Creating reflexivity in low-attaining Year 11 pupils in the Catholic Religious (RE) classroom

Jennifer Ossei-Brainoo

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First Name	Jennifer
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Abstract

In this dissertation I explored the intention of having reflexivity as a learning process in the RE classroom, especially in the Catholic RE classroom. It can be argued to be more effective in an acknowledged confessional indoctrinate setting, where the RE classroom is a space pupils can critically interpret various traditions in the quest of finding their voice and understanding others. The confessional setting acts as the experiential starting point of the critical interpretation happening in the RE classroom. More importantly, the catechism of the Catholic Church arguably makes reflexivity more susceptible to RE in a Catholic School. An element of religious literacy can be seen as paramount in reflexivity as a learning process. Although the lockdown and a few other limitations meant I was not able to complete my practitioner research which focused on using mixed methods, the interviews held focused on discussing the research questions:

1. **What is the role of religious literacy in the development of reflexivity?**
2. **Can reflexivity be created in a lesson or does reflexivity develop over time?**

These were discussed from the perspectives of a group of pupils and teachers from faith and non-faith schools. In the interviews, it was clear that although religious literacy is acknowledged to be important in the reflexive process, the necessity to focus on it to create reflexivity is not clear especially in relation to the low-attaining. Creativity might be the best way to create reflexivity in the low-attaining. It is important to realise soft skills such as pupil and teacher relationships can also lead to reflexivity. Yet still, although it might be difficult to measure, having it as a purpose in one's pedagogy makes it likely to happen.

INTRODUCTION

Across the curriculum, it can be argued that some teachers do not have educating for life as an objective, especially in Key Stage 4 (KS4) because of the amount of content for GCSE (Williams, 2018). However, educational research shows the importance of lifelong learning (Groome, 2006; Groome, 2011; Groome, 2014; Reiss and White, 2013: 6-14; Harber, 2016: 38; Noddings, 2016: 10). Although it might be difficult to measure whether pupils' learning in a classroom is life long, exploring different ways is necessary in the development of task designs (Thompson, 2015).

This research is written within the context of the current report by the Religious Education Council (REC) of England and Wales Commission on RE in England (CoRE) (REC, 2018) which is advocating for a change in paradigm in the teaching of RE so as to maintain relevance in our ever-changing world by naming the subject 'Religion and World views' (REC, 2018: 30–31). The report illustrates the importance of the exploration in this research of how to effectively learn for life in the RE classroom. The report suggests a 'National Plan' for RE that ensures 'learning in this area remains academically rigorous and a knowledge-rich preparation for life in a world of great religion and belief diversity' (2018: 3). Thus, the report seeks to offer a paradigm shift whereby every person regardless of religious affiliation is represented, even in the subject's name.

Pupils' education should ensure that they are skilled and fit enough to thrive and contribute to society at large (Doug, 2020). Taking the CoRE (REC, 2018) report into consideration, this research addresses how RE as a subject could help to prepare pupils to thrive in our modern world which has been called post-secular by scholars such as Radford (2019) and Boeve (2019). Radford describes post-secularists as those who 'might see themselves as

challenging a hegemonic role that some secularists claim for rationality and the sciences in relation to questions of meaning and purpose in human lives' (2012: 229). A post-secularist will emphasise the dialectical need of both 'faith and reason ….in the development of understanding' (2012: 231). This is increasingly relevant in our ever more integrated globalised world with its plethora of spiritualties and ways of encountering the Divine. RE should seek to educate everyone, believers and non-believers alike.

The CoRE (REC, 2018) report has a clear embodiment of Jackson's interpretive approach (1997; 2004; 2009a; 2009b; 2011; 2012; 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; 2015d; 2017) to ensure a good RE takes place in the classroom. Accordingly, I am focusing on creating reflexivity in my learners as a way of ensuring life-long learning is taking place in my classroom.

Reflexivity is defined as the development of an individual, in the critical encountering of new knowledge being taught in the classroom or when dialoguing with a completely new opinion.

The meaning of learning itself is not straightforward, and Sfard (1998) uses two definitions. Firstly, 'learning as acquisition' whereby knowledge gained and possessed by the learner can be seen as short lived, as the learner can easily loose the knowledge once it has been used for its goal (Lujan and DiCarlo, 2005). Secondly, 'learning as participation', which is where learning is seen as interactional in specific social practices. Afdal (2015) reasons that the second definition fails to acknowledge the complexities and nuances of the different social practises. A third definition was suggested by Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005), as 'learning as knowledge creation', whereby learning is seen as an ongoing knowledge creation using essential tools in its facilitation. These tools, alongside teacher competency, develop

educated pupils (Afdal, 2015: 259). The process of reflexivity should embody all of these definitions of learning especially the last two, given that I intend to have learners who are learning for life.

Educational research shows that reflexivity is probably even more difficult to create in the low-attaining group (Dunne, Humphreys, Sebba, Dyson, Gallannaugh and Muijs, 2007). Although the creation of reflexivity might seem a daunting task in a school environment, it is exciting to focus this research on exploring different and effective ways of encouraging reflexivity in my low-attaining Year 11 class. These are learners who already lack motivation and engagement because of their predicted grades and other factors (Dunne, Humphreys, Sebba, Dyson, Gallannaugh and Muijs, 2007). Therefore, exploring engaging and relevant ways to meet the needs of pupils with the aim of creating reflexivity is central to this research.

School context

My school is a voluntary aided comprehensive Roman Catholic secondary school. It is co-educational with an enrolment of 987 pupils. The school is situated in a not so affluent multicultural and multi-faith area of Slough with a large demography of Polish pupils. It was recently classified as *Good with Outstanding features* by OFSTED (2016; 2018) and over the last 5 years has climbed its way from a school which was consistently a *Requires Improvement*. The RE department recently achieved an *Outstanding* from Inspection 48 (2018) and it has been the only outstanding label the school has ever achieved.

Even though majority of the pupils come from Christian families, many of them especially in Year 11 do not necessarily identify as Christian or Catholic. Many of them are undecided.

Majority of the teachers are not religious, with many pupils stating that they often get into critical discussions with many teachers who can be quite critical of the Catholic faith. Such discussions are helpful during RE classes because pupils have become critical and ask a lot of analytical questions.

I am particularly interested in using my low-attaining Year 11 class in this research because GCSE progress in the school for the low-attaining has struggled over the years. There is a real need of finding effective ways of teaching these pupils. Thus, when I mentioned my target group and the purpose of my research to my Head of Department and Head Teacher, there was a lot of interest and encouragement in my aims.

Just before the lockdown the school experienced a cyber-attack and lost all the content/data on its drive. Luckily I had saved all collected data on an encrypted drive, although I lost all the revision lessons I had started to plan alongside the majority of those of my lessons which were saved on the school's drive. However, this setback, although a struggle because of my research, was manageable because I was not the only person experiencing this and I had a few lessons emailed.

If not for the lockdown, the intervention I would have used for the purposes of this research would have been the revision lessons for my target group.

During the lockdown, teaching and learning have been through virtual means apart from going back into school to teach a group of Year 10 in June and July. Although I have not had an opportunity to teach my Year 11s because of the guidelines towards GCSE (Ofqual, 2020), I have been mindful to create reflexivity in lesson planning to other year groups.

Research aim

Many of the learners in my target cohort, find it challenging if not impossible to relate their Catholic Religious Education to everyday experience. Indeed, the skill of reflexivity will create an awareness whereby pupils will recognise the use of their already held beliefs and prejudices to inform their approach to RE and its relation to everyday life. A lot of work has been done to arouse interest in the learner's personal life and consequently the religion being studied (Groome, 1998: 431–440; Groome, 2006; Groome, 2014; Jackson, 2010: 1125). This is known to not only encourage interest and engagement in the subject, but also to ensure lifelong learning. I wanted pupils to question their own held beliefs as they learnt and questioned those held by others, including the Catholic Church, although all of this is within the values of Catholic Christianity.

The struggles I have encountered in the teaching of my subject, especially in relation to my target cohort is not new to my situation. Rossiter (2011: 57) reasoned

> [that many pupils in a Catholic school] *accept religious education without antipathy because they see it as an established part of their Catholic schooling which they value highly; but usually there is not much serious engagement with religious education because they feel it is not relevant to their lives,* [especially because it is not an EBACC subject (Department of Education, 2019) and there is always a desire to focus on English and maths] (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006: 307).

This has made me even more eager to explore ways of making learners aware of the relevance of what they are learning and how it is of benefit in both the short and long term.

It is essential to 'first turn to the educational research literature to find out what already has been learned about this'(Check and Schutt, 2012). Thus for the literature review the following questions will be answered:

- **Why reflexivity?**
- **Why is critical reflexivity in a Catholic RE important?**
- **What is the role of religious literacy in the reflexive process of learning in the Catholic school?**

Literature review

The literature review starts by establishing the definition of the type of reflexivity I want to create in the teaching and learning of my pupils and the reason behind it. It then moves on to exploring its relevance in the theological RE Catholic paradigm, demonstrating how relativism and detachment in the process of reflexivity is not effective as a learning process. Next, its relevancy in the Catholic RE classroom is explored in relation to the wider world. Furthermore, I considered how the definition of reflexivity is distinctively Catholic, while acknowledging the confessional yet indoctrinate nature of the Catholic school. After that, I looked into the role religious literacy plays in the process of reflexivity because it has been seen as the main aim for RE, if not one of its important aims (Wright, 2003; 2004; 2008; Carmody, 2017, Parker, 2020; Shaw, 2020; Hannam, Biesta, Whittle and David Aldridge ,2020).

Why reflexivity?

Reflexivity is a word used in various disciplines (Holland, 1999). Although its meaning can remain elusive based on how it is used, this essay will draw its definition from both a sociological and philosophical critical realist paradigm. In this dissertation the meaning of reflexivity is the "reinterpretation of oneself, having considered the 'other', with awareness of one's own distinctiveness heightened by the encounter of the other." (Freathy and John, 2019). It is the self-conscious interpretation of one's experience while interacting with the experience of others.

The first use of the word can be traced back to the classical works of Mead who defined it as 'the turning back of the experience of the individual upon [her- or himself]' (Mead, 1934: 134). In RE, Fancourt (2010) bases his usage of the word on Jackson's (1997, 2000, 2004, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, 2017) sociological ethnographic writing. In Jackson's ethnographic writing on learning in RE, reflexivity is seen as 'the relationship between the experience of the students and the experience of [those]… whose way of life they are studying' (Jackson, 2000: 134). For Jackson and similar previous references and definitions made about reflexivity, there is a meaningful self-aware interaction between the learner and what they are learning. Through that interaction the learner evolves.

