residential schools are only part of the story” (David, 2022).

The cessation of the ERC program was not explicitly (at least in media reports) tied to the Calls to Action. Nevertheless, data collected for this research (from the textual analysis, interviews and online survey) clearly pointed to the program’s absolute incompatibility with the project of reconciliation. My positionality as a settler and learner of Indigenous Peoples’ history, the ongoing impacts of colonization, and the Calls to Action, operated in the background as I analyzed interview data and conducted the textbook content analysis. On this point, I have been cautious about delving too deeply into an area in which I am only at the beginning of my learning/unlearning journey. I have also purposefully not used the language of decolonization in this thesis. I defer to the work of scholars Tuck and Yang who urge restraint in the use of the word ‘decolonization,’ arguing that “decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other

things we want to do to improve our societies and schools (Tuck and Yang, 2012: 1).²⁰⁰ They explain further:

At a conference on educational research, it is not uncommon to hear speakers refer, almost casually, to the need to ‘decolonize our schools,’ or use ‘decolonizing methods,’ or ‘decolonize student thinking.’ Yet, we have observed a startling number of these discussions make no mention of Indigenous peoples, our/their struggles for the recognition of our/their sovereignty, or the contributions of Indigenous intellectuals and activists to theories and frameworks of decolonization (2012: 3).

When I first read this quote by Tuck and Yang, as they called attention to absence of Indigenous voices in the sphere of education research, I was reminded of a short, yet evocative comment from a study participant who responded to the online survey. Answering the question ‘What sort of knowledge should students have about the religion, beliefs or worldviews of Indigenous Peoples in Canada?’ they said succinctly: “Ask Indigenous people that.” I agree and argue that the framework constructed by Indigenous peoples themselves through the Calls to Action offers an obvious starting point for education about religion and worldviews in Canadian classrooms. Specifically, Call to Action Number 64, which indicates: “We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with aboriginal elders (2015: 7-8).

²⁰⁰ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang are the editors for influential book series ‘Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education’ which “brings together the central concerns of Indigenous and decolonizing studies with the innovative contributions of social justice education” (Routledge, n.d.). Their work is regularly cited in education research literature across a large range of specialities. See Tuck & Yang, 2012.

7.5 NONRELIGION ON THE RISE

The landscape of religious and worldview diversity has shifted significantly since I first began my doctoral studies. Harbingers of new social realities abound in North American and beyond. Take, for example, the newly elected President of the Harvard University's Chaplains organization. Greg Epstein and author of the book *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* (2010), is the University's first Atheist chaplain (Tan, 2021). In a New York Times interview, Epstein explained his presence in such a position of influence at a school with a historically religious foundation: "There is a rising group of people who no longer identify with any religious tradition but still experience a real need for conversation and support around what it means to be a good human and live an ethical life" (Goldberg, 2021). Harvard's election of an atheist chaplain is certainly a notable story from higher education, but only a tip of the iceberg news item confirming the immensity of nonreligion on the rise in countries across the globe. According to the Nonreligion in a Complex Future Project (NCF) at the University of Ottawa:

In the last 15 years, there has been a rapid increase in the number of people who identify as having no religion. In many countries where Christianity has traditionally made up the religious majority, nonreligious populations are now significant. For instance, nearly one quarter of the populations of Canada and the US identify as nonreligious, along with one fifth of Nordic people (that is, people in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland). Britain's nonreligious population has almost surpassed the religious. Over 30% of Australians identify as nonreligious, and Latin America's nonreligious population varies from 8% to 37%. In all these countries, younger people are even more likely to identify as nonreligious, suggesting that the percentage of people identifying as nonreligious will continue to grow. This shift is profound, and its social impact is increasingly evident in public spaces where nonreligion challenges taken-for-granted religious practices, such as in schools, hospitals, and courts of law (*The Nonreligion in a Complex Future (NCF) Project*, n.d.)

The existence and scope of NCF project, (one of several around the world funded by major governmental research bodies), is indicative of the importance placed upon the seismic social changes

which are taking place. Statistics in Canada reveal that here too, there are historically unprecedented changes unfolding. A 2018 survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre showed that “a declining share of Canadians identify as Christians, while an increasing share say they have no religion” (Lipka, 2019). According to the study “about three-in-ten Canadians say they are either atheist (8%), agnostic (5%) or ‘nothing in particular (16%). Canadian census data indicate that the share of Canadians in this ‘religiously unaffiliated’ category rose from 4% in 1971 to 24% in 2011” (Lipka, 2019). In a country where many citizens may barely remember that the majority religious tradition once influenced which days of the week one could go shopping, the Pew study says “most Canadians say religion’s influence in public life is waning...with roughly two thirds of Canadian adults (64%) say[ing] religion has a less important role in their country than it did 20 years ago” (Lipka, 2019). Longitudinal research on the history and contemporary status of majority religion in this country, according to scholars Clarke and MacDonald, points to the solidly supported conclusion that “Canadian society is entering into a new era, a post-Christian era” (Clarke and MacDonald, 2017: 11). Waning Christianity and religiosity in general, are reconfiguring the makeup of social life in Canada.

7.6 RELINQUISHING

This chapter is about the gradual undoing of my assumptions and the (re)assemblage of my understanding of the place of religious/worldview literacy education in contemporary Canadian society. Looking through the lens of my conceptual framework, the parental and educator views shared during interviews, the *franchise* of online survey commentary, and the disturbing omissions and biases found in the ERC student manuals, I experienced a shift in thinking. I find myself now

standing apart from the scholars (and large corpus of literature) whose academic aim has been to hone and to refine approaches to teaching *about* religion, beliefs and worldviews in a dedicated curriculum. Drawing on notions from pluralism (as they relate to religious/worldview literacy education), xenosophia and deep equality to form a conceptual lens through which to explore viewpoints on religious and worldview literacy education in Canada, I argue that such educational content better serves students when woven throughout other subjects, rather than delimited in a singular curriculum. The analysis of data gathered from interviews, the online survey and the textual investigation showed a range of agreement *and* disagreement. On the one hand, there was a pressing societal need for education about religion, beliefs and worldviews; and on the other hand, there was no need at all for such education in a nonreligious Canadian future. Both hands, therefore, juggling the incompatibilities of majority-religion infused literacy curriculum, laid bare by the moral imperatives of reconciliation. The overarching narrative which emerged from this research is one of change, transformation and a need to ‘re-story’ education about diversity and difference (religious and beyond) in Canadian classrooms.

7.7 REWEAVING

This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge by interweaving thinking from the literature on **pluralism**, **xenosophia** and **deep equality** as a conceptual framework, carrying out the empirical work of textual analysis and exploring what parents and educators thought Canadian public-school (primary and secondary) students should learn in order to best prepare them for living and thriving in a diverse society. Triangulating data gathered from semi-structured interviews with parents and educators in Canada’s National Capital region (N=22), responses from a national online survey (N=190), and a textual analysis of secondary student manuals from Quebec’s Ethics and Religious

Culture Program (N=5), provided a holistic vantage point from which to consider the central research questions. Analysis and interpretation of findings revealed that learning about diversity and difference were of central importance, however, there were fundamental concerns regarding indoctrination, rejection of majority religious privilege and even-handedness in the presentation of belief systems. After analyzing the data and distilling findings into four categories, this research showed the following: 1) Respect, openness towards diversity and mitigating misunderstanding about religion as a source of conflict was predicated upon learning about other lifeways, worldviews and belief systems; 2) Learning about the religious roots of colonization and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action specific to education were crucial for critical thinking; and 3) Learning about non-religious worldviews as on par with other belief systems, was essential to understanding the social life in a diverse Canada. Given that existing discourse on religious and worldview literacy education tends to focus on teaching and learning in the context of a discrete curriculum such as Québec's ERC program, findings from this research suggest that the design of religious and worldview literacy curriculum must consider the contemporary social landscape which necessitate a reconsideration of literacy programs as integrated content in social studies or history courses. In this context, pluralism informed by xenosophia, and expanded by notions from deep equality can be understood to operate at the level of curricular design, by "relinquishing rightness" or hold on the idea that such religious/worldview literacy education must privilege historical religious majorities. Canada is no longer a country of a singular religious majority. The evolution of its diverse population is following a similar trajectory to that of other western democracies in which non-religious worldviews are becoming the majority tradition. Privileging Christianity in religion, belief and worldview curriculum does not reflect significant societal shifts towards nonreligious worldviews and undermines education about reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This dissertation thus proposes

a shift in thinking about how to best prepare young Canadians for citizenship in a diverse society—one in which the social significance of religious practice, belief and memory are rapidly waning.

