Methods and Techniques Employed in the Religious Education of Year 5 Students

WARREN ZAMMIT

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Abstract

Warren Zammit

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The main aim of this research was to study how Religious Education (RE) is being taught and delivered to year 5 primary school children. In particular, an emphasis was made on the perceptions that teachers and students hold of different methods and techniques. The teachers’ perspectives were gathered through a questionnaire that was filled in by year 5 teachers working in state and church schools. On the other hand, year 5 children voiced their ideas through focus groups. Findings show that teachers hold a positive attitude towards RE, and that the majority of them are shifting away from traditional pedagogies such as relying only on books. In fact, teachers most two preferred methodologies were video forum and storytelling. The study also indicates that teachers should be aided more in developing innovative pedagogies since there are teachers who are not comfortable doing so due to their background in the subject. With regards to children, it was found that they enjoy the subject; however, there is still a lot of emphasis on examinations which is leading them to value more the methodologies that target only the cognitive domain.

B.Ed. (Hons.)

May 2015

PEDAGOGIES
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
YEAR 5
CHURCH SCHOOLS
STATE SCHOOLS
Author`s Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the legitimate author of this dissertation and that it is my original work.

No portion of this work has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institution of learning.

__________________________
WARREN ZAMMIT

May 2015
To my beloved grandmother,
Concetta,
for her love and support throughout her days on earth.
(1936-2011)
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<td>RE</td>
<td>Religious Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>DQSE</td>
<td>Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCF</td>
<td>National Curriculum Framework</td>
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Chapter 1

Introduction
Chapter 1: Introducing the research

1.0 Introduction
From my primary schooling, I have always valued Religious Education (RE) as a subject that is quite enriching since if the right methodology is applied, it promotes values through a religious context that will help in living a moral life. This has led me to further my studies in the subject at post-secondary education since I wanted to familiarise myself more with RE. However, when I returned to the primary sector as a student teacher, I got the impression that RE is not valued enough as a subject. Having said so, I have to acknowledge that I never taught in church schools, and so this hypothesis of mine was based only on my experiences in state schools. This has inspired me to look at the methods and techniques that are currently being applied by teachers teaching RE in both sectors of education. Furthermore, children’s ideas were also taken into consideration. To let them participate, it wasn’t enough to simply allow the children to speak, but I tried to make sure that they were contributing towards an improvement in one of the subjects in their curriculum (James, 2007).

1.1. Research question
When I decided to have RE as the focus of my dissertation, I was interested in researching various aspects of the subject, and it was difficult to arrive at one research question. At this point, I decided to look at what previous researchers at an undergraduate level had found. It was here that I came upon and read the dissertation written by Abela, Azzopardi & Bugeja (2002) entitled Aims, methods and content employed in religious education: a comparative case study between Year6 primary, state, church and independent schools. I looked specifically at this dissertation since it focused on some very interesting aspects about RE that I also had the intention of focusing on initially. However, I realised that this dissertation was written at a time where the education system was different than it is now. Although this was the case, I still did not want to research something that had already been investigated.

Given this context, I discussed the subject with my supervisor, and it was decided that my research would focus on how RE is being taught and delivered to year 5 primary school children. The intention of this research is to become more aware of the current classroom reality, and
understand the value that it is given to RE. One has to also note that although both state and church schools participated in the study, the main idea is not to compare, but to have a context specific discussion.

1.2 The set-up of the dissertation

In the literature review, I will deal with a variety of methods and techniques that are being employed or suggested when teaching RE to primary school children. Additionally, other factors will be delved into, including teachers conceptions, the aims of RE, models of RE, and the approaches to teaching the subject.

The methodology chapter will present the sequence followed when collecting the necessary data to answer the research question. In this chapter, the methodology applied will be introduced, and justifications will be made about why such a methodology was chosen to carry out the research. At this point, I will also discuss the various advantages and disadvantages that the chosen methodology provided me with. Moreover, I will also go through the steps taken to obtain an ethical consent.

With regards to the data analysis chapter, discussions about the statistical data that emerged out of the questionnaires will take place. In this context, the perceptions of teachers alongside the different ways in which they teach RE will be looked at. In addition, the children`s opinions that were conveyed through the conversations with meaning will also be an integral part of the discussion. All of this discussion will be conducted around the literature that can be found referenced in the second chapter.

The concluding chapter will present a summary of the findings that came forth from the research at the basis of this dissertation. Here, I will also share some reflections about these findings. Additionally, a discussion about some of the limitations I experienced while conducting the study will also be included. Finally, I will offer some suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2

Literature Review
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Both locally and internationally, there has been an ongoing debate about Religious Education (RE) and its relevance to the education system. This has led the subject to a transition period. There are many reasons behind this, among which secularisation, pluralism, and globalisation stand out as three factors markedly influencing the field of RE (Schreiner, 2007). A review of the current local and international literature will be conducted so that the Maltese situation will be understood better.

When reviewing the place of RE in local schools, Gellel (2009) stated that in Malta there are 181 schools, but only 3 of them do not provide Catholic RE. This indicates that the subject is an integral aspect of the local education system. However, it seems that RE is facing problems when it comes to the teaching methods and techniques employed. Such problems include inadequate textbooks as well as teachers who still prefer adopting traditional approaches.

This chapter begins with a definition of RE. This will lead to a look at the relationship between the Maltese church and state so that the context in which RE is taught will be understood better. At this point, a brief description of the different models of RE will also be given. This will be followed by a brief account of the different models of Catholic schools. Furthermore, an analysis of the different conceptions, approaches, and aims that teachers hold in relation to RE will be conducted. The three different domains of learning will also be discussed. Finally, what literature says about different didactic techniques will be considered. All this discussion will take place in the light of the different methods and techniques employed in the teaching of RE.

2.1 Defining RE

In trying to define religious education (RE), a reference will be made to Zeibartz (2003) who in an interreligious world tried to understand the social context of RE. He stated that in a world characterised by such a notable religious diversity, if RE is taught well through the medium of differentiation, it can still unite children. This is the reason why “teaching will have to become more open for dialogue with the other ideological and religious movements present in society” (p.47). RE is a subject that should include more the pedagogy of dialogue instead of focusing...
solely on the subject matter. Zeibartz also argued that RE is open, and so there should be wider inclusion. This is true since if we look at the local context, RE is only available for Catholics, while those who are not Catholics have to opt for ethics education, or simply do something else during RE lessons, since right now, ethics education is only available in a minority of schools. In fact, RE is normally associated with Christianity; however, although it is impossible to have RE for every faith, RE should cater for children of different beliefs by creating mixed faith classes.

2.2 The relationship between the State and the Church

When looking at RE as a subject that falls under the responsibility of the faith community, one has to also look at the issue of the relationship between the state and the church since it also affects the place of RE in the education system (Willaime, 2007). The Education act (1988) states that:

It shall be the duty of the Minister to provide for the education and teaching of the catholic religion in state schools and to establish the curriculum for the education and teaching of that religion in those schools according to the dispositions in this regard of the Bishops in ordinary of these islands (art47(3)).

This extract from the local law implies that there is a healthy relationship between the state and the church. In fact, the church also draws up the syllabi for RE in state schools. However, it seems that in Malta we are heading towards a system whereby more than one religion should be taught. This is because as Darmanin (2013) stated, in schools children are constantly facing different religious cultures. In addition, Gellel (2014) argued that the spiritual dimension should be an integral part of the children’s holistic development; however, he acknowledged that it is only tackled during RE. This should lead to a RE which is open for everyone so that no one will be deprived of an adequate spiritual education. These arguments lead to the question put forward by McCreery (2005), namely how Catholics can teach other forms of religion. Furthermore, this confirms Darmanin’s (2007) argument that state schools are also Catholic oriented since the majority of educators working in public schools are Catholic, and thus they tend to create a Catholic environment leaving little or no space for other cultures.

2.2.1 Models of RE

The relationship between state and church influences the type of RE model chosen. Such models include the denominational / confessional, multi-faith, nonreligious, and mixed models. In the confessional model, the content is specific towards one particular religion since it is the sole
responsibility of religious organisations to provide RE (Karamouzis, 2009). This does not mean that the state provides the teaching of only one religion, but that each individual chooses his/her own RE. A typical example of this is found in Germany where apart from Catholicism and Protestantism, RE also includes other forms of RE through a system of cooperation (Knauth, 2007). On the other hand, as the name implies, the multi-faith model involves the teaching of multiple religions. The mixed model is when mixed-faith classes are created. The benefit of such a model is that it can create an interreligious dialogue between children of different faiths (Troost et al., 2008). Lastly, the nonreligious model is a model in which no type of RE is conducted. An example of a country that adopted such a model is France (Schreiner, 2005).

2.2.2. Catholic schools
Since RE is currently in a transition process, it is also important to look at Maltese Catholic schools. Arthur (as cited in Walbank, 2012) described three models of Catholic schools which are the holistic, pluralistic, and dualistic. The holistic model suggests having teachers and pupils who are Catholic, while the pluralistic model is a more open-ended model in which the Catholic school will cater for more than one religion. Furthermore, the dualistic model refers to schools where the secular and religious aims are separated. When looking at Malta, it can be argued that the majority of Catholic schools fall under the holistic model since the baptism certificate is still a requirement for admission into church schools as it is stated under the documents required section on the Maltese church website (The Church in Malta, 2015).

2.3 Teachers` conceptions
The methods and techniques that are adopted in the teaching of RE depend on teachers` conceptions since these exert a significance influence (Valstar, 2013). Here, a reference will be made to the Elementarization model which Petra Freudenberger-Lotz (as cited in Valstar, 2013) came up with. This model puts forward the idea that educators should stick to elementary knowledge presented in the best possible way. Wolfgang Klafki (as cited in Valstar, 2013) argued that when planning, teachers need to ask themselves whether the content really benefits the students. Klafki was against a never-ending curriculum, and assumed that the elementary subject matter was a mixture of “whatever can be regarded as fundamental and representative for the subject” (p.19), and what contributes to students’ development. This has led him to his dual
principle of categorical education which states that “students should be afforded to open
themselves to their own reality” (p.20).