Jackson explains the purpose of reflexivity as:

• To make pupils conscious of their own unarticulated held views

• To help pupils articulate these held abstract views through dialoguing with the ideas/beliefs and language of various traditions, whether religious or not.

• To raise pupils consciousness of some of the ambiguities, challenges and conflicts within their own views, helping them engage with these views *'*by developing both a hermeneutic of faith and suspicion', and most importantly guiding them to 'develop their interpretative skills in order to engage with this concept' (Jackson, 2004: 88).

It is important to acknowledge that reflexivity as a way of learning is not guaranteed to take place in the RE classroom, whether Catholic or not. However, learning can be managed in a way, which will make lifelong learning more conceivable (Gearon, 2013: 128), especially if the teacher is concerned about the long term learning impact of the content they are teaching. Reflexivity as a way of learning can lead to lifelong learning because of the development of the learner's consciousness which requires them to be active and not passive in their learning. Pupils are positioned in a way where they are critically engaged in the creation of their personal views and opinions while they learn.

For Grimmit, who proposed the phrases *learning about and from RE* (1987), the entirety of a RE teacher's pedagogy is about ensuring that there is an educational interaction between the learners and the content being studied (Grimmit: 2008). Accordingly, in my teaching, I aim to ensure learning in RE, especially in the long-term, by creating reflexive pupils. This aim is very much influenced by the reason Cooling (2020) gives for having a 'hermeneutical pedagogy' as an RE teacher. It all goes back to the purpose of education as a whole which is to have learners who are 'taught how to function well in a world pervaded by interpretation' (Cooling, 2020: 410). However, it is important to note the reflexivity being created goes beyond interpretation. In all RE lessons, Catholic or otherwise, learners should 'become self-aware and reflexive interpreters of the knowledge they gain' (Cooling, 2020: 409). This dissertation fully agrees with Cooling (2020), Hannam (2019) and Palmer (1993) on the basis that RE as a

subject should not just seek understanding but should create a metamorphosis within the learner as they encounter the subject content.

In this research, the reflexivity being explored is both the 'social anthropological' hermeneutic approach of Jackson and the 'critical realist' hermeneutic approach of Wright (1997, 1998, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010). Work done in the field of human rights education shows that it is possible to approach hermeneutics from a critical stance(Al-Daraweesh 2013; Al-Daraweesh and Snauwaert 2013; Zembylas et al. 2017). This seeks to build an understanding of human rights from the norms of existing cultures, making it culturally legitimate and dialogical. Thus, similar to the work on human rights, when learning is from a critical hermeneutic stance it is not biased and exclusive. It rather seeks to develop the self holistically.

Having learners who learn through reflexivity in both the Catholic and non- Catholic RE classroom would tremendously support learners in the globalised society they live in. This is because 'to educate… means to prepare students to live in a world marked by change, not permanency' (D'Souza, 2018: 2). For reflexivity to be possible in RE it needs the different variations and nuances within and between different religious traditions in our global world, to be taught and learnt by pupils (Berglund, 2014). The creation of reflexivity will ensure 'that all pupils are helped to engage with knowledge that is culturally powerful and are able to contribute to society in productive ways.' (Edwards, 2015: 13). This is ever more necessary within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic being experienced globally, with all the various existential questions it raises, which sees everyone as a global citizen. Having an intention of creating a critical hermeneutic of reflexivity during lesson planning is more likely to allow the teacher to expose and create tasks that will explore the complexities within and between various traditions. This encourages a sense of argumentation with the knowledge being

taught which demands that the active learner seeks to interact with the tradition fully to then take a stance on it and apply it to their lived experience.

An RE teacher, consciously creating reflexivity would envisage what the subject's underlining purpose is so as to allow pupils to both learn about and from religion, irrespective of the school's faith. Purpose, although articulated differently by conflicting paradigms as analysed by Gearon (2013), has guided the pedagogy of teaching the subject since its coinage by Grimmit (1987). Its use has been criticised by scholars such as Maybury and Teece (2005), Teece (2008; 2010), Hella and Wright (2009) and even Grimmit (2000; 2008) himself. Yet still, reflexivity ensures that pupils do learn about and from religion. Fancourt's (2010) analysis reinforces the view that learning from religion includes an evaluation of the beliefs and values that the pupils have studied; this is a reflection on one's own beliefs in the light of their RE. In fact, this understanding of reflexivity is used in this dissertation to highlight the importance of the inclusion of a learner in his or her own learning to facilitate a deeper and sophisticated understanding of what is being studied.

It can be argued that having a reflexivity which is both sociological and critical in its hermeneutic in both the Catholic and non-Catholic RE classroom is necessary because as Groome (2014) reasons

> *every educational system reflects and proposes a foundational philosophy about life and its meaning, about the person and their potential, and about how to live well. Even if not made explicit, an operative philosophy is ever present, for both good and ill* (Groome, 2014: 115).

Even the Commission on RE in England (CoRE) also proposes that there should be an acknowledged distinction of the beliefs held by an educational system and the views held by the individuals within it (REC, 2018: 72–73. see also van der Kooij, de Ruyter, and Miedema 2013). CoRE defines a personal worldview as 'an individual's own way of understanding and living in the world, which may or may not draw from one, or many, institutional world views' (REC 2018, 26). Having a critical hermeneutical approach is important because any educational institution is tasked to 'enable each pupil to understand, reflect on and develop their own personal worldview' (REC, 2018: 5), irrespective of the confessional values the school is founded on. The RE classroom in any school can accordingly be the space where pupils can critically reflect on their own held views, the views of the school, and that of the main traditions in society and the world at large. This is doable in even a Catholic school which has a clear purpose of its RE education and the next question of the literature review will explore this.

It is very important to recognise the confessional parts of every school, be it in its ethos or culture. Boeve (2019) reasons that 'dialogue is not a neutral concept. From the start it is charged with a specific view on what it is to be human and to live together' (46). Everyone is operating from a belief/ world view, consciously or unconsciously and this influences how they act and interact with the world. Cooling (2020) also reasons that in every RE classroom there is no objectivity or neutrality or sense of being completely critical, no matter how a teacher might strive for a critical learning to take place in their classroom. Teachers and pupils alike approach the subject content 'from the vantage point of their own worldview'. Accordingly, it is not rational to deduce any approach to learning in RE from a Cartesian 'presuppositionless space' (Descartes 1968, 113). Thus, as Cooling (2020) states:

> *In order to be critical, objective and pluralistic, it is essential to be reflexive about one's own pre-understanding and the impact of that on one's reception of another person's worldview. This applies to both pupil and teacher* (Cooling, 2020: 411).

It is possible to have a 'critical hermeneutical' approach in every RE classroom, Catholic and non-Catholic, by intentionally fashioning the classroom as 'pedagogical spaces in which pupils can recognise, critically reflect, and articulate their worldviews in relation to other worldviews' (Zembylas et al, 2018: 400), including the views of the school. Although the teacher must realise their own biases and how these might unconsciously influence the learning taking place. Thus, for the CoRE's (REC, 2018) report to fit in the Catholic context or any context with an acknowledged or unacknowledged confessional ethos there needs to be a clear explanation of 'the pedagogical implications of the relationship between organised/institutional and personal/ individual world views' (Cooling, 2020: 404). The CoRE report needs to highlight how learning in RE in any school is influenced by the school's ethos and can easily be influenced by the teacher. Although, the ethos might not necessarily affect the pupils' beliefs, especially if the critical hermeneutical nature of reflexivity is the process of learning taking place because both teacher and pupil are aware of their biases which can easily influence their approach to the views being presented.

The creation of reflexivity is not only necessary to ensure a critical hermeneutic approach in learning in RE; it is part and parcel of the evaluative nature of the RE specification (AQA, 2017a; 2017b). Accordingly, having the evaluative skills which naturally grow from the process of reflexivity will benefit pupils in the short-term when taking their RE GCSE.

Arguably certain elements of this approach to the study of RE can be traced back to Ninian Smart's (1969) phenomenological study of RE in place of the confessional study (Gearon,

2013). Although it can be argued that the detachment in approaching religion as a phenomena can be studied and traced back to the writing of Edmund Husserl (Pals, 2008), Smart built on his works considerably (Gearon, 2013). Smart rightly acknowledged that the phenomenological approach comes out of the whole tradition of philosophy, psychology and socio-anthropology in his work *The Science of Religion & the Sociology of Knowledge: Some Methodological Questions* (Smart, 1973). Smart reasoned that in the phenomenological approach, the learner approached what they were learning with a 'suspension of belief, together with the use of empathy in entering the experiences and intentions of religious participants' (Smart, 1996: 2). However, this phenomenological approach was used in the secular sphere and not necessarily welcomed in the Christian setting as seen in the critical reception towards Smart's *The Phenomenon of Christianity* (Smart, 1979). This harsh reception in Christian circles can be linked to the detachment the phenomenological approach encourages.

Gearon (2013, 111) reasons that *The Stapleford Project* (1994) led by Cooling, which introduced concept-cracking and Copely's *Biblos Project* gave a much needed 'philosophical-theological edge to teaching Christianity' (Gearon, 2013: 111). As Gearon (2013: 111) acknowledged that the philosophical emphasis in the Christian theological paradigm has hardly 'dented [the ever growing] consciously secular orientations of religious education.' (2013: 111). This orientation advocates for a more phenomenological approach, be it sociological, philosophical or psycho-experiential in its makeup (Gearon, 2013), because of its sense of detachment and secular relativist nature. It can be argued that this sense of detachment is what has given birth to the popularity of having a set national curriculum, with

a sociological approach to RE in the writings of Clarke and Woodhead (2018) and the CoRE report (REC, 2018).

In the Catholic context RE is not just an 'educational practise' (Afdal, 2015: 256), as the Catholic Educational Service of England and Wales points out:

> *there are two approaches to the teaching of RE, the sociological Religious Studies approach which sees the religious as a social construct and the Theological approach, which studies the human response to the divine. Catholic schools study the latter* (2018).

Therefore, having a secular national plan for RE is difficult to envision since what is being taught in a secular setting will be different from what is being taught in a Catholic setting, irrespective of how it is taught and the general intention of creating global citizens who can thrive in our ever changing society due to their long-term learning. Unless the national curriculum acknowledges the confessional ethos of every educational institution.