7.8 POLICY AND PRACTICE

In the end, there was only one full cohort of students who experienced the ERC entire curriculum. That is, from a first grader who started public school in Quebec in 2008 when the course was introduced, to 2020 when the course was formally abolished, the era of learning *about* religion in a dedicated course was a much heralded, but singular chapter in the educational policy history of Quebec. What impact this might have on scholarly discussions or policy making in other jurisdictions outside of Canada who looked to the ERC as the literacy model to follow, remains to be seen. This research project, however, does have implications for scholars of religion and education as well as for policy decision makers in Canada. My study offers empirical evidence to support new thinking about the ‘what, how and where’ of teaching religious and worldview literacy. As mentioned previously, it proposes a change of course, based on new social realities (the rise of the nones and the non-religious) and on national reckonings for reconciliation (Calls to Action), both crucial considerations for education policy making.

7.9 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

This project adds to the corpus of research about religion and education, and makes a contribution to the specific sub-field of religious/worldview literacy. Weaving together the conceptual framework based on principles from pluralism, xenosophia and deep equality to form a trio of lenses

through which to explore the research questions, this project's triangulation of qualitative data from interviews, an online survey and a textual analysis of course manuals, adds empirical work and analysis to the many decades of thought on religion and education. I concur with the multitude of scholars cited throughout this thesis who advocate for teaching religious/worldview literacy as an aspect of learning which undergirds the idea of reducing societal frictions born of misunderstanding and xenophobia. Much of the scholarship points to a consensus that such education is needed; with one of the primary questions focused on how to best go about inculcating this type of knowledge. In this work, however, I diverge from the view that learning about religion and worldviews is best accomplished in its own separate curriculum or subject matter. Findings from this research suggest that increased public awareness about the religious entanglements of colonization, combined with the significant rise in the number of Canadians who hold non-religious worldviews, contribute to a rethinking of how such literacy endeavours may be better integrated into existing subject areas such as history or social studies.

7.10 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

I have already addressed a number of limitations in previous chapters, primarily related to sample size, the challenge of conducting a bilingual study, and those which are characteristic of qualitative research, generally speaking. Here I expand on limitations. Given that data from in-person interviews and online survey participants was collected using non-representative sampling techniques, I cannot make generalisations about the population of parents and educators in Canada. I did not prioritize the generalizability of results during the planning stages of the research, focusing instead on sampling methods wherein open-ended questions were integral to the gathering of stories

and details needed to enrich my understanding of the research questions. Although I have been careful to ‘let the data tell the story,’ I acknowledge that personal (conscious or unconscious) biases, in particular my background as a former public-school teacher and student of religious studies, may have influenced my understanding of the collective story told by participants. Institutional access barriers to recruiting participants through school boards significantly limited the diversity of my interview participant pool and resulted in data gathered from interviewees with primarily Christian backgrounds. Though my respondents were in many ways similar, they did bring up numerous examples of engagement with difference, and contributed new ideas to consider in conversations on education about religion, beliefs and worldviews. Suggestions for weaving the topic into other academic subjects such as civics, citizenship, history, or social studies, rather than in a separate, distinct course, spoke to a desire to see the principles of respect and openness emphasized in education about difference, writ large. Having had the opportunity to conduct interviews and focus groups with students in schools would have likely shifted some conclusions in my study. Although the aforementioned access issues prevented me from including youth voices, this limitation could also provide a starting point upon which to base future research and a methodological guidepost for designing studies which could circumvent potential recruitment hurdles. Similarly, the two prevailing (though opposite) participant viewpoint ‘camps’ which emerged in the online survey: 1) that education about religion, beliefs and worldviews was an aspirational and crucial subject in public school education; and 2) that such education is no longer relevant in Canadian society; revealed a limit in survey recruitment methods which could be remedied by alternative types of online promotion to larger target audiences.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

DOCTORAL THESIS TITLE:

Education about religion, beliefs and world views in Canadian public schools: Exploring the viewpoints of educators, students and parents

Principal Researcher

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Dr. Lori G. Beaman
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Dear (participant),

My name is Christine L. Cusack and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa. I am conducting a study for my PhD dissertation and would like to invite educators, parents and students from your institution to take part in a research project on learning about religion, beliefs and world views in Canadian public schools.

What is the purpose of the study? The topic of religion frequently makes headlines across the globe—how we understand these events and conversations can be linked to what we know about religious traditions and worldviews other than our own. The purpose of this study is to find out what educators, parents and students think young Canadians (ages 14-17) attending public school should learn about religion, beliefs and worldviews in order to best prepare them to negotiate and to engage with diversity in contemporary society.

What will happen during the study? Educators and parents will be asked to participate in a confidential, audio-recorded interview or to complete an anonymous, online survey. The interview will last 30 to 45 minutes and may take place at school, in a classroom, in an office or at another location convenient for the participant. Students will be asked to participate in a 8-10 person focus group at school, lasting 30 to 45 minutes, and will include the presence of a staff member (either a teacher, a counselor or an administrator). I will undertake to safeguard the privacy of the focus group discussion and will ask the other members of the focus group to keep what is said confidential. Due to the nature of focus group discussions, however, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Guides for interview and focus group questions are attached to this letter.

Are there any risks? It is not likely that there will be any harms or discomforts from participating in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants can choose to not answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Questions about religious practice are for demographic purposes only.

Are there any benefits? There are no direct benefits. Participants, however, will have the opportunity to express their opinions regarding the focus of this research study.

What about confidentiality and anonymity? I assure that information gathered from interview participants will remain strictly confidential. The contents will be used only for the research purposes as stated above, and

participants' confidentiality will be protected. The online survey will be filled out anonymously. Interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded and then transcribed, but this recording and transcription will be kept secure as described below. Only my thesis supervisor and I will have access to these recordings and transcriptions as well as to any notes taken during the interview. Individual participants' names, school names and school board names will remain confidential. All members of the focus group will be asked to keep what is said confidential and the staff member (teacher, counsellor or administrator) present during the focus group discussion will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. Due to the nature of focus group discussions, however, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Anonymity will be protected in that real names of participants, schools or school boards will not be used in any reports or presentations based on findings from this research. In all such reports, identities will not be revealed and all information that may identify people or institutions will be altered or removed.

What about conservation of data? Data collected, including the audio recording and the transcription, as well as analyses of the data by the researcher and thesis supervisor will be kept in a secure manner, locked in the supervisor's laboratory at the University of Ottawa. Data will be stored on computers and data storage devices that are password protected. Data stored in a dedicated cloud service will be encrypted and password protected with two-step verification, shared only with thesis supervisor. All copies of data will be kept securely for five years after the results of the study have been published, and then will be securely deleted. Upon publication of research results and five-year conservation period has ended, paper copies of research data will be shredded.

What about compensation? Participants will not receive compensation for participation in this research project.

What about study results? Results will be available in 2018 and may be accessed from UOttawa Research through this link: <https://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/handle/10393/242>

What about additional questions? For questions or more information about the study itself, please contact me directly. This study has been reviewed by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board and has received ethical clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact: Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5, (613) 562-5387 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

May I meet with your teachers and parents? With your permission, I would like to introduce my research project in a brief, 10-minute presentation at your next staff meeting as well as the next parent participation organization meeting. I will contact you in a follow-up email this week regarding the possibility of doing so. Please accept my sincerest gratitude for your consideration of this project.