The teachers` conceptions are also reflected in the learning environment that they create, and
they influence the conceptions of the learners as well. The reason for this is that such an
environment affects the children`s experiences. This has been discussed by Jonker (2013) who
discussed what the learner does in relation to the learning environment. Jonker employs the
metaphor of a pilgrimage to illustrate the way in which learning takes place. Children and
teachers have goals that they walk towards. In doing so, they are all carrying their personal
experiences with them. When creating the learning environment, it is imperative for teachers to
understand the children`s experiences since they are those who can give life to the syllabus
(Buchanan & Engebretson, 2009).

2.3.1 Aims of RE
The different conceptions of learning and RE lead to the relevance of the definition of the aims
of teaching RE. As Teece (2001) put forward, this is not an easy task because the aims of RE
have to do with the values already embraced by the children. It is believed that this is one of the
major difficulties that teachers are facing, and thus they will need to employ a different set of
criteria when applying their methods and techniques. Moreover, in discussing the aims of RE,
the following reference to some local documents will help further in explaining these aims.

The first one is a document published by the Secretariat for Catechesis of the Maltese
Archdiocese (Gellel et al., 2008) in which it is argued that RE is no longer catechesis. In fact, it
is stated that even the local Synod has made an emphasis on the need to clarify the distinction
and complementarity between catechesis and RE in schools. In this document, it is also argued
that in the Maltese context, the main aims of RE are to educate the spiritual and religious
dimensions of pupils, and to encourage the development of a healthy relationship of each pupil
with self, others, and God through Christ (p.7). This indicates that in theory, RE should aim to
educate students holistically; however, as the same document admits, in Malta, “there is a
preference to religious knowledge rather than religious education” (p.25). The document argues
for a balance between Theology and pedagogy.
In relation to the argument about the distinction between RE and catechism, it would be useful to have a look at the situation in Scotland, where RE educators have different aims. This is because through a locally produced syllabus entitled *This is our faith (TIOF)*, the Scottish education authorities are trying to unite catechism and RE (Franchi, 2013). It is believed that it is difficult to do so in a pluralised world because RE has to do with getting to know about the religion, while catechism is about the personalisation of religion. Nevertheless, in doing so, Scottish teachers can easily move away from simply imparting religious knowledge.

Given that the main focus of this dissertation is the RE of year 5 pupils, two other relevant local documents that depict the aims of RE are the *National Curriculum Framework* (2011) and the year 5 syllabus (2013) for religious education. The former stresses the aim of having learners that will develop their potential as lifelong learners. If the right methods and techniques are applied, this should also lead to the development of the student’s moral and spiritual dimension. As the *NCF* rightly argues, RE can help the children to develop their own identity and understand better their cultural identity. The only debatable point with regards to the *NCF* is whether the time it allocates for RE is enough. Prentice (2012) argued that more time should be spent on RE instead of competing for marks. This should allow more time for children to engage in worthwhile dialogue. It is interesting to note that Prentice teaches in a multicultural school and that she is an atheist. Jackson (2004) argued that there are several pedagogies that focus on dialogue in the classroom in which the students are central, and so, such pedagogies should also be adopted locally. With reference to dialogue, this can take place not only between religions, but also between children of the same religion who might hold different ideologies.

When it comes to the year 5 syllabus, various points can be observed. Firstly, it has the aim of giving importance to the experiences of different people. This is something positive since role models can help the children to learn. Moreover, the syllabus is linked to other syllabi like Social Studies through stories such as that about *Dun Mikiel Xerri*. This is also important since as Rowley & Cooper (2009) stated, we need to look at “knowing” and “valuing as part of a whole, which needs to be infused through our experiences” (p.2). This syllabus is also linked with Social Studies by focusing a great deal on the community. This conforms to Carr`s (2007) idea that RE can be linked with other humanities subjects. Through this, RE should contain more practical aims by suggesting activities such as, for example, visiting an old people’s home. This
is the reason why Kay & Francis (1985) argued that religion touches so many aspects that it is intrinsically an interdisciplinary subject.

2.3.2 Approaches to teaching RE

When discussing the aims of RE, academics often make a reference to two approaches which help in reaching such aims. These two approaches are teaching from religion and teaching about religion. Andrew Wright (2008) claimed that these two approaches cannot be separated since “questions of truthful living cannot be separated from questions of ultimate truth” (p.5). This implies that to teach RE in a holistic manner, teachers have to teach children about facts and beliefs, but also about practical aspects. A typical way of how this can be done is through parables. The idea of teaching about and from religion has also been tackled by Jackson (2007) when he argued about the distinction between educating into, about, and from religion. According to this researcher, education into religion has to do with one religious tradition, while educating about religion is more about the historical aspects of religion. Moreover, educating from religion implies enabling the pupils to consider different aspects of religious issues.

Buchanan’s (2010) list of approaches also deserves be consulted here, given that this seems to be the most relevant to the local context. Buchanan discusses approaches within a Catholic religious model that is very similar to the one that is adopted here in Malta. The first approach is the doctrinal approach where the focus is on church teachings. An example of such an approach is the Nitgħallmu and Niftakru questions that were present in the previous textbook (Lejn il-Missier, 1983). Another approach that focuses on Jesus as personal saviour is the kerygmatic approach. This approach challenges educators to bring the joyful message of religion to the classroom. The third approach is the life-centred approach, and this focuses on sharing experiences in the class. This is interesting because as Lowndess (2010) argued, there is a relationship between good RE and personal experiences. Kozyrev (2012) also argued in favour of making emphasis on the personal dimension of RE. The next approach is the Shared Christian Praxis approach developed by Groome, and it is based on critical education theories. It is through this approach that critical self-reflection can be developed. The next approach is the phenomenological one, which deals with studying religion simply for academic purposes. The last two approaches are the typological approach, dealing with the implementation of the
phenomenological approach in the classroom, and the text-based approach which deals with knowledge.

All these approaches show that finding the right method and technique is not easy when it comes to RE. In this scenario, Frost (1977) argued that an approach towards RE should be plural (not limited to one tradition), open (does not define content from within one religious tradition), exploratory (in terms of the attitude it encourages), and aiming at understanding.

2.3.3 The three main domains

After looking at the different conceptions, aims, and approaches, teachers need to take into consideration the three domains of learning namely the cognitive, affective, and spiritual. The cognitive dimension is related to knowledge and facts. The Nitghallmu u Niftakru questions that were present in Lejn il-Missier (1983) provide a clear example of tackling the cognitive domain. On the other hand, the affective dimension is the dimension that focuses on attitudes. To give an example, the affective domain can be targeted by helping the children to think of others.

The spiritual domain is rather abstract, requiring some further reflection. Alexander & Mac Laughlin (as cited in Radford, 2011) have identified five strands related to this domain. These are the seeking out to develop meaning, the fostering of the inner space, the expression of spirituality, the unique response to the natural and human world, and collective aspects related to the community. All these strands show how complex the spiritual domain is, and how much effort is needed by the teachers to target such a domain.

Buchanan & Hyde (2008) stated that many times the cognitive dimension is given priority over other dimensions. However, as these two researchers correctly argued, these domains are complimentary. This was also stated by de Souza (2005) who argued that effective learning can only take place if the three domains complement each other. This is not the case in Malta because a lot of emphasis is made on knowledge (Gellel, 2008). Teachers should try to apply the learning model developed by de Souza (2005), and further explored by some university students in Australia. In this model, teachers go through the three domains when planning their lessons to create an inclusive class in which students do not just feel valued, but also safe (Ipgrave, 2004). Herrgesell & Pollitt (2007) came up with examples of good practice in RE that can help in
catering for the three learning dimensions. These examples include telling stories and having children working at different stations.

**2.4 Didactic techniques when teaching RE**

Didactic techniques are also an integral part of RE since they can be useful in planning around the three main domains. These also help the children to associate the teacher’s input with their own personal experiences. When applying such techniques, it is also important that teachers avoid giving instructions because as Furrow & Reimer (2001) found out, these were associated by children with adult teachers such as the clergy, and thus they tend to dissociate themselves.

A very important didactic technique is that of story-telling. Stories are important because they bear religious identity (Crain, 2007; Ammerman, 2003). As McCreery, Palmer & Voiels (2008) argued, the teacher’s role as a facilitator should be to give the necessary skills to the children to be able to interpret these stories. This is important because narratives help children to relate the stories to their lives (Corcoran, 2007). To be able to achieve this, Miller (2008) suggested the use of dramatisation since “it is one of the most effective methods for enriching the pupil’s ideas” (p.5). Additionally, teachers should reflect a bit when coming up with follow-up activities to stories, since techniques such as those using a verbal approach, like filling handouts, discussions, and explanations, will not guarantee learning (Gellel, 2009).

Another source that teachers can profitably utilise are the media. Sarno (1987) argued that the more teachers know about communication, the more effective their message will be. This is because teachers will know which strategies they can choose in order to deliver their lessons more effectively. Further to this, he argued in favour of media such as photographs, radio, cinema, and television, since he thinks that these types of media are the ones that are related mostly to RE. Moreover, according to Sarno, certain traditional truths and values can be made more understandable to the students by the use of various media. What is interesting is his question about having children who from a very young age have a television in their room. In this scenario, one has to also keep in mind that Sarno’s work was published twenty eight years ago, and so the number of children who nowadays have not just a television, but also internet connection in their rooms increased. This can lead teachers who are not sure about the use of media during RE to ask themselves whether it is still possible to teach without using such means.
Apart from the media just mentioned, there are other methods like art and drama that can be used for various goals, such as to encourage awareness and discovery in children, to enable pupils to enter compassionately into religious practice, to promote spiritual development, and to use creativity to show understanding (Miller, 2003). Furthermore, through these methods, children will be making the subject more practical since they will also be putting forward their own voice, and thus enhancing their growth (O`Grady, 2006).

2.5 Conclusion

All this literature should lead to a deeper understanding of the concept of religion. Skei (2012) argued that “the understanding of religion has importance of how we deal with this in education” (p.95). This makes us aware that it is imperative for teachers to understand the subject themselves before teaching it. In addition, it can be said that this is more difficult when it comes to primary education since in the majority of primary schools, the subject is taught by the class teacher who might not be comfortable in teaching it. However, efforts are being made to give more resources to primary school teachers in this regard. Finally, as it was illustrated in this chapter, it depends on the attitudes of the teachers towards the subject and the value that they attach to it.
Chapter 3

Methodology
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction
In this chapter, the procedure that will be followed to conduct the research will be discussed. In particular, the research question and the steps that the researcher will take in answering the question will be developed. An analysis of the ethical procedure taken and the types of methodology that the researcher intends to apply will also be investigated. This will lead to a discussion about the strengths and weaknesses that these methods will provide the researcher with. In addition, a definition of the applied research will be given.