Dietz (2013), who is writing in a secular context points out that reflexivity creates learners who will be both critical "of their own life world on the one hand, and the anthropological knowledge generated in the 'second order' by the academic 'expert' on the other"(Dietz, 2013: 22). It can be argued that this is not susceptible to the theological understanding of objective truth (Lindsay, 2020). Later in the literature review, I will go on to analyse how this is not necessarily the case and actually in the search of objective Truth, the philosophical nature of the Catholic Church calls for critical thinking and analysis in striving to not be 'vincible ignorant' (Aquinas and Regan, 2000). Accordingly, despite scholars such as Lindsay (2020), Zembylas (2018) and Lewis (2015) deeming the creation of this understanding of

reflexivity in the Catholic theological context impossible, I intend to review how it is complementary to the Catholic faith.

In addition, Radford (2012) reasons that this type of critical reflexivity, is actually only possible in an educational institution which has a clear identity. He states:

> *it may be possible, once we are initiated into a particular understanding to deconstruct that understanding and to subject its assumptions to rational consideration…In this way propositions that are held true as a matter of faith can be discussed within the system of propositions of which they are a part and as a result we may be able to better understand the points of view of others (230).*

Therefore, for Radford having an acknowledged confessional setting whether secular or otherwise where an RE lesson is taking place, gives pupils a first-hand experience in their understanding of an interpretation of reality in the process of the reflexivity happening in their RE classroom.

The creation of reflexivity is important because it allows for the holistic growth of the learner when they encounter and interact with any form of knowledge, wisdom, experience or religious tradition in their learning. Having reflexivity as an aim as an RE teacher, irrespective of context, means in the process of teaching and learning, the learner develops and is able to view and articulate their now evolved stance critically alongside those of others. When there is an acknowledged confessional school such as a Catholic school, the teaching and learning in the RE classroom of the school has a clear experiential reference point in the process of the reflexivity happening.

Why is critical reflexivity in a Catholic RE important?

Within a Catholic context, it is always important to remember the distinctive purpose of the education is to teach pupils about the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Pope St John Paul II: 1992). Accordingly, how learning in RE is fulfilled in the Catholic school lies within this premise. In a Catholic School, RE is seen as the core of the entire educational process (Pope St John Paul II, 1979: 8). Irrespective of the fact that the school is open to both religious and non-religious pupils, there is a clear Catholic identity (Gearon, 2013: 47) of the school's approach to education. All parents and guardians are made aware of the Catholic ethos of the school right from the onset of their application. Similarly, in the school this research is based on, its mission statement states that it is 'unapologetically Catholic'. Therefore, the creation of reflexivity in my Catholic RE classroom cannot be done within the secular and detached confines of phenomenology but on the bedrock of Catholic Christian values because there is a clear understanding of where everything comes from.

Reflexivity, which comes from dialoguing with the world in its entirety is arguably fundamental within modern Catholic education. The Church's Vatican II document on education *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), cites the school as a place of encounter between 'Church and mankind' for the common good of mutual benefit. The importance of the self-conscious nature of this dialoguing in reflexivity is further captured in the Church's most recent document on Religious Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013) where it states:

> *All children and young people must have the same possibilities for arriving at the knowledge of their own religion as well as of elements that characterise other*

> *religions. The knowledge of other ways of thinking and believing conquers fears and enriches ways of thinking about the other person and his or her spiritual traditions. Therefore, teachers are duty-bound always to respect the human person who seeks the truth of his or her own being, as well as to appreciate and spread the great cultural traditions that are open to the transcendent and that articulate the desire for freedom and truth* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013).

The sense of agency and freedom of thought reflexivity brings in its process is necessary in any dialogue surrounding faith and belief in the Catholic school. Similarly, Groome (2014) states:

> *Given people's 'inner vitality', they should be active participants in the teaching–learning dynamic, agents of their own knowing and not just passive recipients. In the sentiment of St Athanasius of old, a good Catholic education enables its students to become 'fully alive to the glory of God'* (Groome, 2014: 116).

Education in the Catholic school is meant to bring learners into the fullness of life they have been created for. There is a richness and maturity to a person who has come to hold an educated view from their own search in the Catholic setting. Thus, being self- aware and an active learner in the Catholic context, be it whether the learner is Catholic or otherwise allows this to take place and is encouraged.

It is important to emphasise that a focus on the creation of reflexivity within a Catholic context ensures that pupils are not indoctrinated, irrespective of the school's explicit confessional ethos and culture (Carmody, 2017). It is 'non-colonising …[because] it has to respect the integrity of all its students and staff' (Carmody, 2017: 164). Groome emphasises that no

matter the philosophical approach a Catholic School might take in its religious education there needs to be the 'purpose of educating both from a Catholic faith perspective and for the faith life of their students, however students choose to identify in faith' (2014: 114). This shows how reflexivity in Catholic RE should enable learners to learn about what is being taught and from it, in relation to their own and others' life experiences in the classroom, all against the backdrop of the faith perspective of the school. Yet still, pupils are allowed to critically explore the school's faith alongside theirs and the other views they are being presented in the lesson. From that pupils can develop their own sophisticated belief which will allow them to understand and thrive in the world.

This healthy, sophisticated and long term development is what I seek to achieve in all my Catholic RE lessons, which can only be possible through reflexivity. Boeve (2019) cities how having such an aim for teaching in a Catholic school allows pupils to develop in their faith because they

> *are challenged to reflect and communicate about their own options in relation to the view of others. They are challenged as well to become better Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, … – more reflexive and able to perceive and articulate their own standpoints in relation to those of others* (2019, 48).

In any type of Catholic education, forcing the learner to assimilate into the Catholic faith is not encouraged. The Congregation for Catholic Education reasons that encouraging assimilation into the faith of the school, creates a culture of indifference to the 'other' who is not Catholic (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). In the Church indifference is seen as an antithesis to love (Pope Francis, 2019) and love of God and neighbour is seen as the greatest command of the Christian (Matthew 22:36-40). Accordingly, in the Catholic school

love for the other can be created when the learner is aware of their views and that of others. Thus, it is possible to have a space in the Catholic school where pupils are encouraged to critically develop their own views in light of the school's faith.

Reflexivity can be seen as very Catholic and should be encouraged in the Catholic RE classroom because the self-awareness which comes from the pupil 'habitually rethinking one's own experiences; reflecting on one's own behaviour' moves the pupil 'from self-centredness' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). With this skill of reflection during reflexivity in the Catholic RE classroom, pupils can grow in the Church's virtues of selflessness, charity, patience and above all love. Thus, irrespective of the learner being Catholic or not, these virtues which can be easily gained in the process of reflexivity in the RE Catholic classroom will help learners in their everyday interactions, be it in a Catholic or non-Catholic setting.

RE in the Catholic school should naturally encourage 'an openness of mind, heart and hands, to be ready to learn from, relate to and reach out to anyone and everyone of good will' (Groome, 2014: 118). Having reflexivity as an intention in the Catholic RE classroom and the bedrock of the schools values will ensure this. This openness in the process of reflexivity is necessary in the education of the learner in the Catholic RE classroom, although it is antithetical to the modern 'quest of authenticity' (Groome, 2014: 120, Taylor, 1991) and the 'growth of individualisation' (Taylor, 1991; Earl, 2010). In Christianity, there is a 'metanarrative of divine truth which proposes that our best selves are reached through right and loving relationships with God, oneself, others and creation' (Groome, 2020: 120). Hence, the Church's teachings 'to go out from oneself and consider the world from a different point of view is not a denial of oneself, but, on the contrary, is necessary for enhancing one's own

identity' in the Church's teaching (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). This going outside of oneself to discover and develop comes in the process of reflexivity which can thus be reasoned to be Catholic (D'Souza, 2016: 8; 2018: 5). Accordingly, to have it as an intention in my research and pedagogy, fits and is important in my Catholic school's setting.

Reflexivity in every context allows pupils to know themselves better by being reflective on their own experiences, knowledge and behaviour, while interacting with a variety of knowledge which might contradict their own held views. The personal views of the learner in the Catholic school are more often than not different from the Catholic context they are in because of the culture many pupils dwell in outside of the Catholic school. Through reflexivity pupils are more likely to grow in their understanding of what it means to be fully human, with no narrow mindedness (Pope John Paull 11, 2001).

The harmony created through the understanding of the other which is part of the reflexive process within the Catholic setting goes beyond 'relativism and syncretism' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). With relativism, there is a comparison but there is no meaningful relationship and encounter between cultures (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). As Benedict XVI states in his encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*:

> *Cultural relativism has the effect that cultural groups coexist side by side, but remain separate, with no authentic dialogue and therefore with no true integration* (Pope Benedict XVI, 2009).

Relativism is not a Christian virtue because by following the examples of Jesus, his early followers naturally interacted, debated and communed with each other, others such as gentiles, the marginalised and outcasts. Hence, education from this premise will always

encourage an interaction with the other be it that they are a believer or otherwise. The Church's teaching on intercultural dialogue reasons that this desire to be Christ-like is what naturally breeds inter-religious dialogue and thus reflexivity which does not encourage relativism in its process. It is this desire to follow the virtues of Jesus Christ, which makes reflexivity in the teaching of RE essential in a Catholic school.

> *Relativism…while respecting differences, simultaneously separates them into autonomous cosmoses, considering them as isolated and impermeable. Rather, [the Church's]… paradigm seeks, by every means, to foster a culture of dialogue, of understanding and mutual transformation, so as to reach the common good* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013).

In addition, within the Catholic context, reflexivity cannot just be a social science or philosophical undertaking. In Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) he reasons that a human 'requires a deeper critical evaluation of the category of relation [especially] if man's transcendent dignity is to be properly understood.' There has to be a Meta element to the conversation and meaning of relation and communion, if the holistic education of the individual is meant to be considered. The known and unknown, the material and immaterial has to be taken into account. This is clearly seen in how even conversations about human rights which have to do with human relations, require acknowledgment of this Meta element. Human rights as a notion has its origins in the philosophy of Natural Law. A Catholic philosophy which can be traced back to Aristotle and Aquinas, it reasons that through reason shared by all, humans have certain intrinsic rights (Al-Daraweesh and Snauwaert, 2013: 393). Therefore, it can be argued that reflexivity is more effective within a context, which embodies not only a critical approach but a sense of the transcendence.

Reflexivity is particularly important in the Catholic RE teaching and learning because 'whether or not a Catholic school educates effectively for faith depends a great deal on the pedagogy employed in its religious education curriculum' (Groome, 2014: 123). Accordingly, how RE is taught in the Catholic school allows all pupils to effectively develop their own belief through reflexivity on the backdrop of the Catholic ethos. This belief in effect determines how they act in and relate to the world, alongside others.

What is the role of religious literacy in the reflexive process of learning in the Catholic school?