Sincerely,

Christine L. Cusack, PhD Student
Department of Classics and Religious Studies
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

APPENDIX 2: RESEARCH POSTER AND [WEBSITE SURVEY LINK](#)

Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

Research Study: Learning about Religion, Beliefs & World views in Public Education

What do you think Canadian public school students should learn in order to best prepare them for citizenship in a diverse society?

- Are you a public secondary school educator? (teachers, principals, specialists)
- Are you the parent of a public school student? (14-17 years of age)



We are seeking volunteers to participate in a confidential 45 minute interview or to complete an online survey at www.websiteaddress.ca. Please contact us by phone [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

STUDY TITLE: Education about religion, beliefs and world views in Canadian public schools: Exploring the viewpoints of educators, students & parents

Christine L. Cusack, PhD Candidate
Department of Classics and Religious Studies
55 Laurier, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5

[REDACTED]





- Home
- The Project
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- Reading Corner
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- Resources
- Research Centres
- Seven years of research: A User's Guide
- Religion and Diversity Project Final Team Meeting
- Site Map
- Contact us
- Team Portal - Login

Learning about Religion, Beliefs & World views in Public Education

Events Calendar

June 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				
October 2016						



Learning about Religion, Beliefs & World views in Public Education

What do you think Canadian public school students should learn in order to best prepare them for citizenship in a diverse society?

-Are you an educator in a Canadian public school? (non-confessional)
(current or retired teachers, administrators, and counselors in primary or secondary education)

-Are you the parent of a student attending a public primary or secondary school in Canada?
(non-confessional)

We are seeking volunteers to participate in a nationwide research study by completing a brief, anonymous online survey.

[Click here to take the survey](#)

APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS (educators/parents)

DOCTORAL THESIS TITLE:

Education about religion, beliefs and world views in Canadian public schools: Exploring the viewpoints of educators, students and parents

Principal Researcher

Christine L. Cusack, PhD Student
Department of Classics and Religious Studies
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5

Thesis Supervisor

Dr. Lori G. Beaman
Department of Classics and Religious Studies
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5

Invitation to participate: I am invited to participate in the above mentioned research study conducted by Christine L. Cusack.

Purpose of the study: The topic of religion frequently makes headlines across the globe—how we understand these events and conversations can be linked to what we know about religious traditions and worldviews other than our own. The purpose of this study is to find out what educators, parents and students think young Canadians (ages 14-17) attending public school should learn about religion, beliefs and worldviews in order to best prepare them to negotiate diversity in contemporary society.

Participation: My participation will entail taking part in a one-on-one, face-to-face interview lasting 30 - 45 minutes. During this interview I will be asked about my own religious identity and to discuss issues related education about religion and belief in public schools. This interview is scheduled for _____.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail no foreseeable risks greater than those that I might face in everyday life. It is not likely that there will be any harms or discomforts from participating in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants can choose to not answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Questions about religious practice are for demographic purposes only.

Benefits: My participation will benefit Canadian society in that the knowledge generated by this study will address a significant gap in research related to education about religion and its relevance in the Canadian context.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I share will remain strictly confidential. I understand my information will be used only for the research purposes as stated above and my anonymity will be protected. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Only the principle investigator and her thesis supervisor will have access to this recording and transcription as well as to any notes taken during the interview. My name, school name and school board name will remain confidential. Furthermore, my anonymity will be protected in that my real name will not be used in any reports or presentations based on findings from this research. In all such reports my identity will not be revealed and all information that may identify me will be altered or removed.

Conservation of data: Data collected, including the audio recording and the transcription, as well as analyses of the data by the researcher and thesis supervisor will be kept in a secure manner, locked in the supervisor's laboratory at the University of Ottawa. Data will be stored on computers and data storage devices that are password protected. Data stored in a dedicated cloud service will be encrypted and password protected with two-step verification, shared only with thesis supervisor. All copies of data will be kept securely for five years after the results of the study have been published, and then will be securely deleted. Upon publication of research results and five-year conservation period has ended, paper copies of research data will be shredded.

Compensation: I will not receive compensation for participation in this research project.

Voluntary participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all that I have said during the interview up until that time will be erased and not used in the research.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5; (613) 562-5378; Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

I will keep an electronic copy of this consent form and return another electronic copy as an attachment to Christine L. Cusack, indicating my consent to participate.

Consent:

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Ph.D. Student, Christine L. Cusack, at the University of Ottawa which is under the supervision of Professor Lori G. Beaman. If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Christine L. Cusack from the University of Ottawa
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- If I participate in an interview, **I agree that it can be audio recorded.**

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ENGLISH)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (educators/parents)

Before we begin, all responses will be anonymous and confidential. Are you in agreement with this interview being recorded? This interview will take 30-45 minutes.

First, a few questions about you:

1. What is your age?

2. Gender?

3. Occupation?

4. Are you participating in this study as an educator? A parent? Or both?

(For educators)

5. How many years have you been in education?

6. What is your current position or teaching grade level?

What subject(s) do you teach?

(For parents)

7. How old is (are) your child(ren)?

Now, some questions about your religion or worldview:

8. What three words first come into your head when you think about religion?

9. Would you describe yourself as any of the following:

Religious / not religious but spiritual / not religious or spiritual / other / not sure

10. Do you identify with a particular religion, belief or world view? If so, which?

11. Would you say that you practice a religion? If yes, do you practice in any of the following ways?

Worship / Volunteering / Private Prayer / Communal Prayer / Other _____

12. How important is your religion, belief or world view to you?

1 = not at all, 2 = not very, 3 = slightly, 4 = quite important, 5 = very important

Now, some questions about students

13. In terms of content, what do you think students should learn about religion, beliefs or worldviews in school? Prompts:

Beliefs, Practices

How religion is lived by individuals, History
Controversies-occasions where religion is seen as a possible source of conflict

The sociological context-how religion operates in society

Contemporary religious landscape

Engaging with ultimate questions about truth claims

14. What range of religions/and or beliefs/worldviews do you think students should learn about in schools? Prompts:

The 6/9 major world religions (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Ba'hai, Jainism, Shinto)

Indigenous traditions (in Canada)

Contemporary informal religion (spiritualism)

Non-religion (humanism, atheism, secularism)

Legally defined beliefs (veganism, environmentalism)

15. Do you think learning about religion, beliefs and world views (other than one's own) can foster specific skills which other learning does not?

16. What sort of knowledge about religion and belief do you think students should take with them to their future workplaces?

17. What sort of knowledge should students have about the religion, beliefs and world views of Canada's indigenous peoples?

18. Do you think education about religion, beliefs and world views should be compulsory for all students? What levels?

19. Do you think there should be education about religion, beliefs and world views in public schools throughout the Canada?

20. Do you think multiculturalism has an impact on how students understand the diversity of religions, beliefs and world views in Canada? Could you explain?

21. Do you think interculturalism has an impact on how students understand the diversity of religions, beliefs and world views in Canada? Could you explain?

22. Is there anything I have not asked but you would like to add?

(Debriefing) Thank you for taking this survey. Your answers are a valuable part of this research and will help us to understand public opinion about the study's objectives. Your participation will remain anonymous and will not impact your employment. This study has been approved by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board. If you have further questions about this study please direct them to **END**

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (FRENCH)

QUESTIONNAIRE ENTRETIEN PERSONNEL (éducateurs/parents)

Toutes les réponses sont anonymes et confidentielles. Êtes-vous d'accord pour que cet entretien soit enregistré pour les fins de cette étude ? L'ensemble de cet entretien devrait durer 30 à 45 minutes.

Questions générales

1. Quel est votre âge?
2. Votre genre ?
3. Votre activité principale ?
4. Êtes-vous un éducateur, un parent, les deux ?
5. (pour les éducateurs) Depuis combien d'années travaillez-vous dans l'éducation ?
6. Quel est votre poste actuel ou votre classe d'enseignement ? Quelle matière enseignez-vous ?
7. (pour les parents) Quel âge ont vos enfants?