3.1 Research question
As argued in the previous chapter, teachers` can have a huge influence on what happens in class. Following this line of thought, the purpose of this research question is to find out in what way Religious Education (RE) is being taught and delivered to year 5 children. This implies that one needs to become aware of the current classroom reality, in particular when it comes to pupils` and teachers` perceptions of the methods and techniques employed. Moreover, it is hoped that the research will shed light on the pedagogical difficulties and challenges that are being experienced in the teaching of RE at the primary level. This research will also be giving a voice to the children by considering them as active subjects who can contribute to the research (Smith, 2011). Through their voice, one may infer other voices including those of parents, places, games, and so on (Kupfer, 2011).

This research question will serve as a guide which will lead to an answer. As Stoner (2010) suggests, “the research question must be well articulated and specific” (p.3) since this question will also determine what type/s of methodology will be applied to conduct the planned research. In addition, Giarelli and Chamliss (1988) argued that without a research question there can be no inquiry.
3.2 Applied Research
When discussing applied research, Christensen & Johnson (2010) stated that it “has the focus of answering practical questions to provide solutions” (p.9). The researcher plans to meet teachers and children since they are the persons who are directly involved in the teaching and learning of RE. Furthermore, based on the data collected, he will be providing a formative evaluation that can help in improving the teaching of the subject in the primary years. While carrying out this applied research, he will also keep in mind the context in which the research will be taking place since as Sherman & Webb (1988) argued, research is not something abstract, but exists in a context.

3.3 Types of methodology
After articulating the research question, it is necessary to find methods that can lead to answering it. Different qualitative and quantitative methods are taken into consideration. Any research method has its advantages and disadvantages. In this scenario, a decision was made to opt for a mixed methodology whereby qualitative and quantitative techniques will be concurrently employed.

3.3.1 Mixed Methodology
When speaking about a mixed methodology approach, it is evident that its main advantage is that it can combine the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. With regards to qualitative research, such strengths include having first-hand experience of different phenomena, seeing things that are normally not considered, and building on the researcher’s own experience (Hatch, 2002). Apart from this, other strengths are those put forward by Christensen & Johnson (2010), namely that qualitative research is useful to describe multifarious phenomena; it provides descriptions based on rich detail, and it is open to local situations. In addition, such data is collected in natural environments and it facilitates discovering the why and how of things. On the other hand, mixed methodology also incorporates the advantages that quantitative research possesses. According to Christensen & Johnson (2010), these advantages include the ability to generalise findings and to make predictions. The same authors also make reference to time spent in collecting it, preciseness, and sample size as strengths of such a methodology. Furthermore, Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004) argued that data resulting from quantitative research has nothing to do with the researcher, and this makes it more trustworthy.
In relation to mixed methodology, one has to also acknowledge that it has some drawbacks as well. As a matter of fact, combining two types of methodology is not easy, and it requires a certain level of commitment. Moreover, it is imperative for researchers to be flexible between the two methodologies. In addition, a mixed methodology will lead to having a more time consuming research (Christensen & Johnson, 2010; Velez, 2008). Besides, as Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004) stated, it is difficult for one person to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research if the qualitative and quantitative parts are to be conducted at the same time. This will inevitably put pressure on the researcher who needs to become familiar with multiple methods of data collection.

While conducting a mixed research, it is also imperative not to create a sense of dualism between the two research methods. On the contrary, both methodologies should be complementary to each other. As Huxley (2009) argued, “the goal of mixed method research is not to replace qualitative or quantitative approaches, but, rather, to combine both approaches in creative ways that utilise the strengths of each within a study” (p.559). This is what the researcher intends to achieve when using both methods through a parallel design in which the different types of data will be collected and analysed separately (Christensen & Johnson, 2010).

### 3.3.2 Qualitative research

As Stoner (2010) argued, qualitative research has to do with understanding the experiences of people. When doing qualitative research, the researcher will have to try to learn from the experiences of those participating in his research. To be able to do so, he should take Sara Delamont `s (2012) advice of making the familiar strange. This means that the researcher will have to make sure that his experiences will not make him prejudiced towards the experiences of those participating in the research. Such a method is also context specific, and so, the experience is studied as a whole since the research will take place in natural settings (Edson, 1988). Due to this, qualitative research is considered to be an integral part when it comes to conducting educational research.

In qualitative research, there are two perspectives that can be adopted. These are the funnel approach and the modified analytic induction (Wiersma & Jures, 2009). In the funnel approach, the researcher starts from a general research question that will target various aspects and keeps on narrowing. On the other hand, the modified analytic induction begins with a more specific
question and attempts to tackle all issues under one study. In this particular study, the modified analytic induction will be applied since the researcher will start with a specific question in mind which has to do with the methods and techniques employed in the teaching of RE to year 5 children. At the same time, he will also try to tackle other issues such as the perspectives of teachers and students when it comes to the current methods and techniques.

Mary Lichtman (2006) argued that when doing qualitative research, the participants can be considered as co-researchers. It is believed that this is important since the subjects will relate directly with the research, and in a way also consider it as their own. When choosing qualitative research for the present study, the researcher kept this in mind since he wanted children to contribute in an active way. Another interesting point that Lichtman put forward is that qualitative research seeks to answer the `why` and not the `how`. It is believed that this is essential when trying to understand a phenomenon. Lichtman also acknowledged that qualitative research has some disadvantages such as that the researcher plays a central role, and that it does not examine cause and effect. Bryman (2008) criticised qualitative research by stating that it is too subjective and difficult to replicate. In addition, he questioned the lack of transparency when doing qualitative research.

Qualitative research can be carried out using various means, including phenomenology, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory. Phenomenology has to do with the description of experiences, ethnography is related to the description of the characteristics of a group of people, while, a case study is about the description of a case. Finally, grounded theory research have the intention of generating a grounded theory (Christensen & Johnson, 2010). In the case of this particular research, the researcher is interested in the phenomenological aspect since he will be looking at the description of children`s experiences of RE through the use of focus groups.

3.3.3 Focus groups

One can immediately notice that focus groups have a number of advantages. Firstly, the children might be reluctant to give their input in a structured interview; however, during conversations with meaning, they will prompt each other while discussing. This is created due to what Steward & Shumdasani, Sussman, Burton, Dent, Stacy & Flay (as cited in Berg, 2007) referred to as the `synergistic group effect`. As Stoner (2010) pointed out, this will save time since the researcher will be gaining the views of the participants in a shorter period of time. In addition, it helps to
generate new ideas which might not be generated when opting for other means of collecting data. Furthermore, focus groups are flexible, and so in a busy environment such as a school, it is practical to use such a method. As Berg (2007) maintained, all this makes focus groups “an excellent means for collecting information from young children and teens” (p.145).

It is also important to understand that focus groups have their disadvantages as well. As Berg (2007) himself acknowledges, the information that will be gathered depends on the ability of the moderator in motivating those taking part in the conversation. This is because, as Beheshti & Large (2001) stated, “he or she must set the scene for the ensuing session as well as control the proceeding without influencing outcomes” (p.80). In addition, there is the risk of having no one turning up since the attendance is voluntary. Finally, Berg argued that in focus groups, it is the opinion of the group that is taken, and not the opinion of the individuals. Bryman (2008) also mentioned some of the challenges of focus groups when he argued about how time consuming it is to transcribe data, and when he stated that the researcher has less control about the data that s/he will collect when compared to an individual structured interview (p.488).

3.3.4 Procedure for conducting focus groups

Beheshti & Large (2001) stated that when it comes to children, it is ideal to have small groups. In conducting focus groups for the present study, a group of four children from a state school and another group from a church school will be taking part in separate conversations with meaning that will take around thirty minutes. The intention behind this is to be able to understand the perceptions of children coming from the two major sectors of education in Malta. In fact, as Bryman (2008) rightly argued, a focus group is an unstructured way of interviewing people. It was not easy to choose between focus groups and structured interviews; however, a decision was made in favour of conversations with meaning due to the advantages that they can provide the researcher with.

3.3.5 Quantitative research

As Brigham (2010) illustrated, “there is more to quantitative research than numbers” (p.5). This is definitely the case since when those numbers are interpreted; a whole new picture will emerge. In relation to this, the researcher had to consider how he would be gathering data quantitatively. After, he decided to use what Winterbottom (2013) referred to as the non-experimental approach
by trying to understand what was already present. The main benefit of this approach that is directly related to this research is that it is good for exploring data and generating hypothesis.

It must also be observed that there were researchers who criticised this research methodology. For instance, Hara (1995) argued against doing research quantitatively. He stated that quantitative research fails to consider the researcher’s view points in the explanation of results. Furthermore, this type of research is too abstract, and it does not pay attention to the differences amongst the participants. Apart from Hara, Bryman (2008) stated that in quantitative research, there is no distinction between the social and the natural world.

3.3.6 Procedure in doing quantitative research

In the present study, quantitative methodology will be applied to get to know more about teachers perceptions of RE. The plan is to have a sample of 31 year 5 teachers coming from state schools, and another 31 coming from church schools. After accepting to take part, these teachers will fill in a questionnaire.

It is to be observed that that the researcher applied both stage sampling and stratified sampling. Stage sampling was applied when he chose the sectors, the year group, and finally the teachers. On the other hand, stratified sampling was applied when he decided that half of the teachers will come from state schools, with the other half will be coming from church schools (Winterbottom, 2013). These two steps are important since they also have an effect on the qualitative aspect of this research. Moreover, through stratified sampling, the researcher planned a fair sampling, and thus avoiding having problems when analysing the results that he will gather.

After choosing the subjects, it was important to plan the questionnaire. At this point, the researcher had to consider and determine what he wanted to measure. Here, he started by dividing the questionnaire into three sections. The first section uses the likert scale whereby the participants are given different statements, and they will have to state their level of agreement / disagreement. This will give the researcher a valuable insight into the teachers’ perceptions of the methods and techniques involved in the teaching of RE alongside their perceptions of RE in general. In the second section, the participants have to choose their five most preferred techniques, and their five most preferred roles. Finally, in the last section, the researcher will
provide the teachers with four open ended questions about their planning of RE lessons. Here, they will also be asked if they are comfortable teaching the subject or not.