Although religious literacy is a popular phrase in RE and other sectors, there isn't a clear or shared definition and understanding of the phrase 'religious literacy' to help practitioners in their pedagogy (Shaw, 2020: 150). I also acknowledge that the meaning behind the phrase is dependent on the context it is being used (Parker, 2020: 130). Therefore, it can be seen as very fluid and 'a non-didactic idea that must be adapted as appropriate to specific environments' (Dinham and Shaw, 2017: 257). It is reasoned by Dinham and Shaw (2017:1) that the meaning of 'religious literacy' comes from E D Hirsch's concept of 'cultural literacy' (1988), from which it has become popular especially in the writing of Prothero (2007) and Moore (2010). Early usage of the phrase can be seen in the *American journal Religious Education* by Ward titled *The Right to Religious literacy* (Ward 1953) and later in the sociological writing of Vladimir de Lissovoy, *A Sociological Approach to Religious literacy* (De Lissovoy, 1954). Generally speaking 'the starting point for a contemporary definition of any type of literacy is the ability to read, decode and comprehend written texts' in the specific subject (Hannam, Biesta, Whittle and Aldridge, 2020: 215). Dinham and Shaw's work define it as the 'understanding of the grammars, rules, vocabularies and narratives underpinning

religions and beliefs.'(Dinham and Shaw, 2017: 1). However, usage of the phrase in RE can be attributed to Wright (1993), who defined it as learners being able to 'reflect, communicate and act in an informed, intelligent and sensitive manner' (Wright, 1993: 47). In this definition, it moves away from just knowledge and understanding. It includes the skill that is acquired and its effect on the attitude or self-development of the learner.

The use of the phrase 'religious literacy' as an aim in any type of religious education has been criticised by Gallagher (2009), Shaw (2020), and Lewis (2015) especially if there is only a focus on the learning and understanding of simple religious information, thus learning by acquisition (Lujan and DiCarlo, 2005). Gallagher (2009) criticises the work of Prothero who, writing about the need of religious literacy after 9/11 within the context of America, defines religious literacy as 'the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life' (2007: 13). Gallagher criticises Prothero's approach to religious literacy, stating:

> *it must involve not only a degree of mastery of basic information (such as when to perform the prescribed actions during a Roman Catholic Mass or during Muslim daily prayers – what Prothero calls ritual literacy) but also some insight into how people use that basic information to orient themselves in the world, express their individual and communal self-understanding, and give their lives direction and meaning. To be literate about religion, one needs to know something about religious dynamics, mechanics, and processes – the how of religion. A clear understanding of both the what and the how is necessary to grasping the why of religion – why human beings have persisted in this mode of behaviour, even as it has imposed extraordinary demands on them and has frequently brought them to tears as to joy* (Gallagher, 2009 :208).

Shaw (2020) also criticises Prothero by arguing that his definition of religious literacy relies on only certain 'propositional and normative knowledge about the world religions that can be broken down into a set of facts that every American needs if they are to participate successfully in the world' (Shaw, 2020: 151). Similar to Shaw, when striving for reflexivity, the religious literacy I seek to have in my classroom is more than the learning of basic religious facts, it goes beyond knowledge and understanding. Indeed, pupils in their learning of religious terminologies need to have enough background and contextual knowledge of its origin in order to be able to apply it and understand the underlining reasons why they themselves and others act in accord to their personal beliefs. This in effect shows how literate they are. There needs to be a development of skill and character while they are learning to be religiously literate. Including religious literacy in the process of reflexivity will help pupils critically learn whatever tradition is being taught and therefore making them competent and confident in the process of reflexivity, which shapes their attitude as a result of the learning that has taken place.

Similarly, Carmody (2017: 171) reasons that although 'religious literacy such as learning about religion remains a necessary prelude to understanding any religious tradition, it needs to move towards being progressively self-reflective, heightening one's self-awareness.' Accordingly, religious literacy needs to be used as a tool in reflexivity. Educating learners to be religiously literate is not beneficial if the pupils do not become reflexive.

Lewis (2015:7) in his work *Against Religious Literacy* criticises the works of Prothero for focusing on only one side of the phrase being taught. He reasons that religious literacy is about giving pupils the words and tools to use in the discourse, evaluation and consequently

the reflexivity, necessary for their growth. Accordingly, to ensure reflexivity is happening in my classroom, religious literacy needs to be part of the process of creating reflexivity.

In my pedagogy, I want my learners to be able to confidently articulate their own beliefs and that of others. It is important that they are be able to participate in 'various public linguistic traditions that seek to account for the ultimate nature of reality' (Wright, 1996: 174). Through the process of reflexivity in RE with a focus on religious literacy a learner would be able to 'think, act and communicate with insight and intelligence in the light of the diversity of religious truth claims that are the mark of contemporary culture' (Wright, 1996: 175).

This dissertation reasons that the natural critical hermeneutic nature of the reflexive process in teaching religious literacy should create a 'symbiotic relationship between knowledge and the knower' (Freathy and John, 2019). Consequently, learning in RE becomes naturally 'entwined with the development of practical skills of intercultural competency'. (Shaw, 2020: 157). For example, a religiously literate person who knows the story of Noah's ark and how the rainbow features in it, will be able to deeply understand the symbolism behind using the rainbow as a symbol for the National Health Service (NHS) during this time of the pandemic and lockdown (Parker, 2020: 130). Also, a religious literate person will know the spiritual and meditative core of the movements done in yoga and how it is not just a mere form of exercise, but a way to enlightenment and liberation in Hindu traditions. Accordingly, religious literacy is not just 'a product of good RE' but rather 'a process of understanding, interpretation and application' (Shaw, 2020: 157) in RE. A religiously literate person who is not religious, can employ a piece of religious symbolism in conveying a cultural idea, in order to achieve a result which has evocative connections to the religious influence.

The Church teaches that educating pupils to be competent communicators with likeminded and non-likeminded people is essentially the 'role of education today' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). Accordingly, with reflexivity in the Catholic RE classroom having a focus on the right understanding of religious literacy will help the learners to 'translate' their different ways of thinking and feeling (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). Once pupils are able to have the right words and understanding of those words to articulate what is being studied, they can then take steps to articulate and understand themselves within the context of what is being studied. Thus, arguably there has to be an element of religious literacy in the learning process that takes place in every RE classroom.

Being religiously literate is an acknowledged life skill and even Ofsted has cited a focus on its development in every school because of its findings of 'very low level of religious literacy' of school-leavers (Ofsted, 2010: 7). This is important especially in our modern world which requires learners to have a deep understanding of 'the nature, diversity and impact of religion and belief' (Shaw, 2020: 151). Within the Church, religious literacy is vital in the Catholic school, because it is the 'grammar of dialogue'. It is what ensures a dialogue and encounter with the world and within the learner. It is not seen as being 'technical expedient, but … a profound way of relating to others'' and with ourselves (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). For Catholic religious education to be effective, pupils need to be religiously literate to understand the nuances of ideas and teachings being explored in the classroom.

For Ferier coining the term 'conscientization', he reasoned that a "literate" person is a critical and active participant in the society they live in (Kirylo and Boyd, 2017: 24). A person can only effectively participate if they understand the world around them, their place in it and know how to confidently interact with it. Irrespective of the world view a person takes, it can only

be effective in their everyday living if they are able to articulate and reflect on it on a personal and social level. The RE classroom irrespective of ethos, should be spaces where critical, active and curious student are formed.

It is important to highlight that reflexivity is not limited to the creation of religious literacy, but having a focus on religious literacy should be part of the process of reflexivity taking place while pupils are learning in the Catholic RE classroom. Shaw accentuates the notion that the very nature of striving to have religious literacy leads to reflexivity. She reasons that 'the focus on the situatedness of knowledge is key to understanding the real religion and belief landscape highlights the dialogical and reflexive nature of knowledge production' (2020: 155). This is because in the process of becoming religiously literate the learner and what is being studied 'are engaged as co-participants in the dynamic formulation of a narrative about religion' (156). By fully diving into the belief and its various socio-cultural manifestations, and being exposed to what others believe in relation to what is being studied, the learner joins in the 'insider/outsider debate' (Shaw, 2020: 156). The learner, if they are an outsider, can fully immerse themselves in the tradition being taught, gain a deep understanding and be able to evaluate what their reflexive process demands them to critique or have as a belief.

Moore (2007), who also cites the religious illiteracy of many, seeks to broaden the definition of religious literacy from just learning about religion, by pointing to its sociocultural and historical expression. He defines it as 'the ability to discern and analyse the fundamental intersections of religion and social/ political/cultural life through multiple lenses' (Moore, 2007: 56). Consequently, being religiously literate is paramount to the civil peaceful functioning of our pluralistic modern democracy (Shaw, 2020: 151), even if it is seen as post secular.

This dissertation focuses on religious literacy in the creation of reflexivity because it sees it as being fundamental to the fabric of society on an existential, cultural and ethical level. Likewise Richardson wrote

> *religious literacy is an individual and social good, from the ability of individuals to make informed choices about the beliefs that influence their moral understandings, to the moral goods of increasing understanding, respect and tolerance, and responsible political and civic engagement* (Richardson, 2017: 364).

Hence, from understanding what is being taught in the RE classroom irrespective of the faith of the school, a learner with the right understanding and knowledge can make sense of their lived experience. Through reflexivity the learner can have a deeper appreciation of the myriad forms of human experiences, traditions, knowledge and wisdom. It also builds the sensitivity needed to work and thrive in our globalised plural world. Religious literacy prepares 'young people for living in the increasingly diverse world in which they find themselves' (REC, 2018, 6). In all Educational settings with their beliefs and philosophies of holistic education of the child,

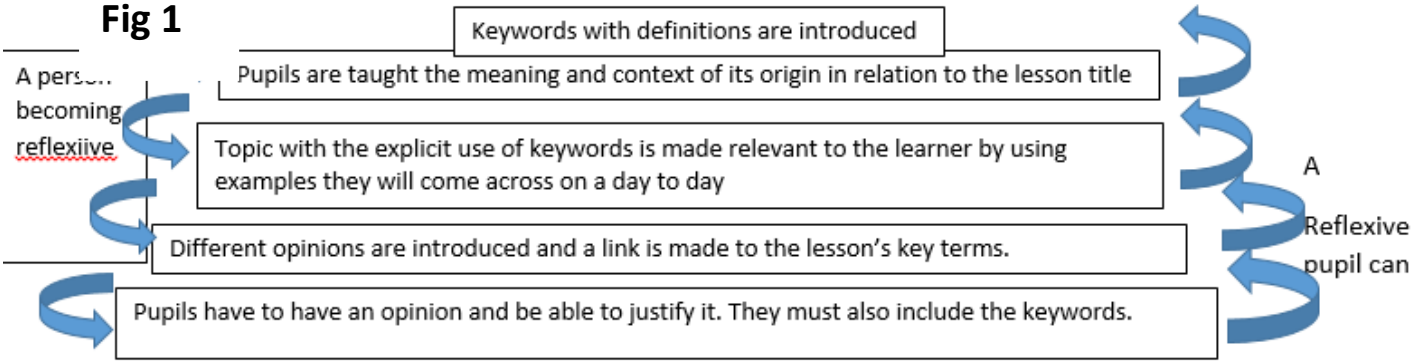
> *cultivating an informed respect for religious differences will equip students with the skills and temperaments to function more meaningfully and effectively within their home communities and the workplace realities they are likely to encounter in the future* (Moore 2007, 33).