Questions sur vos religions et convictions

8. Quels sont les trois mots qui vous viennent spontanément à l'esprit quand vous pensez à la religion?
9. Vous reconnaissez-vous dans l'une des descriptions suivantes : Vous adhérez à une religion / Vous n'adhérez pas à une religion mais vous considérez comme spirituel / vous ne vous considérez ni adhérent d'une religion, ni spirituel / Vous ne savez pas
10. Vous identifiez-vous à une religion particulière, une spiritualité, une représentation du monde ? Si oui, laquelle ?
11. Si oui, diriez-vous que vous pratiquez une religion ? Si oui, vous reconnaissez-vous dans l'une des attitudes suivantes : Membre du culte ou du clergé / Bénévole / Prière à titre personnel / Prière communautaire / Autre (précisez)
12. Si oui, pour vous, votre religion, votre spiritualité ou votre représentation du monde : est très importante / assez importante / importante / plutôt pas

importante / pas importante du tout

Questions sur la religion, les croyances, les représentations du monde des élèves

13. En termes de contenu, que pensez-vous que les élèves doivent apprendre à l'école sur la religion, les croyances, les représentations du monde ? Indiquez pour chacun de ces items s'il vous semble très important / assez important / important / plutôt pas important / pas important du tout :

Croyances, pratiques;
Comment la religion, la croyance, la représentation du monde, est-elle vécue par les gens;
L'histoire des religions, des croyances, des représentations du monde; Débats et controverses liés aux religions, croyances, représentations du monde comme source potentielle de violence ;
Contexte sociologique et présence de la religion, de la croyance, des représentations du monde dans la société
Paysage religieux contemporain;
Débat autour des doctrines de religion et des postures de vérité.

14. Quel éventail de religions et / ou de croyances, spiritualités, convictions, représentations du monde, pensez-vous que les élèves doivent apprendre à l'école ?

Indiquez pour chacun de ces items s'il vous semble très important / assez important / important / plutôt pas important / pas important du tout

Les 6 / 9 religions mondiales les plus importantes (christianisme, islam, hindouisme, bouddhisme, sikhisme, judaïsme, bahaïsme, jaïnisme, shintoïsme)
Les traditions indigènes (au Canada)
Les spiritualités contemporaines
Les convictions non religieuses (humanisme, athéisme, sécularisme)
Les croyances reconnues par la loi (véganisme, écologie)
Autre (précisez) :

15. Pensez-vous qu'éduquer à la religion, aux croyances, et aux représentations du monde (autres que la sienne propre) puisse favoriser des compétences particulières et uniques, que l'on n'apprend pas ailleurs?

16. Quels types de savoir sur la religion, les croyances et les représentations du monde, pensez-vous que les élèves doivent développer sur leurs lieux de travail ?

17. Quels types de savoir les élèves devraient-ils avoir sur la religion, les croyances et les représentations du monde des peuples autochtones canadiens ?

18. Pensez-vous qu'éduquer à propos de la religion, des croyances et des représentations du monde devrait être obligatoire pour tous les élèves ? Si oui, à quel niveau ?

19. Pensez-vous qu'il devrait y avoir un enseignement sur la religion, les croyances et les représentations du monde dans les écoles publiques du Canada ?

20. Pensez-vous que le multiculturalisme a un impact sur la manière dont les élèves comprennent la diversité des religions, des croyances et des représentations du monde au Canada? Pouvez-vous développer votre pensée ?

21. Pensez-vous que l'interculturalisme a un impact sur la manière dont les élèves comprennent la diversité des religions, des croyances et des représentations du monde au Canada? Pouvez-vous développer votre pensée ?

22. Souhaitez-vous ajouter quelque chose d'autre ?

Merci d'avoir participé à cette enquête par cet entretien. Vos réponses sont importantes pour notre recherche et vont nous aider à mieux comprendre la société canadienne d'aujourd'hui. Votre participation demeure anonyme et n'aura aucune incidence ni sur votre vie personnelle, ni sur vos activités professionnelles. Cette recherche a été approuvée par le Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche de l'Université d'Ottawa. Si vous avez des questions concernant cette étude, vous pouvez contacter la chercheuse directement au. **FIN**

APPENDIX 6: ONLINE SURVEY PREAMBLE AND CONSENT FORM

This survey is administered by Christine L. Cusack from the Department of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa. **The purpose of this survey is to explore what educators and parents think students should learn about religion, beliefs and world views in Canadian public schools.** Anonymous information gathered during this survey will be included in a doctoral thesis, scholarly journal articles, and conference presentations. This survey should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. People filling out this survey must be 18 years of age or older, Canadian public school educators (including current or retired teachers, principals, specialists) or parents of public school students ages 14-17.

To learn more about the survey and the researcher's study, risks associated with the survey, how confidentiality and anonymity will be handled, withdrawal procedures, or how to obtain information about the survey's results, please read the accompanying letter of information. This survey is part of a study that has been reviewed and cleared by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board.

The information that you will share will remain strictly confidential and will be used solely for the purposes of this research. Your write-in answers and answers to open-ended questions may be used verbatim in presentations and publications but you will not be identified, as the source of the quote. Anonymity is guaranteed since you are not being asked to provide your name or any level of personal information with which you could be identified. This survey is hosted by Fluid Survey, a Canadian company with servers in Canada, thus collected data is not subject to the U.S. Patriot Act. The survey and its results will be removed from the Fluid Survey site by the end of 2018.

You are free to complete this survey or not. If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted, please contact: Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5, (613) 562-5387 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

Consent to Participate Statement:

Having read the above, I understand that by clicking the "Yes" button below, I agree to take part in this study under the terms and conditions outlined in the accompanied letter of information.

YES "I agree to participate."

SURVEY QUESTIONS (SEE APPENDIX M)

In order to help ensure your confidentiality, please use standard safety measures such as signing out of your account, closing your browser and locking your screen or device when you have completed the survey. Please print and keep the consent page for your records.

EXIT SURVEY

NO "I do not agree to participate."

Do Not Agree to Participate Statement: Thank you. You have decided not to participate in this survey. No data has been collected from you.

Quit Statement:

Thank you. You have decided to quit this survey. None of your survey responses have been collected or stored.

EXIT SURVEY

APPENDIX 7: ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

(Survey preamble and consent document will appear first. Participant must click to agree and continue. An option to exit the survey will also be offered)

All responses will be anonymous and confidential. This survey will take about 20-30 minutes to complete.

First, a few questions about you:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your occupation?
4. Are you participating in this study as an educator, as a parent or both? Please check one

educator /parent/both

(For educators)

5. How many years have you worked in education?
6. What is your current position and teaching grade level?
7. If you are retired, what was your last position or teaching grade level?
8. What subject(s) do (did) you teach?
9. In which city and province do (did) you work? Select one.

(For parents)

10. In which city and province do you reside?
11. How old is (are) your child(ren)?

Now, some questions about your religion, beliefs or world view:

12. What three words first come into your head when you think about religion?
13. Would you describe yourself as any of the following? Please choose one.

Religious / not religious but spiritual / not religious or spiritual / other / not sure

14. Do you identify with a particular religion, belief or world view? If so, which?
15. Would you say that you practice your religion? If yes, do you practice in any of the following ways?

Worship / Volunteering / Private Prayer / Communal Prayer / Other

16. How important is your religion, belief or world view to you?

1 = not at all, 2 = not very, 3 = slightly, 4 = quite important, 5 = very important

Now, some questions about students

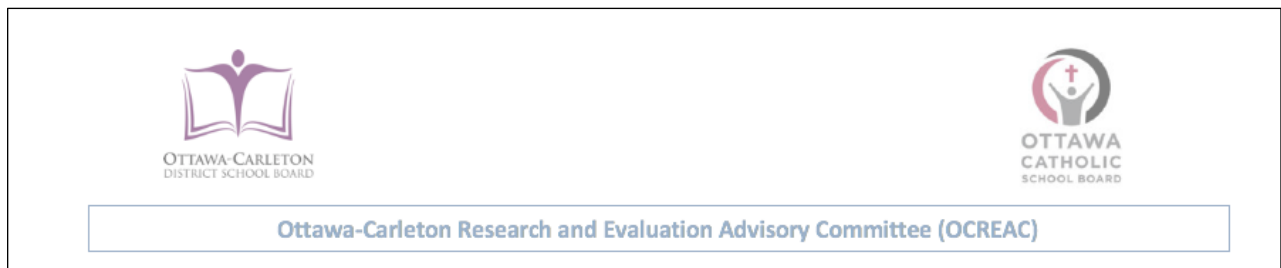
17. Has your son or daughter had a class or classes about religion, beliefs or world views in public school?
18. In terms of content, what, if anything, do you think students should learn about religion, beliefs or world views in public school?