When constructing this questionnaire, the researcher made sure that the questions posed will be related to his research objectives (Punch, 2005). Based on the arguments of Christine & Johnson (2010), it was important for the researcher to try to avoid leading and double-barrelled questions. In this questionnaire, the researcher did not make that much use of contingency questions. This is because the majority of the questions asked in the questionnaire applied for all participants. When it comes to the sequence in which the questions are asked, reference is made to the funnel sequence and the inverted funnel sequence (Frankfrot Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992). As one can observe in the questionnaire, both sequences were used. The funnel sequence was used since in the majority of cases, each question is linked to the one preceding it. Moreover, the inverted funnel sequence is evident since the most general questions are left till the end. The researcher also decided to test the questionnaire before finalising it.

3.4 Ethical Clearance

After deciding on the methodology, it was necessary to gain an ethical consent. Permission was sought and obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Attached to the ethics form, the researcher presented the consent forms given to parents, and the assent forms given to children, as well as the information sheets that were handed to teachers, parents, and children. Written consent from all gatekeepers, namely, the DQSE, the Secretariat for Catholic Education, and all heads of schools who accepted to participate in this research was also obtained. With regards to children’s assent, Smith (2011) argued that they “have to be positioned as participating subjects, knower’s and social actors, rather than object’s of the researcher’s gaze” (p.14). This should lead to the establishment of a research relationship with the children so that the researcher will work with children and not on children (Conroy & Harcourt, 2011).

One should take into consideration that children are considered as vulnerable subjects, and that religion is quite a sensitive subject to deal with. When analysing such ethical issues, a look can be taken at the approaches put forward by Christensen & Johnson (2010), namely the dentological, ethical scepticism, and the utilitarian approach. The dentological approach suggests that ethical concerns must be taken into consideration on the basis of a universal code. On the other hand, those who follow ethical scepticism argue that ethical rules are subjective. Finally,
the utilitarian approach tries to strike a balance between the harm that can be done to an individual participating in the research on one hand, and the benefits that can come out of the research on the other. All these approaches were taken into consideration when thinking about the research since the researcher tried to follow university ethical guidelines. Ethical rules also depend on the subjects that were going to be studied. The researcher tried to make sure that no harm will be done to subjects irrespective of any possible benefits.

3.5 Conclusion

During his own experience in schools, the researcher met teachers who took different positions about the role of RE in education. He observed teachers who took RE very seriously, and also others who just taught it for the sake of examinations. Additionally, he also got to know a lot about the perspectives that children have when it comes to RE. This has inspired him to apply a mixed methodology approach in which the perspectives of teachers and children coming from state and church schools will be considered.

Through this methodology, it is hoped that he will be able to find out which methods and techniques are mostly preferred by teachers when it comes to teaching RE. Moreover, he also hopes to get to know about the methods that children prefer. This should lead him to know more about the perspectives of teachers and children coming from the two major sectors of education in Malta. After analysing the data, it will also be possible to compare the teaching of RE in state schools with that taking place in church schools.
Chapter 4

Discussion of Data
Chapter 4: Discussion of data

4.0 Introduction
In this chapter, results collected through the data gathering process will be analysed and discussed. The focus will be on teachers’ and children’s ideas and perspectives of Religious Education (RE) with an emphasis on the methods and techniques involved. These will be discussed in the context of the literature review chapter; however, reference to other researchers will also be made.

4.1. Description of sample
Francis (1987) argued that positive attitudes are considered as an integral part of the learning process especially when it comes to RE. It is in this light that the researcher wanted to study the attitudes of teachers and children towards RE. To do so, the ideas of teachers were gathered through a questionnaire that was divided into three sections, while the children voiced their ideas of RE through the conversations with meaning.

In relation to the questionnaires, a total of 62 respondents took part. Half of them are from state schools, while the other half are from church schools. The majority of the participants are females (78%), and the most common age group is 31-40 (45%). In addition, the predominance of those involved (38%) have between 11 and 20 years of teaching experience. With regards to the qualifications, 67% obtained a B.Ed. (Hons), while the others have other qualifications such as PGCE (18%), and a non-teaching degree (13%). The remaining 2% are teachers that attended the former teachers’ training college. It is also important to note that all of the teachers concerned teach year 5. In the case of the focus groups, 4 children attend a state school, while the other 4 children attend a church school. These children were chosen randomly.

4.2. Section A
The first section of the questionnaire involved a likert scale in which teachers had to mark their preference towards 41 statements. As McLeod (2008) stated, a likert scale can help in measuring the attitudes of those taking part in the study. Besides, such a scale also has the advantage of opting for an opinion rather than a simple yes / no answer.
To be able to get results from this section, the Mann Whitney test was used (Stangroom, 2015). This is a non-parametric analogue of the independence samples test, and is used when the measurements are rating scores or ranking scores, or else measurements having skewed non-normal distribution. The null hypothesis specifies that the mean rating scores provided for statements vary marginally between school types, and is accepted if the p-value exceeds the 0.05 level of significance. The alternative hypothesis specifies that the mean rating scores provided for a statement vary significantly between the school types and is accepted if the p-value is less than the 0.05 criterion.

4.2.1. Section A results

For discussion purposes, the results obtained from the statements presented in the first section of the questionnaire will be divided into three groups. The mean rating score for each statement ranges between 1 and 5, where 1 corresponds to strongly disagree, and 5 corresponds to strongly agree. The higher the mean rating scores, the higher the agreement of teachers with the statements concerned.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When teaching Religious Education it is important that children learn about religion.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.119</td>
<td>0.419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>0.701</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When teaching Religious Education it is important that children learn from religion.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>0.681</td>
<td>0.836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>0.560</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children should learn more about other religions.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.928</td>
<td>0.706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.595</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should take a multi-faith approach.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.157</td>
<td>0.346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.264</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should focus on human experience.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>0.730</td>
<td>0.580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.627</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories are essential when teaching Religious Education.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>0.535</td>
<td>0.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>0.499</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting places of worship is an integral part of Religious Education.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>0.776</td>
<td>0.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.963</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In order to be effective, teachers should make use of artefacts in Religious Education.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.890</td>
<td>0.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.976</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should compare their conceptions with those of others during Religious Education lessons.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>0.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education is an interdisciplinary subject.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td>0.675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.842</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education aids citizenship education.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>0.681</td>
<td>0.430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>0.851</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions in class are important during Religious Education lessons.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>0.254</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>0.801</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should educate around the affective dimension.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.626</td>
<td>0.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>0.523</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Religious Education there is a close relationship between the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.606</td>
<td>0.873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>0.592</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 : Representing the mean rating scores and the level of significance between teachers teaching in church and state schools for statements 1-14.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education is demanding as a subject.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.313</td>
<td>0.362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.024</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers teaching in church schools have more resources for Religious</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.945</td>
<td>0.230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education than those teaching in state schools.</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>.870</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should prepare children for the sacraments (they</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.232</td>
<td>0.776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would not need to attend catechism classes in the evening).</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.170</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should teach Catholic Doctrine.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>0.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.340</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should teach Catholic morals.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>.748</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should teach the Bible.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.775</td>
<td>0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.961</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Catholic teachers should not teach Religious Education.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.296</td>
<td>0.342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.285</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The current Religion textbook relates to students` experience.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.814</td>
<td>0.400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.727</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The current Religion textbook meets students` requirements.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.908</td>
<td>0.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.882</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel constrained by the content presented in the textbook.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.482</td>
<td>0.542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.118</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When planning my lessons I make sure that I target children`s spiritual</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>.514</td>
<td>0.371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dimension.</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.772</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When planning my lessons I only target the students` cognitive dimension.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.996</td>
<td>0.752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.992</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Religious Education lessons, I am encouraging healthy relationships</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>.486</td>
<td>0.926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between the children.</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>.558</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When teaching Religious Education, I try to start from what is common to</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>.445</td>
<td>0.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all children.</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.677</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 : Representing the mean rating scores and the level of significance between teachers teaching in church and state schools for statements 15-28.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During Religious Education lessons I provide time for the children to think.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.506</td>
<td>0.388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>.564</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Religious Education lessons challenge students’ attitudes.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>.709</td>
<td>0.355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.617</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children have time to ask questions during Religious Education lessons.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>.765</td>
<td>0.506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.864</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use Bible stories in my lessons.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>.568</td>
<td>0.404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.624</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use different stories (not only Biblical) in my Religious Education lessons.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>0.545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>.755</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I refer to role models during my Religious Education class.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>.502</td>
<td>0.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>.564</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only make use of the textbook during Religious Education.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.080</td>
<td>0.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>1.321</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make use of various resources during Religious Education.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>.551</td>
<td>0.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>.626</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish to make use of different resources but I do not know where to find them.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.224</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>.969</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education is becoming more difficult to teach.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.092</td>
<td>0.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.303</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should not be taught in schools.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>.720</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.222</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education is not an important subject.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.091</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.078</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics should replace Religious Education.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>1.157</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.376</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Representing the mean rating scores and the level of significance between teachers teaching in church and state schools for statements 29-41.
4.2.2. Discussion

When looking at the results, it can be noticed that in the majority of cases, the mean rating scores exceed 4, indicating the agreement of teachers with the particular statements. Moreover, it can also be observed that in most of the statements, the difference between the two sectors is not significant; however, there are also some mean rating scores that have a significant difference as will be shown in the following discussion.

The first two statements deal with teaching about and from religion. In line with what the participating teachers marked, a reference can be made to Wright (2008) who argued that these two methods of teaching RE cannot be separated, yet, it is also evident that teachers believe that teaching from religion is more important than teaching about it. In the following statements, teachers conformed to Frost’s (1977) idea that RE is open, by agreeing that it should also include other religions, but were not sure whether RE should take a multi-faith approach.

Researchers such as Groome (1981), Buchanan & Engebretson (2009), Lowndess (2010), and Kozyrev (2012) argued in favour of the integration of experiences in RE. It seems that teachers concur with them since they agreed that experiences should be an integral part of RE; however, interestingly, they were not sure if students should compare their conceptions with those of others, but agreed with the use of discussions. In relation to discussions, as can be noticed in table 4.1, the scores of state and church school teachers are significantly different with a p-value of 0.008. In fact, there are more church school teachers in favour of discussions than there are state school teachers.