Having the competence of being reflexive is important within all contexts of religious education because as reasoned by Fisher (2003) 'religion incorporates basic and powerful

beliefs about the human condition and it is important that children have an opportunity to articulate, share and consider these beliefs' (240), especially in safe spaces.

Fig 1 illustrates how religious literacy can be built into a lesson with the purpose of creating reflexivity with a starting point of introducing key terminology.

Fig 1



In this diagram a reflexive person can accordingly know and justify their opinion in the midst of many other opinions. They can identify these different opinions in the process. They also have enough background knowledge on the key ideas they have used to formulate their own held view and can thus apply it effectively in the formulation of their own views.

Cooling gives a very good articulation of what the religiously illiterate person faces when in the company of other religious Christians.

> *The early Christians were accused of cannibalism because their contemporaries heard them talking about eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus. This is a quite*

> *understandable misconception for someone who knows nothing of the beliefs that underpin the Eucharist. To give another example, a friend of mine once met an African evangelist at Heathrow airport. The evangelist had been telling his fellow passengers that his brother was meeting him off the plane. They were quite perplexed when they were introduced to the white skinned brother. Their difficulty was that they had never encountered the idea that the church is the family of Christ. Children and adults today will have similar problems in understanding. Christianity if they leave school theologically illiterate. The same point, of course, also applies to other religions.* (Cooling, 1994: 6)

The misconception of thinking Catholics are participating in an act of cannibalism, can cause many problems and conflicts. Accordingly, learners who learn about the sacrament of the Eucharist have a deep understanding of it without resorting to assumptions because of the words being used. In his speech *No Peace Among Nations until Peace Among the Religions* as part of his global ethic project, Hans Kung when speaking about modern German and Jewish relations, stresses on the importance of religious literacy. He states "there will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions" (Küng, 1991). Our globalised modern world needs religious literacy in the process of reflexivity to ensure all learners coming out of their RE can live and thrive harmoniously with others, free from misconceptions.

My approach in building religious literacy to aid in reflexivity, is very similar to the secular approaches of Lindsay(2020: 21), Deardorff (2013), Vieten(2013: 133); who reason that competence in any dialogue needs to be focused on 'knowledge, skills, and attitude' (Lindsay, 2020: 21). Unlike Deardoff (2013) and Vieten (2013) who reason the order of acquisition

should be 'attitude, skills and knowledge', this review is adopting Lindsay's line of reasoning and arguing that 'knowledge' needs to be the starting point, before 'skill and attitude'. Educating pupils to be religiously literate will equip them with the knowledge and understanding of various traditions, thus equipping pupils with confidence and skills of interaction, which they need in our globalised world. This will then make them develop a competent attitude which will make them educated active participants of our modern society; who can live, work and thrive alongside people who are very different from themselves (Lindsay, 2020: 22).

Accordingly, in this dissertation I echo Gadamer's notion that 'the gebildete (cultured) person is not only learned in the traditional sense by having knowledge of the facts, but s/he also possesses the ability to discriminate between good and bad, beautiful and ugly, important and unimportant, and so on' (Roy and Starosta, 2001: 11). Discernment is one of the many skills that should come out of the process of reflexivity while focusing on religious literacy (Davie, 2015; Shaw, 2020). By having knowledge and understanding of the other, the learner will not only have the knowledge but will know 'how to conduct oneself in the world with the tact to act appropriately in social situations' (Roy and Starosta, 2001: 11). This process means the learner will not only have 'the skills of critical enquiry' but they will also have an attitude of positively engaging with themselves and the world around them (Shaw, 2020: 156). This will naturally be the attitude of the religiously educated who has become educated through reflexivity, because of the intrinsic self-awareness and open-mindedness the reflexive process embodies (Shaw, 2020: 154).

In this research there is a prime focus on religious literacy in the creation of reflexivity as pupils need enough knowledge and understanding, to be skilful enough, knowing how to

conduct themselves and interact with the world outside of themselves, for their own good and good for all. Religious literacy is not beneficial to learning if it is not part of the reflexive process happening in the RE classroom, be it Catholic or otherwise. From the perspectives of exams, pupils will not be able to fulfil both the Assessment Objective 1(AO1) and Assessment Objective 2 if they do not know and understand the terminologies that define the content they are studying. In the long-term also having the right knowledge and understanding will help pupils makes sense of their emotion, thinking and lived experiences, and those of others, as they encounter the world as a whole.

Research Questions

1. **What is the role of religious literacy in the development of reflexivity?**
2. **Can reflexivity be created in a lesson or does reflexivity develop over time?**

Having these research questions, that are grounded in the literature review, sets the factors of the research, steering the whole course of the dissertation by giving the entire methodology and analysis of evidence a clear focus. The importance of research questions have been acknowledged and used as a guide for a very long time, as Lewis and Munn wrote 'research questions are the vital first steps in any research. They guide you towards the kin of information you need and the ways you should collect that information.' (1987:5).

The research questions challenged me to question my assumptions of how key terms should be taught and are learnt to help with the reflexive learning of pupils, especially in my low-attaining target group.

Methodology

Practitioner research

For this dissertation, my hypothesis is ***Focusing on religious literacy in the designing of tasks aids reflexivity in the Catholic RE classroom.*** Accordingly, practitioner research is the best type because it does not only leave room for collaboration and engaging with pupil's perspectives but it allows me to explore and try different activities and tasks for different classes (with different abilities) in my ongoing pursuit for creating reflexive pupils in my role as an RE teacher in a Catholic school. Focusing on having just a series of cycles for an action research would have made the process of reflexivity as a way of learning a disservice, as this is also a reflective practice to help me in my ongoing development as a teacher. Unlike action research which works in cycles, 'the practitioner researcher approaches research and embeds research within practice' as they research (Fox, Martin and Green**,** 2007: 1).

I was also influenced by the early work of Hargreaves (1996) who called for Practitioner research by challenging educational research which is done by non-practitioners. He has consistently asked practitioners to be engaged in research that will develop and inform their craft. This is because many educational researches which are not done by practitioners seem to be far removed/ detached in meaning from the profession.

To ensure that the research complied with 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (2018), which has been put together by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) alongside all the necessary legislation and professional ethical standards, my school based investigation had to be approved by the University's ethical review process. The process is managed by CUREC (the Central University Research Ethics Committee) through the

Departmental Research Ethics Committee. After the approval, I sought further approval from my Head Teacher to conduct the research within the school's context and classroom. This was necessary because of the responsibility and safeguarding of all the participants and the wider community of educational researchers. (BERA, 2018:6)

Timeline of my research:

At the start of the academic year, I drew up a plan for the research. I intended to hand in my CUREC form in October, which I did, and start making notes for my Literature review from October to November. I hoped to receive my approved CUREC Form by the end of November. This would have made it possible for me to start collecting data, using the data collected to plan and teach intervention lessons between December and March. I would have then aimed to start writing the dissertation from April to June; using June till the end of August as my rewriting and editing phase.

However, this original plan did not happen accordingly. I handed in my CUREC form in October and started reading and making notes for my literature review in October. Unfortunately, I had to reapply to the University for Ethical Clearance in December as I was advised I did not use the modus operandi. I finally received approval to collect data and teach my intervention lessons in March a week before the lockdown. This meant I had to quickly interview pupils as soon as I received approval, because there was a strong suspicion that schools were going to be put in lockdown because of the Covid 19 pandemic. All schools were put in lockdown on 20th March 2020.

Participants/ Collaboration

The choice of the target study group was based on classroom discussions and students' evaluative pieces of writing at the start of Year 11. Through these classroom activities, I realised how the pupils lacked deep understanding of the content they were being taught. During lessons, the students were able to answer and recall questions when being assessed. However, they struggled to apply those skills and knowledge in examinations and any form of managed classroom discussion (Lujan and DiCarlo, 2005). Learners found the application of their learnt knowledge to everyday lived experience also extremely difficult. Hence, I felt the need to base this research on these learners and in the process of the practitioner research, learn ways to support them in their long-term understanding. In addition, I settled on my low-attaining class as the study group, after realising that their involvement in the research could encourage them in their aspirations. For participating in the interview process, each participant was told they will be given a Certificate of Participation.

Apart from the students interviewed, teachers in my school's RE Department and two other Heads of Departments from other schools were also interviewed. The teachers interviewed in my school's RE department have all experienced teaching Year 11 and especially low-attaining pupils in Year 11 RE. This meant their experience of teaching RE to these year groups will be beneficial in assessing the role of religious literacy in creating reflexivity in the RE classroom. Furthermore, if not for the lockdown, teachers would have been encouraged to make inputs into lesson plans as well as observe my intervention revision lessons of the low-attaining class. Having my department collaborating with me was essential because of the importance of peer support (Cordingley, 2013; Higgins et al, 2015). This would have enabled me to strive to be objective in my lesson planning, enhancing my professional knowledge. Rather than filming myself, I chose an observation of the learners and my

teaching to avoid any safeguarding issues. Also, pupils are used to be being observed by another member of staff because the school has an open door policy. I also asked a teacher who was teaching a different band of low-attaining RE pupils in my school to observe me, as I felt her input would be honest, constructive and we could both learn from each other during the process.

The two Heads of Department interviewed outside my school were selected because their schools are completely different from mine. One of them teaches in a non-faith Grammar school, this teacher will be called Carol. The other teaches in a non-faith comprehensive school, this teacher will be called Betty. By interviewing teachers from different schools, I felt it would make my data more reliable. Accordingly, if they were saying similar things to the teachers in my Catholic school as based on their experience, then it is more likely to be valid and reliable.