- 19. Do you think learning about religion, beliefs and world views (other than one's own) can foster specific skills which other learning does not?**
- 20. What sort of knowledge about religion, beliefs and world views do you think students should take with them to their future workplaces?**
- 21. What sort of knowledge should students have about the religion, beliefs and world views of Canada's indigenous peoples?**
- 22. Do you think education about religion, beliefs and world views should be compulsory for all students? What grade levels?**
- 23. Do you think there should be a standard religion, beliefs and world views curriculum in all Canadian public schools?**
- 24. Do you think multiculturalism has an impact on how students understand the diversity of religions, beliefs and worldviews in Canada? Could you explain?**
- 25. Do you think interculturalism has an impact on how students understand the diversity of religions, beliefs and world views in Canada? Could you explain?**
- 26. Is there anything you would like to add?**
- 27. How did you hear about this research?**

(Debriefing) Thank you for taking this survey. Your answers are a valuable part of this research and will help us to understand public opinion about the study's objectives. Your participation will remain anonymous and your responses will not impact your employment. This study has been approved by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board. If you have further questions about this study please direct them to.

EXIT SURVEY

APPENDIX 8: SCHOOL BOARD COMMUNICATIONS



June 6, 2016

Christine L. Cusack

Re: Education about religion, beliefs and world views in Canadian public schools: Exploring the viewpoints of educators, students and parents

Dear Miss Cusack,

The Ottawa-Carleton Research and Evaluation Advisory Committee has reviewed your application and is **unable to approve** your application to conduct this research in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.

While we can agree that education plays a vital role in developing youth citizenship within the multicultural Canadian context, curriculum related to education of religion, beliefs and worldviews is developed and prescribed by the Ontario Ministry of Education in publicly available policy and curriculum documents. Information related to what is currently being taught in Ontario's public schools, as well as the Ministry's rationale for these choices, is outlined in curriculum documents such as *Canadian and World Studies*, *Interdisciplinary Studies*, *Native Studies*, and *Social Sciences and Humanities*.

While it is clear that you are interested in collecting opinions from students, staff, and parents related to the public education of beliefs, religions and worldviews, your rationale for doing so from within the public-school board, rather than sampling a wider public audience, is unconvincing. As the collection of opinions related to the education of these topics offers no direct benefit at a school or Board level, it is recommended that you approach the Ministry directly with your request if you wish to do so from within public schools. Alternatively, our second recommendation is that you approach other venues, both denominational and non-denominational, to obtain a wider, more representative sample of student and parent voices.

Should you consider submitting your application to alternate sources, our final recommendations would be to strengthen its contents by (1) providing a more concrete review of existing research on the topic; (2) providing a rationale for the selection and inclusion of chosen questions in your

study; (3) outlining expectations for the outcome of your analysis more clearly; and (4) ensuring consistency in the wording of questions across the various components of the study (interview/ focus group/ online survey).

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss the concerns raised above, please contact Dr. [redacted] either by email or by phone. On behalf of the Ottawa-Carleton Research and Evaluation Advisory Committee, we thank you for your interest in pursuing research within Ottawa-Carleton area school boards and wish you all the best in your studies.

Sincerely,

Research Officer, Quality Assurance
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

	<p>Ottawa Catholic School Board 570 Hunt Club Road West • Nepean • Ontario • K2G 3R4</p> <p>Ottawa-Carleton District School Board 133 Greenbank Road • Nepean • Ontario • K2H 6L3</p>
--	---

Permission to conduct Ph.D. research: Education about religion, beliefs and world views in Canadian public schools: Exploring the viewpoints of educators, students and parents

Mon, Jun 6, 2016 at 8:49 PM

My apologies for the delay in responding but at this time we will have to decline participation. We are frequently solicited for access to our staff and students for research purposes and must decline my requests that do not have a direct potential for impact on student achievement.

I wish you the best in your research.

Directrice Générale Adjointe-Directrice des services éducatifs

Assistant Director General-Director of Education

Western Quebec School Board

PROJET DE RECHERCHE L'éducation sur la religion, les croyances et les représentations du monde dans les écoles publiques canadiennes: Explorer les points de vue des éducateurs, des étudiants et des parents

Mon, Jun 6, 2016 at 3:50 PM

Bonjour Mme Cusack,

J'ai autorisé votre projet et je l'ai transmis à l'ensemble des directions d'établissement.

Aussi, j'ai invité les gestionnaires désireux d'y prendre part à communiquer directement avec vous.

Espérant le tout conforme, recevez, madame, l'expression de mes sentiments les meilleurs.

APPENDIX 9: GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON (EXCERPT)

πρὸς ξενίας τὰς σᾶς by thy friendship with us, Soph. 3. the state or disabilities of an alien, ξενίας φεύγειν (sc. γραφήν) to be indicted as an alien, Ar.
ξενίζω, Ion. and Ep. ξενίζω, f. ἴσω, Ep. ἴσω, Att. ἴω: Ep. aor. 1 ἐξείνισσα or ξείνισσα: (ξένος):—to receive or entertain strangers, to receive as a guest, Lat. hospitio excipere, Hom., Hdt., etc.; ξ. τιὰ πολλοῖς ἀγαθοῖς to present with hospitable gifts, Xen.:—metaph., δὲ Ἄρης οὐκ ἐξείνισεν, i. e. who fell not in battle, Soph.—Pass. to be entertained as a guest, Hdt., Att. II. to astonish by some strange sight, Polyb.:—Pass. to be astonished, Id. III. intr. to be a stranger, speak with a foreign accent, Luc.: to be strange or unusual, Id.
ξενικός, ἡ, ὄν, and ὄσι, ὄν; Ion. ξενικός:—of or for a stranger, of foreign kind, opp. to ἀστικός, Eur.; ξενικά the taxes paid by aliens at Athens, Dem.;—τὸ ξ. the class of aliens, Arist.; τὸ ξ. (sc. δικαστήριον) the court in which aliens sued or were sued, Id. 2. of soldiers, hired for service, mercenary, Hdt., Xen.: τὸ ξενικόν = οἱ ξένοι, a body of mercenaries, Ar., Thuc., etc. 3. = ξένιος, hospitable, friendly, Aeschin.:—ἡ ξενική friendly relation, as between host and guest, Arist. II. foreign, alien, Hdt.; ξ. ὀνόματα foreign names, Plat.; of style, foreign, i. e. abounding in unusual words, Arist.
ξένιος, α, or, Att. also οσι, or, Ion. ξείνιος:—belonging to a friend and guest, hospitable, Ζεὺς ξένιος as protector of the rights of hospitality, Il., Aesch.:—τράπεζα ξ. the guests' table, Od.; ξένιος τιμι bound to him by ties of hospitality, Hdt. 2. ξένια, Att. ξένια, τά, friendly gifts, meat and drink, given to the guest by his host, Hom.; ξένια παρέσχε δαῖτα as a friendly gift, Aesch.; βοῶν ξένια ἐπέμφεν Xen.; ἐπὶ ξένια καλεῖν to invite any one to eat with you, Hdt., etc.; metaph., θάνατος ξενία σοι γενήσεται Eur. II. foreign, Pind., Att.
ξένισις, ἡ, (ξενίζω) the entertainment of guests, Thuc.
ξενισμός, δ, = ξένισις, Plat.
ξενιτεία, ἡ, a living abroad, Luc. From
ξενιτεύω, f. σω, (ξένος) to live abroad, Luc. II.
 Dep. ξενιτεύομαι, to be in foreign service, Isocr.
ξeno-δαίκτης, ου, δ, one who murders guests, Eur.
ξeno-δαίτης, ου, ἡ, (δαίς) one that devours guests or strangers, of the Cyclops, Eur.
ξenoδοκέω, Ion. ξεινο-, to entertain guests or strangers, Hdt., Eur., etc.:—in late Gr. ξenoδοχέω, N. T. From
ξeno-δόκος, Ion. and Ep. ξεινοδόκος, δ, (δέχομαι) one who receives strangers, a host, Od. Hence
ξenoδοχία, ἡ, entertainment of a stranger, Xen.
ξeno-δότης, ου, δ, a host, epith. of Bacchus, Anth.
ξenoείεις, εσσα, εν, (ξένος) full of strangers, Eur.
ξeno-θύτιω, f. ἴσω, (θύω) to sacrifice strangers, Strab.
ξenoκτονέω, Ion. ξεινοκτ-, to slay guests or strangers, Hdt., Eur. II. to slay one's host, Eur. From
ξeno-κτόνος, ου, (κτείνω) slaying guests or strangers, Eur., Aeschin.
ξenολογέω, f. ἴσω, to enlist strangers, levy mercenaries, Dem., etc. From
ξeno-λόγος, ου, (λόγω) levying mercenaries, Polyb.
ξeno-πάθειω, f. ἴσω, (πάθος) to have a strange feeling, feel strange or shy, Plut.