Teachers were also presented with the three dimensions of RE. At this point, it seems that they agree with De Souza`s (2005) argument that effective learning can only take place if the three domains are complementary to each other since they agreed that there is a close relationship between the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions. In addition, as table 4.2 indicates, mean rating scores of disagreement were produced only with targeting the cognitive dimension. This seems to contradict Buchanan & Hyde’s (2008) argument that the cognitive dimension is given a priority over other dimensions. Related to this, both sets of teachers agreed that RE is interdisciplinary, thus conforming to Kay & Francis`s (1985) idea.
A dimension that can be seen as rather complicated is the spiritual dimension. Gellel et al. (2008) argued that one of the main goals of RE is to educate around such a dimension, and it seems that teachers are doing so since they have a mean rating score of agreement with the related statement. It can also be argued that they are targeting this domain through collective aspects related to the community, which was one of the strands Alexander & Mac Laughlin (as cited in Radford, 2011) identified. This is evident from the teachers’ high mean rating score for encouraging healthy relationships through RE.

The different domains can also be targeted through stories. In fact, various referenced researchers such as Herrgessel & Pollitt (2007), Crain (2007), and Ammerman (2003) spoke about the use of stories in RE. In relation to this, the participating teachers favoured the use of stories. Besides, it was argued that through stories, the RE syllabus is linked to other syllabi such as Social Studies. In line with this argument, teachers also agreed that RE aids citizenship education.

When discussing stories, the teaching of morals through Bible stories comes to mind. This is another case where a significant difference between teachers can be observed. In fact, when looking at statements 20 and 21 (table 4.2), the p-values are 0.038 and 0.025. The reason for this is that those teaching in church schools agreed that RE should teach Catholic morals and the Bible, while those teaching in state schools were not sure about this. This indicates that as Watson & Thompson (2006) argued, the place of the Bible in RE is quite controversial, and might be the reason why those teaching in state schools are not sure about the teaching of the Bible. However, interestingly enough, teachers from both sectors agreed to using Bible stories in their lessons. At this point, one also needs to take into consideration the issue of the context, since church schools tend to put more emphasis on the faith dimension due to their distinctive character (McLaughlin, 1999).

Focusing on the new textbook, it is clear that teachers do not feel constrained by the content presented in the textbook; however, they did not produce high mean rating scores in relation to whether the textbook relates to students’ experiences. As it is implied by Rymarz (2008) when speaking about new textbooks in the Archdioceses of Melbourne, the reason for this might be that textbooks are focusing on aspects that are not directly related to students’ experiences. In fact, teachers disagreed with using just the textbook in their lessons, but showed agreement with
using various resources. With regards to resources, where to look for the necessary resources is also an issue. In relation to this, teachers produced significant difference in their mean rating scores with a p-value of 0.009. As can be observed, there were more church school teachers who wish to make use of different resources, but do not know where to find them.

When teaching RE, thinking is also an integral aspect since it can lead to the questioning of one’s attitudes. Here, teachers were asked to state their level of agreement with providing time for the children to think and ask questions, and with conducting lessons that challenge students’ attitudes. As can be noticed in table 4.3, teachers agreed with the three statements. What is positive here is that as Valstar (2013) remarked, methods and techniques adopted in the teaching of RE depend on teachers’ conceptions, and by agreeing with these statements, it seems that the participating teachers have conceptions that are encouraging them to apply such techniques. However, when applying the mentioned techniques, in line with Gellel (2009) argument, teachers should reflect when coming up with follow up activities.

To conduct enriching activities, it is important that teachers are given the right tools. This comes out clearly from this study because when given a statement that says that RE is becoming more difficult to teach, teachers produced mean rating scores that exceed 3. Surprisingly, there are more church school teachers that think that RE is becoming difficult to teach, but on the other hand, there are more state school teachers that think that RE is demanding. Here, the problem might be related to factors such as secularisation, pluralism and globalisation (Schreiner, 2007) that are all affecting the field of RE. One way in which teachers can overcome such challenges is by taking Carr’s (2007) advice, and apply a cross curriculum approach.

Finally, a reference to the last three statements presented in table 4.3, which are quite controversial, is appropriate here. The participating teachers disagreed with the statement that says that RE should not be taught in schools, but it is evident that church school teachers disagreed strongly with a mean rating score of 1.42. This was also the case with the teachers’ reaction to the statement that said that RE is not an important subject. As a matter fact, in both statements, a significant difference can be observed between the scores of church and state school teachers. When it comes to the last statement which was about whether ethics should replace RE, teachers disagreed as well. These findings confirm that teachers agree with
Debattista (2012) that RE is an important tool to achieve a holistic style of education, and so it should be kept.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When teaching Religious Education it is important that children learn about religion.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When teaching Religious Education it is important that children learn from religion.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children should learn more about other religions.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should take a multi-faith approach.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should focus on human experiences.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories are essential when teaching Religious Education</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting places of worship is an integral part of Religious Education.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In order to be effective, teachers should make use of artefacts in Religious Education.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should compare their conceptions with those of others during Religious Education lessons.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education is an interdisciplinary subject.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education aids citizenship education.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions in class are important during Religious Education lessons.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should educate around the affective dimension.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Religious Education there is a close relationship between the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education is demanding as a subject.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers teaching in church schools have more resources for Religious Education than those teaching in state schools.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should prepare children for the sacraments (they would not need to attend catechism classes in the evening).</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should teach Catholic doctrine.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should teach Catholic morals.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should teach the Bible.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Catholic teachers should not teach Religious Education.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The current Religion textbook relates to students’ experience.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The current Religion textbook meets students’ requirements.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Response 1</td>
<td>Response 2</td>
<td>Response 3</td>
<td>Response 4</td>
<td>Response 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel constrained by the content presented in the textbook.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When planning my lessons I make sure that I target children’s spiritual dimension.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When planning my lessons I only target students’ cognitive dimension.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Religious Education lessons, I am encouraging healthy relationship between the children.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When teaching Religious Education, I try to start from what is common to all children.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During Religious Education lessons I provide time for the children to think.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Religious Education lessons challenge students’ attitudes.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children have time to ask questions during Religious Education lessons.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use Bible stories in my lessons.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use other stories (not only Biblical) in my Religious Education lessons.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I refer to role models during my Religious Education class.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only make use of the textbook during Religious Education.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make use of various resources during Religious Education.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish to make use of different resources but I do not know where to find them.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education is becoming more difficult to teach.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should not be taught in schools.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education is not an important subject.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics should replace Religious Education.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Representing the opinion of teachers for all statements.
4.3 Section B

After giving their opinions, teachers were asked to pick their five most preferred techniques and roles. The objective of these questions is to present the most favoured techniques and roles.

4.3.1 Teachers’ preferred techniques

It is evident that video forum is the most preferred technique since it was chosen by 53 of the respondents. This immediately takes us back to Sarno (1987) who argued that truths and values are made more accessible to children by the use of media. Furthermore, it shows that teachers are aware of this; however, one has to acknowledge that media is not just video conferencing. In fact, Miller (2003) argued, that there are other methods such as drama and art which unfortunately were not picked that frequently.

Following video conferencing, one can find the sharing of experiences and discussions. These are two important techniques since they can lead to dialogue, and as Watson (2011) stated, this will lead to community cohesion and spiritual development. As Jackson (2004) also implied, such pedagogies are child centred, and thus can contribute to the children’s development. In addition, other prevalent techniques include reading from the textbook and storytelling. For such techniques, teachers should follow Furrow & Reimer’s (2001) advice, and avoid didactic instructions.

It can also be noticed that fantasy exercises, art appreciation, crafts, concept mapping, and filling handouts are the least favoured techniques. There might be various reasons for this. With regards to the first four, it can be argued that such pedagogies are more time consuming, and so teachers might be reluctant to opt for them. In the case of filling handouts, it can be deduced from the low response that most teachers understand that such technique can hinder a lot of benefits that the subject offers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Count Church</th>
<th>Count State</th>
<th>Percentage Church</th>
<th>Percentage State</th>
<th>Total percentage of whole group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video forum</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>90.3%</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing experiences</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story telling</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading from the textbook</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilemma stories</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading from the Bible</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music forum</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role play</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group dynamics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer sessions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling handouts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art appreciation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept mapping</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy excercise</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Representing the chosen methods and techniques
4.3.2 Teachers’ preferred roles

In the case of roles, teachers mostly prefer imaging themselves in the role of a guide, with the next most preferred role being that of companion on a journey. These roles take us back to Jonker’s (2013) idea of a pilgrimage. It seems that in this pilgrimage, teachers prefer to be guides who are also companions for children. Other roles that followed these two are the roles of observer, facilitator, and story teller. When looking at the last two, it can be argued that both roles are related since in line with McCreery’s (2005) argument, the role of the teacher as a facilitator should be to provide the children with the required skills to interpret stories. However, it has to be pointed out that the role of the teacher as facilitator is not limited just to storytelling.

Roles that were not popular are those of treasure hunter and midwife. When analysing them, it can be noticed that these roles are related. This is because the role of a treasure hunter is one in which teachers help the children to become more inquisitive. Similarly, teachers take the midwife role to help the children to give birth to their ideas. A reason why such roles might not be popular could be that they are associated with modern pedagogy that teachers might not be aware of.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Guide</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companion on a journey</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>93.5%</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>93.5%</td>
<td>90.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-teller</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>83.9%</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>27</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasure hunter</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwife</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Representing the most preferred roles
4.4. Section C

For the last section, teachers were asked four open ended questions. The first two deal with the amount of lessons conducted every week, and the duration of such lessons, while in the other questions, teachers were asked about the way they set their learning objectives for RE, and whether they are comfortable teaching the subject. For discussion purposes, these questions will be analysed and discussed separately.

4.4.1 RE lessons delivered every week

Teachers deliver between 2 and 5 lessons every week. The mean number of lessons delivered every week is that of 4. What is interesting is that a closer look at those who deliver 2 lessons per week shows that 9.7% are church school teachers, while 3.2% are state school teachers. On the other hand, when analysing those who deliver 5 lessons, 4.8% are church schools teachers, while 6.5% are state schools teachers. Contrary to the perception of many, it is clear that more RE lessons are held in state schools than in church schools.

Figure 4.4 : Representing the amount of RE lessons delivered every week.
4.4.2 The duration of a typical RE lesson

The duration of RE lessons ranges between 25 and 60 minutes. However, the most common durations are 40 and 45 minutes. In the case of church school teachers, the majority of them (22.6%) indicated 40 minutes as the duration of a typical RE lesson, while 24.2% of those teaching in state schools marked 45 minutes. This indicates that when it comes to duration, there isn’t that much variance between state and church schools.