I made sure all participants did not feel over-burdened by their participation. I asked them for a suitable time and then arranged the interviews accordingly. They knew the interview could always be postponed if needed. For the pupils I suggested the time and then they chose which ones worked best for them. With the interviews, I kept the questions short with participants being given enough time to answer and expand on their answers. This was because I was very mindful of 'concerns relating to the time and effort that participation in some research can require' (BERA, 2018:20).

The reliability and validity of practitioner research is paramount but cannot be guaranteed because of the inter-personal relationship with the participants. As any type of 'threat' can be 'attenuated' (Manion and Morrison, 2013: 105), I sent emails to the interviewees (teachers) requesting for the interview in order to avoid any form of coercion and to

depersonalise the requests. Pupils were told after a lesson. All participants including the teachers knew they had the option of pulling out of the research at any time according to ethical guidelines, which states “researchers’ use of incentives to encourage participation should be commensurate with good sense, such that the level of incentive does not impinge on the free decision to participate.”(BERA, 2018: 19).

Student participants were told they will be given certificates for their participation. This was an incentive to encourage their commitment to the outcome and to show my gratitude. When students were told about the research, they were encouraged to be themselves to avoid any pretence throughout the process so that it would be a true reflection of their views. They were also told they will be anonymised as part of the ethical requirements.

The identity of all participants and the school has been anonymised because of their rights to confidentiality (BERA, 2018: 21). Throughout my research the best interest of the learners in my care and who I based my research on, was of outmost importance (BERA, 2018: 15). Consent was given and all participants knew they could pull out at any given time (BERA, 2018: 9, 22). Due to the pandemic, all certificates were posted via the school with a note of thanks and the conclusion of my research.

In a letter to the Head Teacher I fully explained what the research was about and what the information would be used for. As part of the CUREC application, I included the letter for approval before sending it to my Head Teacher (BERA, 2018: 9). This was necessary as part of the Modus Operandi of the University’s Department of Education and the fact that the research was placed in my school context (BERA, 2018: 10). I did know there might be some conflict of interests in ‘power relationships’ because of my ‘dual roles’ (BERA, 2018: 13),

especially in cases where I might have to disclose sensitive data to my school, all of which was covered in the Modus Operandi and with my supervisor.

All participants were told how their data would be used (i.e.: in writing, the various reports to my sponsors, presentations in school and the poster conference). Participants knew all raw data would be kept on an encrypted USB stick and deleted as soon as its content were used appropriately. Throughout my research, right from filling out the CUREC FORM, until the very end of the research I always strived for honesty and transparency with all my participants and 'stakeholders, avoiding non-disclosure'. (BERA, 2018:16, 17)

At the end of the dissertation, I have been asked to give a CPD to the staff to the role of having reflexivity consciously created in our classrooms as part of the school's Catholic school ethos. It is envisaged that through this CPD the staff will learn more about the conclusions and the research as a whole. I know there are many seasoned teachers and reflexivity is not a new concept; however should 'conflicting interpretations arise', I will have a discussion with the individual concerned and find out how we can all learn from each other (BERA, 2018: 7). This can easily be done because this research does not seek to prove my hypothesis but to explore it and my research questions. I recognise that there is in 'the history of academic debate around RE…the need to be constantly aware of the inevitable limitations of any possible way of 'framing' religion and allow for the possibility of future 'reframing'' (Hannam, Biesta, Whittle and Aldridge, 2020). Accordingly, although a focus on literacy was the way I sought to create reflexivity, I was open to other ways of doing so.

Methods

For the methods used, the research can be viewed as a 'post-positivist perspective' whereby data collected will be 'fallible (best approximation of reality)' (Hesse-Biber, Rodriguez, and Frost, 2016: 9), because of limitations such as the context, time, number of people interviewed and most importantly the pandemic which caused a lockdown. Mixed methods was chosen because it fitted the research questions best (Hesse-Biber, Rodriguez, and Frost, 2016: 9). It was necessary 'to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon from differing perspectives' (Hesse-Biber, Rodriguez, and Frost, 2016: 9) and accordingly, 'to develop a more rounded understanding/theoretical framework' ((Hesse-Biber, Rodriguez, and Frost, 2016: 10). The desire to explore the creation of reflexivity from different perspectives informed not only the methods used but also the teachers from different contexts who were interviewed. The mixed methods chosen is the least restrictive, so it would have been used as a form of 'triangulation' to create 'reliability' and 'validity' to enable the creation of a more 'thorough and rigorous piece of research' (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 27, 28, 29).

The plan was that after holding various interviews with the low-attaining cohort and RE teachers participating, the data gathered would be used to create a questionnaire. This questionnaire would have then been given to the whole of Year 11 to check the consistency and reliability. The questionnaire would have been a useful way of collecting "information on respondents' attitudes, values and habits" (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 101). However, the lack of 'in-depth personal responses' of the questionnaire means 'both questions and answers often remain superficial'. (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 102).

Ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018: 21) encourage the use of questionnaires if the data is being collected from a large/ wide group of people. Accordingly, the plan was to give out the questionnaires at the start of Form and then collect it at the end. Although this did not happen because of the lockdown, pupils would have been reassured that their names would be anonymised when using their answers (BERA, 2018: 21). In the questionnaire, each question would have had a clear meaning with an aim of answering the research questions (Check and Schutt**,** 2012:107). Data collected from the interviews and questionnaires would have been used to advise intervention revision lesson planning with a clear focus on creating reflexivity. These lessons would have been observed by another RE teacher in my department.

Interviews

I chose to use an interview because interviews can be easily adapted to different contexts and participants (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 127. The interviews were semi-structured, thus I was able to explain words or phrases asked, to make sure the participant understood what was being asked when they hesitated. When interviewing teachers, I tried to relate certain questions to teachers' contexts be it a faith or non-faith school.

The qualitative nature meant 'non-verbal clues' could be discerned during the interviews (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 127). There were moments when it was clear a participant was struggling with answering a question, accordingly I gave a hypothetical example in his context and this helped them answer the question. There were also moments where a participant was very excited when speaking about a specific topic and I allowed them to talk for as long as they needed when responding to my question.

The conversations brought up new 'lines of enquiry' that were not obvious at the start of the research (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 127). There were some teachers who mentioned they have never had a focus on religious literacy despite the specifications (AQA) they use highlighting the need for religious literacy. The Head of Department in my school also mentioned he has always taught keywords to get pupils to answer the 1 marker question in the exam, but never incorporated it as part of the whole learning process in his classroom. This made me curious as to find out what they are trying to create in their classroom and what tools they are using to create this. Consequently, it made me realise that religious literacy might not necessarily be a focus for some RE teachers and accordingly I wondered how much it should be a focus when seeking to create reflexivity in the low-attaining.

As much as possible I tried to not influence participants' answers, because the interviewer influencing the participants' answers is a flaw of using interviews, be it because of power relations or the influence of knowing a colleague so well (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 127). I tried to counter this by encouraging all participants that their honest opinions is what I need to hear. I also tried to make them as comfortable as possible during the interview process by reflecting their emotions during times of excitement and encouraging them whenever they were struggling to answer a question.

Questionnaires

Although I did not get to use a questionnaire, I wanted to use it because I wanted to compare the answers given by my target group with the whole year. I wanted to find out if their struggles and experiences were unique to them, a struggle common to the low-attaining, or one common to the whole year group. Using a questionnaire would have made it easy to quickly gather a vast amount of data (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 127). In addition, it also meant I could have easily compared different cohorts of responses, analysing the factors that are contributing; be it the teacher's teaching style, the class setting of participants or if it was unique to my target cohort.

Being able to express the data 'statistically' would have also made it easier to analyse and compare findings with others (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 127). This would have made it easier to make overall conclusions and statements about teaching RE in my school and in other schools (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 127).

Unlike the qualitative nature of interviews, the answers in questionnaires rarely reflect the 'depth or complexity of people's feelings.' (Check and Schutt, 2012: 127). It does not consider the participants experience and there is no room for the participants individual exploration of the topic or to seek understanding of what is being asked. Thus, I knew I could not use a questionnaire on its own because of my hypothesis.

Observations

I chose to have my intervention revision lessons observed because it would have made me more aware of 'certain practices and behaviours' that I or pupils exhibit that I am not conscious off (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 142). I know observation also has its flaws, such as

the observer struggling to observe and record simultaneously. Accordingly, I would have created a form which had a few questions on it to allow the observer to spend 99% of her time observing, instead of trying to make sure she had filled in the form.

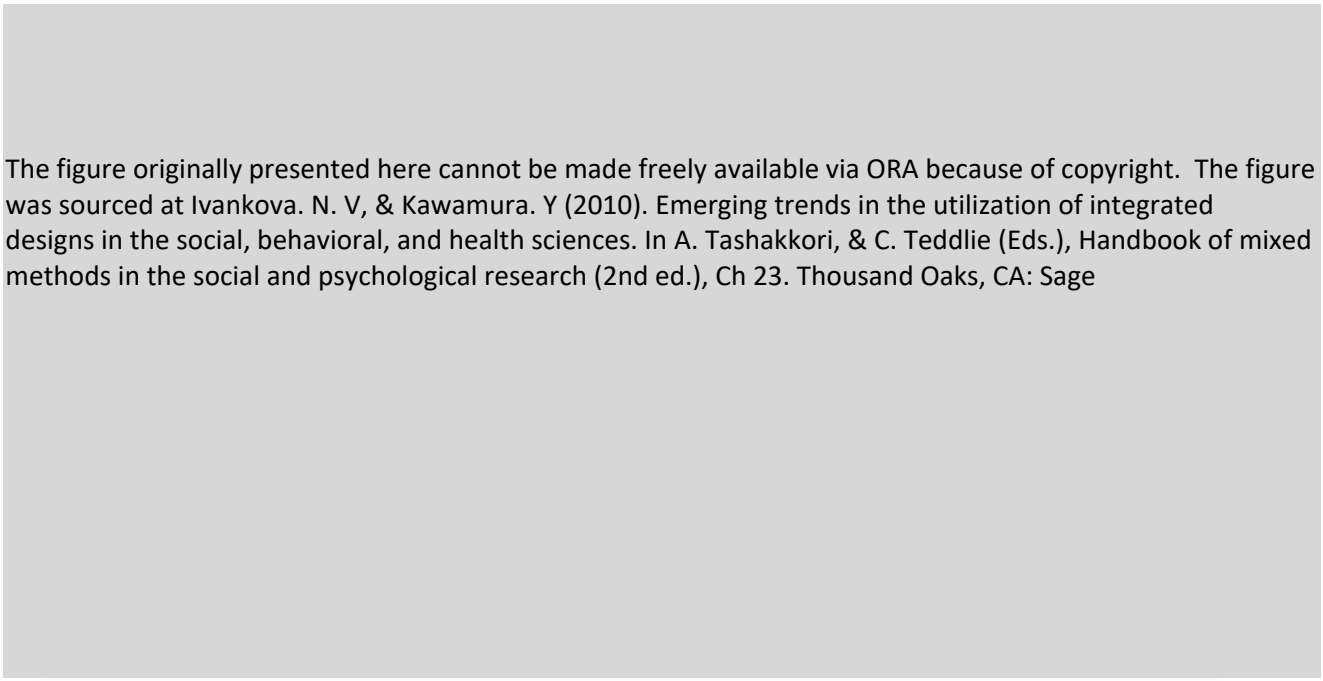
Also, although my school has an open door policy, it is possible that 'the observer may affect the situation as is frequently the case when a school inspector is viewing a lesson.' (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 142). The pupils might behave differently. I would have countered this by encouraging the pupils to behave like their normal selves before the observation.