ΞΕ'ΝΟΣ, δ, Ion. ξείνος (used also by Trag.): I. a guest-friend, i. e. any citizen of a foreign state, with whom one has a treaty of hospitality for self and heirs, confirmed by mutual presents (ξένια) and an appeal to Ζεὺς ξένιος, Hom. 2. of one of the parties bound by ties of hospitality, i. e. either the guest, or = ξεινοδόκος, the host, Id., Hdt., etc. 3. any one entitled to hospitality, a stranger, refugee, Od. 4. any stranger or foreigner, Hes., Att.:—the term was politely used of any one whose name was unknown, and the address ξείνε came to mean little more than friend, Soph. II. a foreign soldier, hireling, mercenary, Thuc., Xen.
 B. as Adj. ξένος, η, ου, and οσι, ου, Ion. ξείνιος, η, ου, foreign, Soph., Eur., etc. II. c. gen. rei, strange to a thing, ignorant of it, Soph.:—Adv. ξένως ἔχω τῆς λέξεως I am a stranger to the language, Plat. III. alien, strange, unusual, Aesch.
ξeno-στᾶσις, ἡ, a lodging for guests or strangers, Soph.
ξenoσύνη, Ion. ξειν-, ἡ, hospitality, Od.
ξeno-τίμιος, ου, (τιμή) honouring strangers, Aesch.
ξenotrophéw, f. ἴσω, (τρέφω) to entertain strangers, to maintain mercenary troops, Thuc., Dem.
ξenophónéw, f. ἴσω, to murder strangers, Eur. From
ξeno-φόνος, ου, (*φίνω) murdering strangers, Eur.
ξenoús, Ion. ξεινούς, f. ἴσω, (ξένος) to make one's friend and guest, Aesch. II. mostly in Pass., with fut. med. ξενόσομαι: pf. ἐξείνισμαι: aor. 1 ἐξενάσθην: 1. to enter into a treaty of hospitality with one, Lat. hospitio jungi, c. dat., Hdt., Xen.; absol., Xen. 2. to take up his abode with one as a guest, to be entertained, Trag. 3. to be in foreign parts, to be abroad, Soph., Eur.: to go into banishment, Eur.
ξenών, ὄνος, δ, (ξένος) a guest-chamber, Eur.
ξένωσις, ἡ, (ξενόω II. 3) a being abroad, Eur.
ξηρός, ἄ, ὄν, Ion. for ξηρός, dry, ποτὶ ξηρόν to the dry land, Od., Anth.
ξίσμα, ατος, τό, (ξίω) = ξόανον, Anth.
ξίσσε, Ep. 3 sing. aor. 1 of ξίω.
ξίστης, ου, δ, = Lat. sextarius, nearly a pint, N. T.
ξιστός, ἡ, ὄν, smoothed, polished, wrought, Hom., Hdt., Att.; ξ. αἰθουσαι halls of polished stone, Il. From
ΞΕ'Ω, impf. ἔξω: aor. 1 ἔξεσα, Ep. ξέσσα:—Pass., pf. ἔξεσμαι:—to smooth or polish by scraping, planing, filing, of a carpenter, Od., etc.
ξηρά (sc. γῆ), ἡ, dry land, v. ξηρός III.
ξηραίνω, f. ἄνω: aor. 1 ἐξηράνα:—Pass., aor. 1 ἐξηράνην: pf. ἐξηρασμαι: (ξηρός):—to parch up, dry up, Eur., Xen.:—Pass. to become or be dry, parched, Il., etc. 2. to lay dry, Lat. siccare, Thuc.
ξηρ-ἄλοιφέω, (ἀλείφω) properly to rub dry with oil, without the use of the bath, Lex ap. Plut., Aeschin.
ξηρ-αμπέλινος, η, ου, of the colour of withered vine-leaves, bright red, Juven.
ΞΗΡΟΣ, ἄ, ὄν, dry, Lat. siccus, opp. to ὑγρός, Hdt., Ar.; ξηροὶ ὄμμασι, Horace's siccis oculis, Aesch. 2. of bodily condition, withered, lean, haggard, δίμας Eur., Theocr. II. like Lat. siccus, fasting, austere, harsh, Eur., Ar.; ἐν ξηροῖσιν ἐκτρέφειν Eur. III. as Subst., ἡ ξηρά (sc. γῆ), dry land, Xen.: so, τὸ ξηρόν Hdt.: ναῦς ἐπὶ τοῦ ξηροῦ ποιεῖν to leave the ships aground, Thuc.
ξηρότης, ητος, ἡ, (ξηρός) dryness, Plat., Xen.: ἡ ξ.

APPENDIX 10: NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES (NEH) 'RELIGIOUS LITERACY IN A PLURAL AGE' WORKING CONFERENCE (2016)


The image is a screenshot of a Facebook event page. At the top left is the Facebook logo and a 'Sign Up' button. Below the logo is a navigation menu with 'Events' selected. The event title is 'NEH "Religious Literacy in a Plural Age" Working Conference', hosted by the 'HDS Religious Literacy Project'. The date is 'Saturday, July 9, 2016 at 9:00 AM - 4:15 PM EDT'. The location is 'Harvard Divinity School, 45 Francis Ave, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138'. There are 2 people who went and 1 person interested. The event details include a paragraph about religious literacy in England and Quebec, and a list of speakers: Diane Moore, Adam Dinham, Christine L. Cusack, Jim Fraser, Linda K. Wertheimer, Nate Walker, Vincent Biondo, and Steve Prothero. The event is categorized under 'Religious studies' and 'Education'. The host is the 'HDS Religious Literacy Project'.

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 NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE
Humanities
FIFTY YEARS

JUL 9 NEH "Religious Literacy in a Plural Age"
Working Conference
Public · Hosted by HDS Religious Literacy Project

🕒 Saturday, July 9, 2016 at 9:00 AM - 4:15 PM EDT
More than a year ago

📍 Harvard Divinity School
45 Francis Ave, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138 [Show Map](#)

2 Went · 1 Interested
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Details


Has religious literacy become a necessary component of citizenship? In England and Quebec, the state school curricula have been revised to include religious literacy. Do these programs share successful strategies that can succeed in the U.S.? Faculty experts and doctoral students from diverse disciplines and backgrounds will present on how to improve religious literacy education across ethnic, religious, and partisan lines.