Figure 4.5: Representing the duration of a typical RE lesson.
**4.4.3 The ways in which teachers set their objectives for RE**

When the participating teachers were asked about the way they set their objectives for RE, there was a vast range of responses. The most common answer was that they follow readymade material. In the case of church schools, this includes work that teachers plan prior to the start of the academic year, or simply derive them from the new syllabus. On the other hand, state school teachers referred to the uploaded lesson plans on i-learn when setting up their objectives.

A number of teachers from both sectors also stated that they focus on children`s experiences or else try to understand their students` strengths and needs when setting up their objectives. Interestingly, one particular teacher stated that he/she focuses on Bloom`s taxonomy to write objectives for the children. It is believed that this is the best way to set up objectives since children`s learning becomes central.

Teachers also set their learning objectives by focusing on the most important points of the textbook, and by discussing with children. The former confirms that although more emphasis is being made on other resources, the textbook is still an important part and an effective tool of RE. As regards the latter, it can be noticed that the idea of discussing with children when setting objectives for RE lessons is in line with Teece`s (2001) argument that the aims of RE have to do with the values of the children.

**4.4.4 Teachers comfort in teaching RE**

In the last question, teachers were asked if they are comfortable teaching RE. Here, 84% of the teachers said that they are comfortable, while the other 16% stated that they are not. Moreover, it is interesting to note that of the 84% of teachers who are comfortable, 46% are state school teachers, while the other 38% are church school teachers. In addition, of those who are not comfortable teaching RE, 11% are from church schools, whereas 5% are from state schools. This indicates that there are more state school teachers who feel comfortable teaching RE, than there are church school teachers.
The first set of reasons that teachers gave for feeling comfortable / uncomfortable in teaching RE are related to their personal backgrounds. In fact, one teacher stated that he / she feels comfortable teaching RE because he / she has a degree in Theology, whilst another teacher stated that he / she has been teaching catechism for sixteen years. Moreover, there was a teacher who wrote that he / she is still attending RE lessons since in his / her words, “RE is a lifelong experience”.

Satisfaction in teaching RE is also important for teachers to feel comfortable. On this point, one teacher wrote that the teaching of RE gives satisfaction because he / she can help the children to build relationships. This can lead to making a difference in the children’s’ lives, and as argued by Parkay (2010), teachers experience great satisfaction from doing so. Furthermore, other related statements are that the subject is interesting and that it gives an opportunity to the teacher to grow spiritually.

It seems that the textbook is making an impact on year 5 teachers since there were teachers who mentioned it as a reason for feeling comfortable. This conforms to Apple’s (as cited in Rymarz
& Engebretson, 2005) argument that textbooks can help in empowering or disempowering teachers. In this case, it can be argued that the majority of teachers feel empowered by the textbook.

When analysing the reasons teachers gave for not feeling comfortable teaching RE, it is evident that just like there are teachers who feel comfortable because of their background, there are others who feel uncomfortable due to the same reason. Furthermore, having children coming from diverse backgrounds is distressing teachers since they are feeling helpless in trying to target all children. In fact, teachers wrote that they are finding it difficult to strike a balance between the teaching of the church and other factors that are affecting today’s society such as divorce and gay’s civil unions. Related to this, one particular teacher stated that they should be given guidance about how to answer questions about such issues because as White (2010) argued, teachers are using their own religious understanding when providing answers, and this might not be in line with what is expected from them.

With regards to the syllabus, teachers argued that it has been increased, and they are feeling constrained by the content presented. Related to this, in a paper that deals with changes in RE and citizenship, it is suggested that teachers teach fewer topics so that they will have time to go into more detail (The Times Educational Supplement, 2014). This idea can lead teachers to focus more on the affective domain of the subject, and less on the cognitive one.

### 4.5 The perceptions of children

Through the focus groups, children were asked to give their perspectives about a number of aspects related to the teaching of RE. It is important to note that both groups were asked the same set of questions. Besides, each discussion took about 30 minutes.

The conversation started by asking the children about their favourite subjects. At this point, three of the children who attend a church school chose Physical Education as their favourite subject, while the other chose art. On the other hand, those attending the state school chose RE as their favourite subject. As reasons, they all stated that they like RE because they get to know more about Jesus, and because it is easy to study and do well in exams. Additionally, when asked if they enjoy learning RE, all of them said that they do, mainly because of stories and activities.
organised in class. Moreover, when asked whether they think that RE is difficult, all children said that it is not.

There were also factors that both sets of students do not like. Such aspects include copying notes from the board and being disturbed while doing activities. However, the most interesting answer was that of a girl who said that she is worried that they are not learning by heart, and so, she is finding it difficult to study. This girl’s answer clearly reflects the influence of the exam-oriented education system that is adopted in Malta. This idea also shifts attention to Prentice’s (2012) argument that time should be spent on dialogue rather than competing for marks.

To get to know more about the activities conducted in class, children were asked about what they do during RE lessons. Here, those attending the church school said that they copy notes from the board / PowerPoint, listen to explanations, read, and take part in activities such as finding pictures. On the other hand, in line with questionnaire data, those attending the state school are receiving lessons which are more text-book based. Also in conformity with what teachers said, children in both sectors said that many times their teachers make use of videos. This question led to that of resources, and as it is implied here, children said that they make use of videos, drawings, internet, handouts, and also the textbook.

It is also evident that textbooks are a major resource for RE, and so, children were also asked about what they think of their textbook. Here, all children stated that they find their textbook helpful. When giving reasons, they argued that it is because it is understandable, and it makes it easier for them to do well in exams. Again, this indicates that children are still immersed in an exam oriented system. As a matter of fact, when asked about how they use the textbook, the children explained that they make use of it to enhance their understanding in relation to exams. Furthermore, the children explained that they feel the need to utilise other books rather than focusing only on the textbook. Moreover, when asked about what can be added to textbooks, one particular child insisted that there should be more knowledge about other religions and cultures.

An integral part of the textbook is stories. It is believed that children give a lot of value to stories, and so they were asked whether they like stories, and what type of stories do they like. All children said that they like stories; however, there were children who stated that they enjoy Bible stories, while others argued that they like stories that convey a moral message, such as stories
about bullying. There were also children who said that the stories presented in their textbook are too difficult for them. It is pertinent to note here that to make stories easier for children, the four phases put forward by Reed et al. (2013) can help. These phases include encountering the story, interpreting it, understanding it in community contexts, and reflecting about the children’s understanding of the stories. However, one has to keep in mind that such phases need to be to some extent adapted by teachers to suit primary school children.

Children were also asked if they are provided with time to discuss. In this regard, a positive aspect emerged since nearly all children stated that they are provided some time to discuss, and some teachers even ensure that the set up of the class helps by putting the children into groups. There was only one child who said that discussions are impossible since when “someone says something, the rest of the class will start passing comments”. This shows that as Watson (2011) argued, having a good dialogical pedagogy is extremely important because it will lead to community cohesion.

It was also important to ask children whether they are provided with time to think, and to ask questions. In relation to the former, the two groups did not agree. This is because those attending the state school said that they have time, while those attending the church school stated that they are not given much time because most of the time they write notes or read from books. This contradicts the results obtained from teachers since although reading from the textbook was the fifth most chosen technique, no one chose copying notes from the board as their most preferred technique. However, one has to keep in mind that this data came from a small sample of children, and so one cannot base generalisations on it. When it comes to questioning, all children acknowledged that is important to ask questions so that understanding will be enforced. Additionally, all of them said that they are given time to ask questions.

The question that followed dealt with outings related to RE. Here, it was observed that the children attending the church school are not involved in RE outings, while those attending the state school are. When asked about where they went, they mentioned places such as the catacombs, and watching religious exhibitions. On the other hand, children attending the church school said that they are not taken on RE outings because there are “no places where to go”. Although this data came from just one church school, it is rather worrying since Malta is full of religious heritage.
Towards the end, children were asked general questions about RE, and in the first of such questions, they were asked whether RE has to do with other subjects. Here, the children responded that it has to do with History and Social Studies. They said that it has to do with History because the story of Jesus happened a long time ago, and with Social Studies through topics such as solidarity. It is to be noted that the connection the children made between RE and Social Studies conforms to the idea expressed by the majority of teachers that RE aids citizenship education.

As it was discussed, the difference between catechism and RE is quite controversial, and so it made sense to discuss this point with the children. In answering this question, the majority agreed that there is a difference between catechism and RE since in catechism they go into more detail. In contrast, one of the children said that there isn’t a difference because catechism is like an extra lesson of RE.

For the final question, the researcher asked children about how RE can be taught better. In their answers, children gave various ideas such as having more outings, and other extracurricular activities related to RE. Furthermore, the children said that there should be less writing, and more practical activities such as crafts and stories.

**4.6. Conclusion**

From the results of the questionnaire, it is evident that in contrast with what was previously thought, the majority of teachers do value the subject, and are willing to become more familiar with it. In addition, they are applying methods and techniques that indicate that the methodology in RE is finally shifting from traditional approaches. However, this study has also revealed the fears that some teachers harbour about teaching RE. With regards to children, it can be stated that they have a positive attitude towards RE, and they consider it as an important subject for them.
Chapter 5

Conclusion
Chapter 5 : Conclusion

5.0 Preamble
In this concluding chapter, a summary of the general findings gathered from teachers and children will be given. In particular, reference will be made to the manner in which Religious Education (RE) is being taught and delivered to year 5 primary school children, since this was the main research question for this study. This will be accompanied by some reflections about the results obtained. After, the limitations experienced in conducting this study are discussed. Some suggestions for further research will finally be given.

5.1. Summary of the general findings
These findings show that the majority of teachers have a positive attitude towards RE. This indicates that they have enough motivation to provide the children with good RE. In fact, they were completely against removing RE, or replacing it with other subjects such as ethics education. It seems that one reason for this is that they have found the new year 5 RE textbook (2013) to be quite student friendly and helpful. The study also indicates that teachers are moving away from traditional pedagogies. However, teachers` education with regards to RE should be a priority since from the study, it emerged that there are a number of teachers who wish to make use of different resources, but do not know where to find them. In view of this, teacher`s training can help them to become familiar with more resources, and so gain confidence in teaching the subject (Hanlon, 2000).