Observation would have been used as a tool amongst many to explore the hypothesis. This is because observation was seen as the best method to understand which activities/ means of pedagogy works in the classroom when trying to create reflexivity, after the data has been collected from the interviews and questionnaires. Yet still, I knew 'it is not always possible to understand actions by observation alone' and I was prepared to do a follow-up interview if necessary. Accordingly, having my lessons observed would have been an asset to the entire research 'providing a fuller analysis, which ultimately improves the depth of the whole research project.' (Check and Schutt**,** 2012: 142).

Mixed methods

As shown in the work of Ivankova and Kawamura (2010: 591) Figure. 1, using 'mixed methods' is not new.

Figure 1



As an approach it is very popular and well documented in educational empirical research with a quarter of all research method publications between 2000 and 2008 being a mixed methodology (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2010).

Mixed methods can be defined as a methodology that uses both quantitative and qualitative methods 'to collect data, analyse data, report findings, and draw inferences in a given study' (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007). It is often seen as the 'third methodological movement' (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003: 5) and the 'third research paradigm' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 15).

Denzin (2010) criticises the use of the mixed methodology. He believes the inquiry within a piece of research loses its meaning when research methods become mere tools and

accordingly defines it as 'bold, innovative, energizing, and disruptive'(420). However, I am willing to use it because mixed methods allow the researcher flexibility to prioritize '*what is to be learned* over *how to learn it.'* (Preissle, Glover-Kudon, Rohan, Boehm, DeGroff, 2016 : 1). In fact, this is essentially what the focus of the dissertation is on i.e. *Creating reflexivity in low-attaining Year 11 pupils in the Catholic Religious Education (RE) classroom*. The method of finding ways on creating reflexivity is not the focus. Accordingly, as far as a method can help to find the best way of creating it, I intend to use it.

Mixed methods does not narrow and confine the research to a specific method. With mixed methods the researcher can 'marvel at the options in combining various approaches to suit the research problem and context.' (Preissle, Glover-Kudon, Rohan, Boehm, DeGroff, 2016: 1). Furthermore, this research is not based on proving a hypothesis or a philosophical inquiry on proving truth but rather on finding out if the hypothesis is indeed the case and viable. Denzin's (2010), critique of mixed methods being seen as mere tools is actually seen as an advantage in this research.

> *It's important to note that methods are tools; a researcher's methodology determines the way in which a tool will be utilized. The rationale for mixing methods must be tightly linked to one's methodology and the questions that emanate from this perspective* (Hesse-Biber, Rodriguez, and Frost, 2016: 6).

The entire research is inductive, because the hypothesis and research questions are grounded in the literature review. The research can be seen as a 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This is because I did not start with a hypothesis I intended to prove right from the start of the research. Furthermore, I am willing to change my hypothesis to fit the development of 'patterns in the data' (Check and Schutt, 2012: 33). From my experience as

a teacher and from my literature review, I did expect religious literacy to play a role in creating reflexivity or learning as a whole in the RE classroom.

The hypothesis, ***Focusing on religious literacy in the designing of tasks aids reflexivity in the Catholic RE classroom*****,** would have been tested with the mixed methods. From this hypothesis, I developed independent and dependent variables. The independent variable focuses on teaching, learning and understanding key terminology; and the knowledge it comes with, while the dependent variable focuses on how this helps with the creation of reflexivity in the Catholic RE classroom (Check and Schutt, 2012: 36).

Dinham and Shaw (2017) emphasis that 'what young people learn about religion and belief in the confused environment of schools underpins how they handle it throughout their lives.' (Dinham and Shaw, 2017: 2). Accordingly, before reflexivity is created I have to know clearly the activities and tasks I intend to have in my task designs to ensure reflexivity is happening (Thompson, 2015: 3). These activities and tasks would have been influenced by the data collected from the interviews and questionnaires.

Discussion of data

In the data analysis I will be discussing the research questions by discussing both pupils' and teachers' interview responses in relation to the research questions. For the teachers: Leon is the name I will be using for the Head of Department in my Catholic school, Pearl is the name I will use for the other RE teacher in my Catholic school, Betty the name for the Head of Humanities in the non-faith and non-selective school, and Carol the Head of Department for the non-faith Grammar school.

What is the role of religious literacy in the development of reflexivity?

Pupils

Out of the six pupils interviewed only one pupil mentioned the need for knowing the meaning of keywords in order to understand the content being studied. She mentioned once she understands the content in relation to the keywords, then she knows she understands the keywords. Arguably, the number of pupils interviewed is not reliable enough to draw a conclusion as to pupils understanding of when they have understood key terminology. Although this research is focusing on only one set 3 class, I would have probably interviewed more set threes or randomly chosen from different classes if there had been enough time.

Pupils seem to have detached the centrality of key terminology from their learning and only see it as a box to tick. Interestingly, two Heads of Department, Carol and Leon, mentioned that they used to have a similar attitude when they started managing their departments, because of the limited time for teaching which affected pupils' understanding of the key

term. Key terminology has for a long-time been seen as 'ticking the box', and these Heads were of the view that teaching keywords was necessary to answer the 1 marker question in the AQA examination. It makes sense that this is what has influenced pupils in their learning and approach to key terminology and religious literacy as a whole. Dinham and Shaw emphasized the existence of this notion by stating, 'what young people learn about religion and belief in the confused environment of schools underpins how they handle it throughout their lives' (Dinham and Shaw, 2017: 2). Accordingly, it shows how the intention of a teacher behind the designing tasks in a lesson can easily manifest itself in how pupils relate to the subject. Thus if there is a clear focus of religious literacy in the process of creating reflexivity, it is more likely these pupils will approach the key words in a way that makes it part of their entire learning process in RE.

Pupils seem to struggle with the personalisation and application of theological keywords in their everyday thinking and interactions. However, a pupil said she will only use such a word outside of the classroom if she is having a debate with friends or at home with a family member who is an atheist. Another said it probably comes to mind whenever he was in a religious setting like a church or during Mass. But apart from that all pupils said, 'They rarely use theological keywords.' Only one pupil said, 'theological keywords give a back story for life as a whole'. Another pupil mentioned how probably the only time they will use a key terminology from RE is in an English lesson when they have to analyse a text with religious and philosophical themes. These answers made me more interested in exploring how religious literacy can be used to support people's understanding and the reflexive process of their learning as a whole. For 99% of them religious words were only necessary in 1 marker questions which are recall questions.

However, with ethical words such as justice, peace, forgiveness, contraception from the thematic side of the specification and curriculum, all pupils said they were more applicable in their day to day life. For 1 out of 6 pupils cited, the content we studied in lessons informed how they live. The words are ones they come across often in the modern everyday context and which they would not necessarily attribute it to only religion. All pupils did say they had understood how these work in society from lessons had in the past because they could easily relate it to their everyday experiences and the national news.

However, in cases where the words were rarely used in everyday language, such as theological words which they only came across in RE lessons and at Church then they only recalled or used them when revising for a test or an exam. This might relate to studies on low-attaining pupils who struggle with literacy as a whole (Dunne, Humphreys, Sebba, Dyson, Gallannaugh and Muijs, 2007) or the general detachment all of them mentioned the theological content has from their everyday lives. The interviews made me realise that if I wanted to focus on religious literacy in the development of reflexivity, there had to be an ongoing use of keywords taught about and used in the past and insisting pupils use them when talking about them during lessons. I also realised there needs to be a focus on making the content relevant to their everyday experience to help them in their long-term learning.

Teachers

This question produced a mixture of answers for the teachers. Two out of four teachers (50 per cent) cited the importance of religious literacy. Betty reasoned you can only apply the knowledge and internalise it if you are able to engage with its history, diving deeper to understand the connection of the knowledge with the wider world and out of that you can form your own views. Very similarly Leon emphasised that in order to understand the whole

unit you need to know all the keywords. This seemed to echo the views of the pupil who highlighted the need to know and understand the keywords before understanding the topic. He also reasoned that pupils who tend to get Grade 9 usually effectively use keywords in their evaluative pieces of writing. He reasoned that 'understanding the ideas behind the words and where they have come from does help with reflexivity. Pupils can connect better with the other'. Accordingly although religious literacy has not been a great focus of his in the past he is starting to see its importance in pupils' learning.

Similar to Leon, Carol felt that AO1, key terminologies and her teaching of religious literacy as a whole are only used for recall questions in her department and that she recognises that there is a gap in focusing on religious literacy and reflexivity when creating the SOW. She said she never has it as a goal to create reflexivity or learning as a whole. However, she cited that her pupils always achieve the necessary grades regularly. She also mentioned because her subject is an option course for GCSE, majority of the pupils who take it are naturally passionate about it and are willing to learn, share their experiences in lessons and apply what is being learnt to their everyday experiences.

Pearl felt that religious terminology is not relevant in everyday life and her observation was that pupils find it difficult to wrap their heads around it. Accordingly, in her teaching she does not focus on this because many times if pupils 'can't understand the word they lose interest in the content', especially in the low-attaining. For her, ensuring that learning is happening in the classroom should not include religious literacy as an aim. This made me wonder how far reflexivity can happen without the inclusion of religious literacy, especially in the low-attaining classroom, especially as Carol also mentioned that her pupils are doing well in the subject despite not having a clear focus on religious literacy. However, in Pearl's

Catholic context, which is my school, low-attaining pupils are not reaching their target grades. Also in Pearl's school, apart from it not being a Grammar school, the subject is not an option. Pearl's context and experiences cannot be likened to Carol's, since it is possible that in Carol's school, despite not having a clear focus on religious literacy pupils, naturally dive into the knowledge being taught, which aids their learning as a whole. Also Carol mentioned that none of her GCSE pupils are low-attaining.