Featuring
Opening Keynote: Diane Moore on the AAR's Public Understanding Efforts (HDS)
Adam Dinham on Religious Education in England (Goldsmiths)
Christine L. Cusack from the "Religion and Diversity Project" in Canada (Ottawa)
Jim Fraser on the new edition of *Between Church and State* (NYU)
Linda K. Wertheimer on religious literacy across the U.S. in *Faith Ed* (Print Journalist)
Nate Walker (Newseum)
Vincent Biondo on the NEH California Pluralism Project (CSU Fresno)
Closing Keynote: Steve Prothero, Author of *Religious Literacy and God Is Not One* (BU)

[See Less](#) *

Religious studies Education

Hosted by

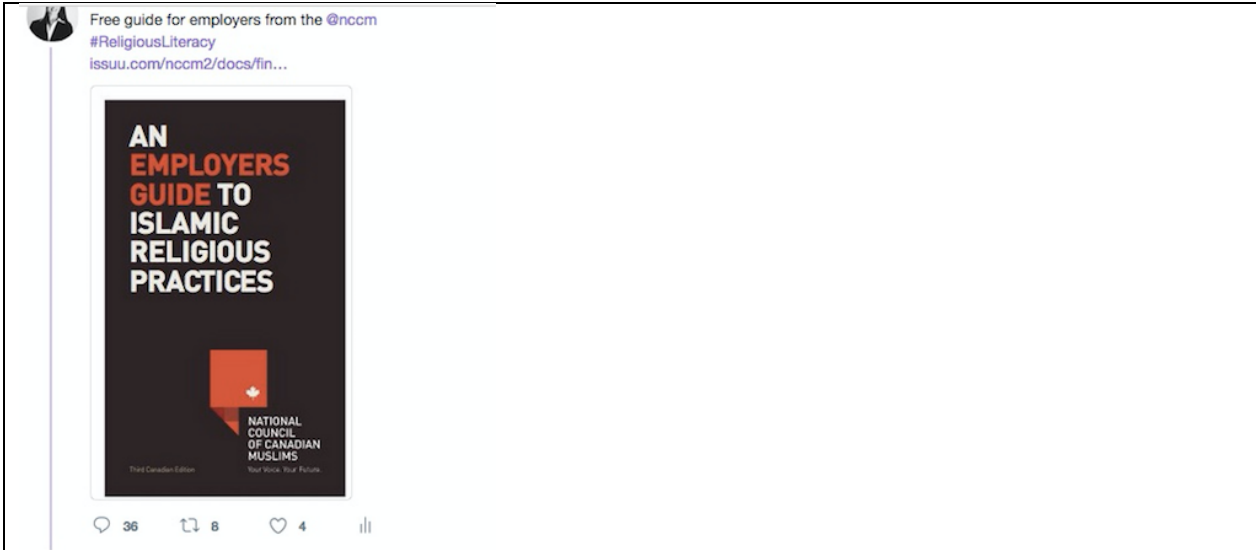
 HDS Religious Literacy Project

APPENDIX 11: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS						
Identifier	Language	Religion/Worldview	Occupation	Age	Gender	Parent, Educator or Both
P1	English	Catholic	Primary School Teacher	42	Female	Both
P2	English	Catholic	Primary School Teacher	58	Female	Both
P3	English	Catholic/None	Primary School Teacher, psychologist	62	Female	Educator
P4	English	Latter-day Saint (LDS)	Primary School Teacher	43	Female	Both
P5	French	Catholic/nonpracticing	Primary School Teacher	53	Female	Educator
P6	English	LDS	Government Policy Analyst	42	Female	Parent
P7	French	LDS	Primary School Teacher	54	Female	Educator
P8	English	Anglican	Project Manager	56	Female	Parent
P9	English	None	Middle School Teacher	48	Male	Both
P10	English	LDS/non-practicing	Entrepreneur	42	Female	Parent
P11	English	LDS/practicing	Homemaker	42	Female	Parent
P12	English	LDS/practicing	Primary School Teacher/Homemaker	42	Female	Both
P13	French	Muslim/practicing	Project Manager	47	Female	Parent
P14	English/ French	Christian	Military Lawyer	40	Male	Parent
P15	French	LDS/None/non-practicing	Homemaker	33	Female	Parent
P16	French	None	Elementary School teacher	55	Female	Educator
P17	French	Catholic	Elementary School administrator	38	Female	Educator
P18	French	Catholic	Civil Servant	45	Male	Parent
P19	French	Catholic	Elementary School Teacher	49	Female	Both

P20	English	Lutheran	Homemaker/Health care aid	45	Female	Parent
P21	English	LDS/practicing	Holistic Health Educator/Homemaker	33	Female	Parent
P22	English	LDS/practicing	High School Teacher	37	Male	Both

APPENDIX 12: ISLAMOPHOBIC TWEETS





X Monsieur Daniel Costello Don't Censor Canada! X @cost... · Aug 17 ▾

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Religious faith is an individual & private practice in Canada a right enshrined by law. IMHO inappropriate for this organization given its known associates, to be aiming to educate anyone on anything. Recommend redirecting your research ties to @clarionproject @GatestoneInst

🗨️ ↻ 16 ❤️ 39 ✉️



VictoriaL59 @Victoria59L · Aug 19 ▾

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

I want my workplace to be neutral if religion and politics. I am there to work not to pander to someone's belief. Keep that at home. Not at my desk. XXXXX

🗨️ ↻ 5 ❤️ 26 ✉️



geoff brand @geoffbrand84 · Aug 19 ▾

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Maybe there needs to be a Muslim workers guide to Canadian work practices.....instead of this.

🗨️ ↻ 3 ❤️ 22 ✉️



Dustin Davis @dustin_davis_ · Aug 19 ▾

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Pork in the smoker, and Christmas is only about 4 months away. Cheers!

🗨️ ↻ 3 ❤️ 15 ✉️



Mr. David bellehumeur 🇺🇸🇨🇦 @mr_bellehumeur · Aug 19 ▾

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Religion has no place in the workplace! Period!

🗨️ ↻ ❤️ 3 ✉️



Roger M @defiantcanuck · Aug 19 ▾

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

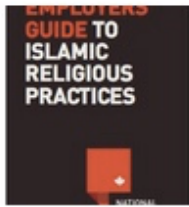
Where is the Muslim employees guidebook on how we do things in Canada?

🗨️ ↻ 5 ❤️ 29 ✉️



Miss Erin @themadslloth · Aug 18

Oh fuck off already.



Christine L. Cusack @CusackChristine
Free guide for employers from the @nccm
#ReligiousLiteracy
issuu.com/nccm2/docs/fin...

22 81 199



Andrea Staines

@staines_andyjoy

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Replying to @themadslloth

@Joc_MB @CusackChristine @nccm You beat me to it...

6:34 PM - 18 Aug 2018































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1 4



Tweet your reply

-  **Leave it to** @DissidentBeaver · Aug 19
Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm
Aka: How to submit to Islam and make your once tolerant #WesternCivilized company #ShariaCompliant
   3 
-
-  **Chuck deMonkey** @ChuckdeMonkey · Aug 19
Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm
Mrs Cusack, you truly disgust me.
   2 
-
-  **Celina Maccadanza** @CelinaSivret · Aug 19
Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm
I wouldn't even wipe my ass with that
   1 
-
-  **Darren** @Darren33140921 · Aug 19
Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm
How about a guide to how Canada was founded on hard work and Christian values and at the end of the one page it says " if you dont like it get the FUCK OUT"
   
-
-  **N** @alwayasnvr · Aug 19
Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm
No thanks. Not interested.
   
-
-  **Bruce Kreitz** @bruce_kreitz · Aug 19
Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm
Fuck this
   



Adolph Bernanke @Adolph_Bernanke · Aug 19

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

When will the diversity quotas be in place when people realize that they are not going to pay someone to pray?



Karen @Grewupinscarb · 16h

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Religion should not be in the work place. It's called work not church, mosque, temple, etc.



Mr Free @RPD1023 · Aug 19

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Not really relevant they don't want to work



justavoicethewind @dfp67 · Aug 19

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

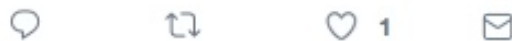
we never noticed islam when lebanese refugees came , they never cried about it or demanded 5 prayer times a day off, now all of sudden we must bend pver backwards to make the religion of a terrorist feel acomadated or it will begin to terrorize us



Torguy68 🇨🇦🇮🇹🇪🇵🇸 @Torguy68 · Aug 19

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

To line the birdcage?