With regards to teachers` preferred techniques, the most preferred technique was video forum. This indicated that the introduction of the interactive whiteboard in schools has encouraged teachers to make more use of available media. On the other hand, the least preferred techniques were fantasy exercises and art appreciation. It seems that teachers are not familiar enough with the benefits that such methods can provide them with. From this study, it also transpired that teachers prefer taking the role of a guide while teaching RE.

When looking at the ways in which teachers set their learning objectives, it can be observed that the majority of teachers referred a lot to the lesson plans uploaded on i-learn. This showed that
teachers are finding such lesson plans helpful. The study also illustrated that the majority of teachers are comfortable teaching RE. Here, it was evident that the teachers` own backgrounds play a central role in determining whether they feel comfortable or not teaching the subject. In fact, as argued by White (2009), teachers` personal believes affect them in the way that they deliver RE lessons.

With regards to children, it was noticed that they enjoy RE a great deal. Unfortunately, due to the education system that Malta adopted, there were children who think of RE only in terms of examinations; however, they agreed that doing exam related activities, such as copying notes, makes the subject boring. Moreover, children gave considerable value to other methodologies that they found more enriching, such as stories. Generally, it was also found that the learning environment created does not always help the children to make the most of RE.

5.2. Limitations in conducting the study

Now that the study is completed, some limitations can be noticed. Firstly, the samples of teachers and children were small, and so the resulting findings cannot be generalised. This does not necessary mean that the samples do not reflect the ideas of the whole population; however, as Gray (2014) argued, “increasing the size of the sample usually increases its precision” (p.230). Furthermore, the teachers participated through a questionnaire. This could lead them to write responses which would not be in line with what they actually do / believe, since no observations were carried out to check that what they wrote conforms to what they actually do / believe. On the other hand, it is believed that by ensuring their anonymity, teachers were encouraged to feel safe to write anything they wanted.

Another limitation was that the research was conducted at a time in which RE is going through major changes that might affect the roles of research in RE (Afdal, 2010). These changes included the introduction of the new textbooks which were being used for the first time in year 5. This was also the first year in which ethics education was launched as a pilot project in some schools. It was also the year in which the syllabi of RE in the primary years were being questioned by entities such as the Malta Union of Teachers. In fact, it could well be the case that RE will go through other significant changes that are not considered in this study.
5.3. Suggestions for further research

This transition period that RE is going through paves the way for further research on the subject. One suggested subject for research could include looking in more depth at how teachers, as well as the children themselves, look at the changes that the subject is facing. From this research, it resulted that both teachers and children have ideas that can improve the outcome of the subject, and thus it makes sense to involve them in research since they are those who will mostly be affected by the outcomes of such changes.

Tillson (2011) argued that “ethics ought to be extracted from RE and placed in a separate subject” (p.683) given that it is beneficial for RE as well. In this scenario, a study focusing on how the introduction of ethics education is affecting the position of RE in the local education system can benefit the field of RE. Moreover, another study can tackle the number of children who although baptised, will still attend ethics education rather than RE.

An issue that was discussed in this study was that of multi-faith classes. Nowadays, it is an accepted reality that in Malta, besides Catholicism, number of other religions are being practiced, and as Levine (2006) stated, the public schools are the places where one gets in touch with these religions. In this context, a study about introducing multi-faith RE that considers the perspectives of those involved can shed more light on the field of RE.


Debattista, E. (2012). *Religious education : Promoting holistic development* (Bachelor of Arts in Theology (Hons)).


Tackling the changes to RE and citizenship. (2014 ). The Times Educational Supplement.


Appendices
# Appendix 1 : Questionnaire

## Section A

Please answer the following questions by ticking in the appropriate box.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When teaching Religious Education, it is important that children learn about religion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When teaching Religious Education, it is important that children learn from religion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children should learn more about other religions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Education should take a multi-faith approach (teach about all religions not only about Catholicism).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Education should focus on human experience.</td>
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<td>Stories are essential when teaching Religious Education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visiting places of worship is an integral part of Religious Education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In order to be effective, teachers should make use of artifacts in Religious Education.</td>
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<td>Students should compare their conceptions with that of others during Religious Education lessons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Education is an interdisciplinary subject.</td>
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<td>Religious Education aids citizenship education.</td>
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<td>Discussions in class are important during Religious Education lessons.</td>
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<td>Statement</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Education should educate around the affective dimension.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In Religious Education there is a close relationship between the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Education is demanding as a subject.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers teaching in church schools have more resources for Religious Education than those teaching in state schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Education should prepare children for the sacraments (they would not need to attend Catechesis classes in the evening).</td>
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<td>Religious Education should teach Catholic Doctrine.</td>
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<td>Religious Education should teach Catholic Morals.</td>
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<td>Religious Education should teach the Bible.</td>
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<td>Non-Catholic Teachers should not teach Religious Education.</td>
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<td>The current Religion textbook relates to students' experience.</td>
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<td>The current Religion textbook meets students' requirements.</td>
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<td>I feel constrained by the content presented in the textbook.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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<td>Not Sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>When planning my lessons I make sure that I target the children's spiritual dimension.</td>
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<td>When planning my lessons I only target the students’ cognitive dimension.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Through Religious Education lessons, I am encouraging healthy relationships between the children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When teaching Religious Education, I try to start from what is common to all children.</td>
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<td>During Religious Education lessons I provide time for the children to think.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Religion Education lesson challenge students' attitudes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children have time to ask questions during Religious Education lessons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I use Bible stories in my lessons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I use different stories (not only Biblical) in my Religious Education lessons.</td>
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<td>I refer to role models during my Religious Education class.</td>
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<td>I only make use of the textbook during Religious Education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I make use of various resources during Religious Education.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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<td>Disagree</td>
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<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish to make use of different resources but I do not know where to find them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education is becoming more difficult to teach.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education should not be taught in schools.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education is not an important subject.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics should replace Religious Education.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section B

Please tick according to your preference.

1. Please select your five most preferred techniques.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading from the textbook</th>
<th>Video Clip + discussion (video forum)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading from the Bible</td>
<td>Music Clip + discussion (music forum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>Role play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair work</td>
<td>Art appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing experiences</td>
<td>Prayer sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept mapping</td>
<td>Group dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilemma stories (stories without an ending where students are invited to construct their own ending)</td>
<td>Crafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story telling</td>
<td>Fantasy exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling handouts</td>
<td>Copying from the board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Please select your five most preferred roles when teaching Religious Education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observer</th>
<th>Companion on a journey</th>
<th>Midwife</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>Treasure hunter</td>
<td>Story-teller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section C

Please answer the following questions.

1. How many Religious Education lessons do you deliver every week?

______________________________________________________________________________

2. How long is a typical Religious Education lesson?

______________________________________________________________________________

3. How do you set your learning objectives for Religious Education?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

4. Are you comfortable teaching Religious Education? Why?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Sector: State / Church school

Age: 22-30 / 31-40 / 41-50 / 51-65

Teaching Experience: 0-5 years / 6-10 years / 11-20 years / more than 20 years

Gender: male / female

Teaching Qualification: Teacher Training College / B.Ed(Hons) / PGCE / Non-Teaching degree / Other: ______________________________________
Appendix 2: Guiding questions

Questions to guide me during the conversations with meaning

- Which subject do you like most?
- Do you enjoy learning Religion? What do you like and what do you dislike about it?
- Is Religion difficult to learn?
- Can you tell me what you do during a religion lesson?
- Do you use resources such as books, videos, music, paintings or objects related to religion during Religion lessons?
- Do you enjoy listening to stories during Religion lessons? What kind of stories?
- Do you go on outings related to what you do during Religion lessons? If yes, do you enjoy yourselves during these outings? Why?
- During Religion lessons do you have time to discuss?
- During Religion lessons do you have time to think?
- During Religion lessons are you allowed to ask questions?
- Do you think that Religion has to do also with other subjects? If yes, with which subjects?
- Do you think the Religion textbook is helpful? How do you use it?
- Do you see any difference between catechism lessons (MUSEUM/Dutrina) and Religion lessons? If yes, can you please tell me in what way they are different?
Mistoqsijiet ta` gwida ghal waqt il-konverżazzjoni informali

- Liema suġġett jogħġobkom l-aktar?
- Thobbu titghallmu Reliġjon? X`jogħġobkom u x`idejjaqkom f` dan is-suġġett?
- Huwa diffiċli biex titghallem ir-Reliġjon?
- X`tagħmlu waqt il-lezzjoni tar-Reliģjon?
- Tużaw riżorsi bhal kotba, vidjows, mużika, tpenġijiet u oġġetti relatati waqt il-lezzjonijiet tar-Reliġjon?
- Tieħdu gost tisimgħu stejjer waqt il-lezzjonijiet tar-Reliģjon? X`tip ta` stejjer?
- Ġieli tmorru ħruġ li għandhom x`jaqsmu ma` dak li tagħmlu waqt il-lezzjonijiet tar-Reliģjon? Jekk iva, tieħdu gost waqt dawn il-ħruġ? Għaliex?
- Waqt il-lezzjonijiet tar-Reliģjon, ikollkom ċans tiddiskutu?
- Waqt il-lezzjonijiet tar-Reliģjon, ikollkom ċans taħsбу?
- Waqt il-lezzjonijiet tar-Reliģjon, ċhalikom / tħalikom issaqsu mistoqsijiet?
- Taħsбу lir-Reliģjon ghandu x`jaqsam ma` suġġetti oħrajn? Jekk iva, ma` liema suġġetti?
- Taħsбу l l-ktieb tar-Reliģjon jghinkom? Kif tużawh?
- Taħsбу xi differenza bejn il-lezzjonijiet tal-Mużew / Duttrina u l-lezzjonijiet tar-Reliģjon fl-iskola? Jekk iva, tistgħu tghiduli b`liema mod huma differenti?
Appendix 3: Permissions to gain access to teachers and children

Permission to gain access to teachers

Dear Heads of schools,

I am a B. Ed (Hons) Primary student currently conducting a study under the supervision of Dr Adrian Gellel. Through this research, I intend to study how Religious Education is being taught and delivered to pupils attending Year 5. I wish to understand more the current classroom reality and to better understand the pedagogies and techniques adopted by teachers.