Consequently, although 'it could be argued that religious literacy ought to be adopted as both the aim for RE and as an organising principle for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in this subject area' (Hannam, Biesta, Whittle and Aldridge, 2020: 214), I wonder how religious literacy could be used in a way which is engaging enough to help in the reflexive process I want in my classroom, even among the low-attaining, and I am determined to find out in my ongoing practice. Religious literacy cannot be the main aim for RE lessons because, as Pearl cited, many pupils struggle with it at times and also just focusing on learning the knowledge can deter the development of reflexivity (Hannam, Biesta, Whittle and Aldridge, 2020: 215).

When teachers were asked directly if religious literacy can help pupils understand others and in the process themselves, the answers were very diverse and reflected the settings in which all the different teachers interviewed teach. Both teachers in my Catholic school, Leon and Pearl felt literacy can help pupils understand others and in the process themselves. For example, Leon cited how teaching a lesson on forgiveness and redemption and using stories such as the life of Mary Magdalene or stories of parents who have forgiven their children's killer, can influence them to see the value of forgiveness and giving people second chances. Pearl also reasoned 'once they have an understanding of the key concept

then they can unpick the meaning for themselves…it will help them have faith or not'. This shows the importance of having enough knowledge and understanding about something to hold an informed stance on it. Consequently, pupils can then start to be critically reflexive thinkers and learners.

Carol was of the view that it was possible to use religious literacy to describe learner's 'metamorphosis' during the process of reflexivity. However, she emphasized that they don't necessarily have to use religious language to meaningfully articulate themselves, although the connotations of the religious language used might present their articulation insightfully.

For Betty, it is not always straightforward to know if religious literacy helps pupils understand others and in the process themselves because this is then requiring a form of measurement which is not straightforward. She said:

> *I don't know because a lot factors play into it. Many of our pupils are extreme atheists, having a religious friend might be more effective than RE itself helping you empathise with something that is very different to you. Many students just cannot relate… so sometimes creativity, poetry and art is the best way to get them to relate and engage. It depends on the child if they want to understand others…some people prefer to study it and not engage with it to change. Belief is difficult to understand when you are outside of it. With the 1 hour a week with pupils there isn't much we can do as a department.*

This shows that it is very difficult to measure reflexivity or to ensure reflexivity is happening especially when the subject is compulsory as it is in her setting and as it is in my mine, and there are many pupils who are not interested in the knowledge, skills and attitude that

comes from the subject. Thus, although many engaging activities and techniques might be used with the aim of creating reflexivity in pupils, it is sometimes impossible to know if it is truly happening.

All teachers agreed on the importance of creativity (Dunne, Humphreys, Sebba, Dyson, Gallannaugh, Muijs, 2007:94) being used in low-attaining classes to create reflexivity rather than an emphasis on religious literacy. This is widely believed to provide a more positive learning experience for the low-attaining instead of having a literacy-inspired task design. For example, Betty mentioned that sometimes she allows her pupils to show their understanding or opinion through art. Templates will be provided to help especially low-attaining leaners as part of the scaffolding. Prompt questions and a thinking criteria will also be given to help with their thinking and self-reflection. This shows that when having an intention to create reflexivity, other techniques such as art can be used to make this a reality, especially with pupils who are not confident with literacy.

Can reflexivity be created in a lesson or does reflexivity develop over time?

Teachers

Betty, Carol and Pearl all felt RE lessons, in collaboration with all the subjects working together, are the best way to effectively make sure reflexivity is part of the learning process. Betty for example mentioned that in her experience as Head of Humanities RE teachers naturally seem to have that objective of reflexivity in their pedagogy because they are trained to be as such or because the evaluative elements of the specifications demand this. However, in her school all the humanities subjects she manages have an aim of getting students to be global citizens, and that the role of RE specifically is to do this with different

religions, ideas, personalities and belief systems in a safe space. Consequently, for her reflexivity happens over time with all the subjects she manages in the humanities working and informing each other in their ways of creating global citizens.

Carol felt that it was not healthy that spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) tends to fall on RE and that it should be cross-curricular. For her she reasoned, 'it will be more optimal and holistic if different subjects contributed to reflexivity, which leads to the development of SMSC. She reasoned that 'PE for example, can look at the drug testing element in sports which is moral and social'.

Similarly, Pearl reasoned that every subject in our Catholic school, especially in the humanities and social sciences, should have reflexivity as part of its curriculum for a well-rounded education. The fostering of reflexivity as a learning process in pupils should not just be an aim in the Catholic RE classroom. For Pearl, Carol and Betty, reflexivity as a process can only be effective if a school is committed to it as a development across curricula and over the entire time pupils are in the school. Although as Betty said it might easily happen in the RE classroom.

In the RE classroom both Betty and Leon stressed the importance of having its development in the creation of a scheme of work. Betty felt there was a danger in introducing the critical dialogue which comes with reflexivity very early on because core knowledge needs to be introduced first and built on. Then eventually reflexive activities are brought into the Scheme of Work (SOW) so that pupils will have enough knowledge to interact with, critique and then reflect upon. In addition, Leon asserted the SOW in our Catholic school has been created in such a way that it allows reflexivity to gradually develop as pupils build their knowledge.

Although all the teachers believed that it was very difficult and almost impossible to measure, 100% of all teachers interviewed agreed that with time it is possible. They reasoned that it can be observed in the insightfulness of responses in classroom discussions, debates or during questioning. Also they all mentioned that it can be measured through the quality of written evaluative essays and how they debate. Leon mentioned that the creation of an art piece in a lesson or overtime can also show the learning taking place within a pupil.

Both Pearl and Betty, although from different schools, highlighted the insider and outsider dichotomy which takes place in the RE classroom (Fancourt, 2015: 170-183). They both mentioned that reflexivity in the RE classroom is easier for pupils who are from religious backgrounds, even when the belief being taught is different to their own beliefs. This shows that for some pupils in might happen in a given lesson and for others it might happen over time. Accordingly, the need for familiarity in the learning to aid in the process of reflexivity is emphasised.

Pearl and Carol reasoned that it is possible to measure it in a lesson if the lessons are ethically based. This is because the knowledge is easily relatable to the everyday lives of pupils. Carol cited how a debate can be had as a lesson activity, whereby people stand at opposite side of the classroom to reflect their views while debating and are allowed to change sides during the debate. Pearl mentioned how a starter which is a continuum can reflect the views pupils hold and then the plenary can be used to check if views have changed.

Betty and Carol stressed the importance of soft skills, especially the relationship a teacher has with their pupil and how comfortable the pupil feels in the classroom, as the some of the main factors that help with the process of reflexivity. For example, Carol reasoned that

'student openness to the process comes with time and the trust towards the teacher creates the culture and ethos which can contribute towards the pupil feeling open to share their views'. She also stated that the teacher 'sharing personal knowledge and showing them how your opinion has changed with time can allow them to feel comfortable'. Similarly, Betty emphasised that having a relationship with pupils where they know they can express themselves without being judged is the foundation of creating reflexivity. Accordingly, trusting relationship with pupils must be strategically developed to give pupils the confidence they need to be critical interpreters of their leaning.

Limitations, Conclusions and Implications

Limitations

Having my CUREC applications delayed affected the timeline planned. It meant I could only gather data when I received the approved CUREC application in March. Accordingly, I spent the time beforehand reading and planning my research. If I had received approval in November as I had planned for it to be, I would have had more time to spend collecting and analysing data from my interviews and questionnaires. It also means I could have used lessons before pupils sat their Mocks in early March to test conclusions made from the data collection, and accordingly the mocks as a form of measurement for my data collected. However, because of the delay I intended to use my revision lessons with my Year 11s as an exploration of data collected and class discussions and class tests as a measurement.

The lockdown, which happened as a result of the pandemic made it difficult to carry out what I had planned for my data collection/ exploration of my hypothesis in the classroom. It meant I had to quickly formulate interview questions for my pupils and interview them on

the Wednesday of the week school closed. I was not able to carry out my questionnaires and explore the data collected in task designs taught in the classroom. This restriction means I am only able to rely on the questions provided by the six pupils and five teachers I interviewed. It also means my conclusions might not be the most reliable because of the small number of people I was able to collect data from.

Conclusions and Implications

From this research, it was quite obvious that there was not a clear understanding of the importance of religious literacy amongst all RE specialist teachers in both Catholic and Non-Catholic schools in the development of reflexivity. Similar to what was acknowledged in the literature review they mentioned religious literacy is only part of the learning process of RE in both Catholic and non-Catholic schools. All RE teachers stressed the fact that creativity has to play a role when creating reflexivity for low-attaining pupils, as religious literacy, especially theological key terminology can be quite difficult to apply if it is not familiar.

Soft skills such as the relationship with the teacher and the learning space also has to be considered. The creation of reflexivity cannot just be reduced to a focus on religious literacy; many factors play a role in its creation. Therefore, reflexivity is also very difficult to measure as any form of personal development needs to take several factors into consideration.

What I realised is that as a teacher you must have it as an intention when designing tasks and then have appropriate tasks to make it a reality. Being intentional in your planning is more likely to encourage reflexivity.

Some questions this research raised include:

How can RE teachers in a Catholic school address the obvious tensions created through being critical during reflexivity in a more productive light?

How far does having a focus on religious literacy as part of the learning process develop reflexivity?

What is the best way to fully address and clearly pay homage to the purpose of RE in a Catholic School in the classroom while being unbiased in the approach to other worldviews?

This piece of writing contributes to both the secular and Catholic approach to teaching and learning in RE. This is because as mentioned before in the literature review, every school and institution have a confessional nature be it its ethos or worldview, although it might not be acknowledged and some might be more explicit than others. This was acknowledged in the CoRE report (REC, 2018). Even in our democratic society there are British values which every citizen is meant to adhere to. Once this is acknowledged there can be that clear aim of creating critical reflexive pupils who can fully function and thrive in our modern society as the new report by CoRE(REC, 2018). A National Plan can then be proposed which is inclusive of the secular and the religious.

I intend to carry out the research into reflexivity a bit further in my Farmington scholarship next year (2020/2021), with a focus on KS3 pupils. During the Masters I was made a KS3 coordinator, in this roles I intend to create schemes of work that focus on using key terminology and other creative ways to create reflexivity in all my units. Furthermore, I intend to explore effective ways of measuring this in the long term.

As the Assistant Head of Year 10, it is my aim to explore reflexivity in more depth and as a whole school initiative. I intend to do this, by creating reflexive projects to manage the behaviour of the Year 10s in the next academic beginning September 2020, using the school's pupil profile as a framework.

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