ProCanada @MaryTerepocki · Aug 19

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Employers, if you are just hiring people based on their race, religion, or gender, you are the problem. Unless you are hiring for a entry level position, the only way to get a job should be based solely on experience. Keep all other things out of the equation - just experience!



Freedom55 @DomrctMy · Aug 19

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Is there a similar guide for Islamic beheadings?



elijahfire @elijahfire8 · Aug 19

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

when I see stuff like this first thing the morning



~~Nicholas Boek (currently QFD banned)~~ @NicholasBoek · Aug 18

Replying to @CusackChristine





Miss Trixie @Miss__Trixie · Aug 18

Replying to @CusackChristine



🗨️ 1 ❤️ 10 📧



Canadian National @CanadaNational · Aug 18

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Here's the Islamist's guide to working for me:

I don't pay for you to pray. Show up, do your work. The first whiff of negativity in my crews I'm suddenly going to have no work for you.

I am under no obligation to accommodate you or your goofy beliefs. #cdnpoli

🗨️ 1 ↻ 1 ❤️ 21 📧

⋮ 1 more reply



C K #BernierNation @CK70436600 · Aug 18

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm



🗨️ ↻ ❤️ 3 📧

I am under no obligation to accommodate you or your goofy beliefs. #cdnpoli

1 1 21

1 more reply



C K #BernierNation @CK70436600 · Aug 18

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm



3



masalla 🤡 @Sgnutten · Aug 18

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

FFS! They don't get special exceptions.

1 7



United Man @unitedman58 · Aug 18

Replying to @CusackChristine @eltie196_ @nccm

Step one. Don't hire them.

1 17

1 more reply



Dave R @DavRo13 · Aug 17

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Anne Marie Waters @AMDWaters

When the elites can no longer deny the reality of the religion of peace, they will rewrite history and pretend they were against it all along. [bbc.co.uk/news/uk-447297...](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-447297...)

9





Dan Fraser @FraserFraserdw · Aug 19



Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Workplaces are neutral. Keep your sky gods at home on a leash.



↻ 1

♥ 13



Bruno @BELLERIVERGUY · Aug 19



Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Merry Christmas.



↻ 2

♥ 4



Cory @trainvalet · Aug 19



Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Why? Religion has no place in the workplace. Keep it in your home or church. It causes enough damage as it is.



↻

♥ 7



Monday, October 21, 2019 🇨🇦 @jeretgannon · Aug 19



Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

If a religious guide is required to hire a certain religion than I would say just don't hire that religion.



↻

♥ 1



More replies



X Unwashed Oilfan @OilfanUnwashed · Aug 18



Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

How about they work the hours they are required to work. We don't supply handbooks for Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, etc. Work the hours you are required to work. Leave religion at home.



↻ 6

♥ 14



John A. @daddawg12 · Aug 18



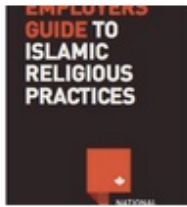
Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Get lost with this brain washing bull crap



Miss Erin @themadslloth · Aug 18

Oh fuck off already.



Christine L. Cusack @CusackChristine
Free guide for employers from the @nccm
#ReligiousLiteracy
issuu.com/nccm2/docs/fin...

22 81 199



Andrea Staines

@staines_andyjoy

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@Joc_MB @CusackChristine @nccm You beat me to it...

6:34 PM - 18 Aug 2018

1 Retweet 4 Likes



1 4



Tweet your reply



George Soros P0r0d1e @p0r0d1e · Aug 19

Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

Please tell me this isnt a thing and it isnt the 3rd canadian edition already if so?



Dee Hart @lproudCanadian · Aug 19

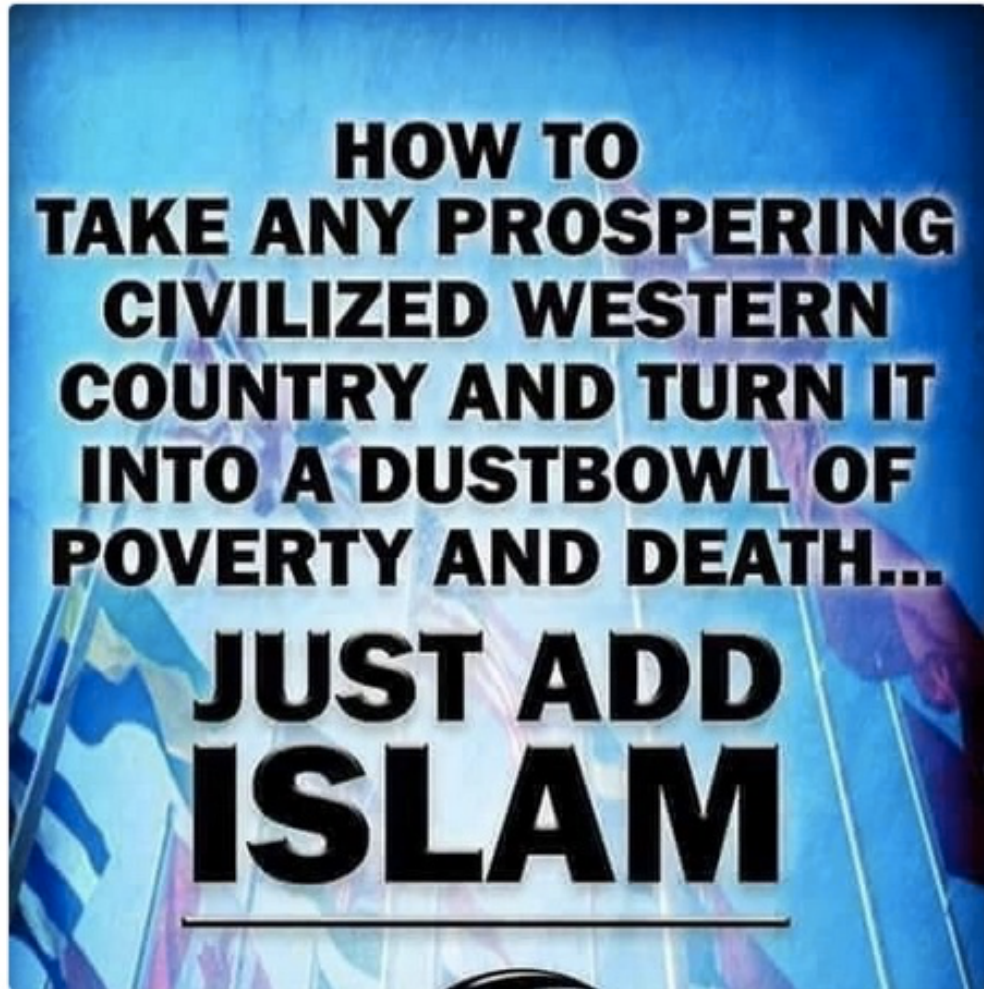
Replying to @CusackChristine @nccm

oh fuck me, no....



Ho Lee Chit @indi3568 · Aug 19

Replying to @CusackChristine



1



APPENDIX 13: ERC TEXTBOOKS

Living in Society, Secondary Cycle One, Student Book A

Living in Society, Secondary Cycle One, Student Book B

Weaving the World, Secondary Cycle Two, Year Two, Student Book A, Volume 1

Weaving the World, Secondary Cycle Two, Year Two, Student Book A, Volume 2

Weaving the World, Secondary Cycle Two, Year Three, Student Book B

COURT CASES

Canada (Citizenship and Immigration) v. Ishaq, 2015 FCA 194 [2015]

Loyola High School v. Quebec (Attorney General), 2015 SCC 12, [2015] 1 S.C.R. 613

Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys, 2006 SCC 6, [2006] 1 S.C.R. 256

S.L. v. Commission scolaire des Chênes, 2012 SCC 7, [2012] 1 S.C.R. 235

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