I kindly ask to grant me permission to distribute a questionnaire to teachers who teach Religious Education to year 5 classes. If you accede to my request may I assure you that the information gathered will be treated with the confidentiality and that the name of the school and its staff will not be disclosed in my dissertation.

If you require any further details please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail on warren.zammit.11@um.edu.mt.

Thanks and kind regards
Warren Zammit.

Dr Adrian Mario Gellel
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education
Permission to gain access to teachers and children

Dear Heads of schools,

I am a B.Ed (Hons) Primary student currently conducting a study under the supervision of Dr Adrian Gellel. Through this research I intend to study how Religious Education is being taught and delivered to pupils attending Year 5. I wish to understand more the current classroom reality and to better understand the pedagogies and techniques adopted by teachers.

I kindly ask you to grant me permission to distribute a questionnaire to teachers who teach Religious Education to year 5 classes. Furthermore, I planned to conduct a conversation with meaning in two classes from two primary schools (State and Church), and thus I am kindly asking you to also give me permission to conduct this conversation with meaning with four children in one of the year 5 classes of your schools. The conversation with the children will only occur once and will take approximately thirty minutes. This will also be held at the school in a time identified by the respective teacher and administration. If you agree to my request, I will send an information sheet and a consent form with the children to give it to their parents only if they have not chosen to have their children opt out from Catholic Religious Education. I will also give an information sheet and a consent form to children. The first four children who I will be granted permission to involve in the conversation will be selected.

If you accede to my request may I assure you that the information gathered will be treated with confidentiality and that the name of the school and its staff will not be disclosed in my dissertation.

If you require any further details please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail on warren.zammit.11@um.edu.mt.

Thanks and kind regards

Warren Zammit.

ID:142193 (M)                                                                 Dr Adrian Mario Gellel
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education
Appendix 4 : Information Sheets & Consent Forms

Information sheet for teachers

Dear teachers,

I am a B.Ed (Hons) Primary student currently conducting a study under the supervision of Dr Adrian Gellel. Through this research, I intend to study how Religious Education is being taught and delivered to pupils attending Year 5. I wish is to understand more the current classroom reality and to better understand the pedagogies and techniques adopted by teachers. Therefore, I am kindly asking you to fill in the questionnaire which you can find attached to this information sheet.

Please note that the questionnaire is anonymous, and thus you are not expected to provide any data such as your names or the name of the school you teach in. All data collected from this questionnaire will only be used for the purpose of the study. If you require any further details please do not hesitate to contact me through e-mail on warren.zammit.11@um.edu.mt.

Your help is much appreciated.

Thanks and regards

Warren Zammit.

Dr Adrian-Mario Gellel
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education
Parents information sheet

Dear parents / guardians,

I am a B.Ed (Hons) Primary student currently conducting a study under the supervision of Dr Adrian Gellel. Through this research, I intend to study how Religious Education is being taught and delivered to pupils attending Year 5. I wish to understand more the current classroom reality and to better understand the pedagogies and techniques adopted by teachers. As part of my study, I am going to hold a thirty minute conversation with a number of children. This conversation will help me to understand better children's perceptions of the methods and techniques employed by their teachers when teaching them Religious Education.

I am therefore kindly asking your permission to involve your child to participate in the discussion. Please note that after gaining consent from parents and the children themselves, I will pick the first four children whom I would have obtained permission to involve.

The conversation will be audio-recorded. If you accede to my request may I assure you that the information gathered will be treated with confidentiality since the name of the child and his/her school will not be disclosed. Please also note that the children will be given the right to opt out of the conversation at any time. Moreover, the conversation will be held at the school premises at a time identified by the respective teacher and school administration.

Once the data is collected, it will only be used for the purpose of the study. The study will be read by people at the faculty of education in the University of Malta, and will be made available at the University library after that I graduate.

Whilst thanking you in advance, I would be grateful if you fill in the attached form in order to grant permission to your child to participate in the conversation. If you require any further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me through e-mail on warren.zammit.11@um.edu.mt.

Kind regards

Warren Zammit. 

Dr Adrian Gellel
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education

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Consent form to gain permission from parents

I _____________________________ the parent/guardian of ________________________

Have read the Information Sheet sent by Mr Warren Zammit. Yes ☐ No ☐

Agree that the conversation with Mr Zammit is audio recorded. Yes ☐ No ☐

Know that the identity of my child will be restored throughout the study. Yes ☐ No ☐

Know that my child can opt out of the conversation at any time. Yes ☐ No ☐

Agree that my child participates in the conversation. Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature __________________ I.D. number __________________
Karta ta’ informazzjoni għall-genituri / kustodji

Gheżież ġenituri / kustodji,


Minhabba dan, qieghed ġentilment nitlobkom biex inpoġgi li tifel / tifla tagħkom f` lista ta’ ismijiet. Wara li niehu l-kunsens mingħand il-ġenituri, jien se nagħżel erba` t’tfal minghajr l-ebda kriterja, u magħhom se nagħmel diskussjoni informali ta’ tletin minuta.

Il-konverżazzjoni se tkun awdjo-rekordjata. Jekk taċċettaw lit-tfal tagħkom jieħdu sehem, nixtieq ninfurmakom li l-informazzjoni miġbura se tkun trattata b’kunfidenzjalita` stretta u l-ismijiet tat-tfal u tal-iskola m`humix se jkunu msemmija. Apparti dan, it-tfal se jkollhom id-dritt li jieqfu jieħdu sehem fil-konverżazzjoni x`hin iridu u l-konverżazzjoni se ssir ġewwa l-iskola.

Ġa la darba tinġabar l-informazzjoni, se tkun użata għal iskopijiet tal-istudju. L-istudju se jinqara minn persuni fil-fakulta` tal-edukazzjoni jewwa l-Universita` ta` Malta, u se jkun aċċessibli mil-librerija tal-Universita` wara li nigradwa.

Filwaqt li nirringrazzjakom bil-quddiem, inkun grat jekk timlew il-formola t`hawn isfel biex tatu permess lit-tfal biex jippartecipaw fir-ričerka. Jekk ikollkom bżonn xi klarifikazzjonijiet nista` niġi kkuntatjat permezz tal-`e-mail` fuq warren.zammit.11@um.edu.mt.

Grazzi hafna

Warren Zammit.

Dr Adrian Gellel
Senior Lecturer, Fakulta` tal-Edukazzjoni.
Formula ta' kunsens

Jiena _____________________________ l-ġenitur / kustodju ta` _____________________________

Qrajt il-karta li baghat Mr Warren Zammit.   Iva ☐   Le ☐

Naqbel li l-konverżazzjoni ma` Mr. Zammit tkun awdjo-rekordjata.   Iva ☐   Le ☐

Naf li l-identita` tat-tifel / tifla tiegħi se tinżamm mistura tul l-istudju.   Iva ☐   Le ☐

Naf li hemm il-possibilta` lit-tfal jieqfu jieħdu sehem fid-diskussjoni x`hin iridu. Iva ☐   Le ☐

Naqbel lit-tifel / tifla tiegħi jippartecipa / tipparteċipa fid-diskussjoni.   Iva ☐   Le ☐

Signature _____________________________    I.D. number _____________________________
Dear children,

I am a student teacher who needs your help. This is because I want to know what you think about the methods that your teachers use in class to teach you Religion. I will explain what you have to do, and then decide if it is ok for you to help me.

I am going to choose four pupils from your class to discuss about your Religion lessons. The discussion will take 30 minutes in all. During the discussion, you will be audio-recorded, but no one will know who will be speaking since I will not disclose your name. I will not even mention your school.

The discussion will be held in your school, and you can stop taking part in the discussion or not answer any question at any time even if you told me that you agreed to participate in this research.

I will use what you tell me to write my dissertation (a very long composition). My teachers at University will read my dissertation but they will not know with whom I talked because I will change the names of children in order to protect their identity.

Thank you for reading my note. If you wish to help me please fill in the form below and give it to your teacher. I really appreciate your help.

Warren Zammit
Children's Consent Form

I __________________________ have read the note sent by Mr Warren Zammit.

Agree that our discussion is audio recorded  Yes ☐  No ☐

Know that in his dissertation (a very long composition) no one will know my name or the name of my school.  Yes ☐  No ☐

Know that I can stop taking part in the discussion or not answer any question at any time even if I agreed to participate.  Yes ☐  No ☐

I know that the discussion will take place in school.  Yes ☐  No ☐

Would like to take part in the discussion.  Yes ☐  No ☐

Sign: ______________________.
Karta ta` informazzjoni lit-tfal

Gheżież tfal,


Jiena se nagħżel erba` t`tifal minn ġewwa l-klassi taghkom biex flimkien niddiskutu dwar il-lezzjonijiet tar-Reliġjon. Din id-diskussjoni se ddum 30 minuta, u se ssir ġewwa l-iskola. Waqt id-diskussjoni, dak li se nghidu se jkun awdjo-rekordjat, imma ħadd m`hu se jkun jaf min se jkun qed jitkellem ghax jien mhux se nsemmi isimkom. Lanqas l-isem tal-iskola ma jien se nsemmi.

Id-diskussjoni se ssir ġewwa l-iskola, u tistghu tieqfu tiehdu sehem jew ma tiegħbux xi mistoqsija x`hin tridu, anka jekk aċċetajtu li tipparteċipaw.

Dak li se tghiduli se nużah biex nikteb it-teżi tieghi (komponent twil). L-għalliema tieghi ġewwa l-Universita` se jaqraw dak li jien se nikteb, imma mhux se jkunu jafu ma` min tkellimt għaliex ha ntikom isem differenti ħalli ħadd ma jkun jaf min intom.


Warren Zammit.
Ittra ta` kunsens ghat-tfal

Jiena _________________________ qrajt in-nota li baghat Mr. Warren Zammit.

Naqbel lid-diskussjoni tkun awdjo-rekordjata. Iva ☐ Le ☐

Naf li fit-teżi (komponiment twil) ħad t`hu se jkun jaf la ismi u lanqas l-isem tal-iskola tieghi. Iva ☐ Le ☐

Naf li nista` nieqaf niehu sehem fid-diskussjoni jew ma nwieġibx xi mistoqsija x`hin irrid anka jekk aċċettajt li niehu sehem. Iva ☐ Le ☐

Naf li d-diskussjoni ssir ġewwa l-iskola. Iva ☐ Le ☐

Nixtieq niehu sehem fid-diskussjoni. Iva ☐ Le ☐