Students' Perceptions of a Multifaith Environment and its Challenges: Exploring a Way Forward in a Maltese Independent School

Fiona Zammit Gauci

Abstract

This paper examines students' perceptions about the possibility to educate beyond Religious Education and the curriculum in a bid to enhance a multifaith environment. The findings reported in this paper derive from the qualitative component of a larger sequential explanatory mixed methods study carried out with both educators and students in an independent school in Malta. The study revealed significant differences among participants who hail from different faith communities. Student participants in the focus groups specifically noted their school's endeavour towards inclusion and respect towards all faiths and suggested that more diverse multifaith initiatives for all members of its community should be identified and put into practice in order to better address the needs of a multifaith school. Students claimed that they felt respected as persons at school, although they believe that many faiths remained largely invisible at school. The paper concludes that schools must gradually adopt new multifaith initiatives while remaining faithful to their own identity.

Keywords
Multifaith, Perceptions, Students, Educators, Independent School

Introduction

Maltese society has become increasingly multicultural in recent years. Malta's 2021 Census of Population and Housing indicates that 83% of residents aged 15 years and over identified as Roman Catholic, 4% as Muslim, 4% as Orthodox, 1% Hindu, 1% Church of England, 1% Protestant, 1% Buddhist, 0% Jews, 0% Other Religions and 5% indicated no religious affiliation (National Statistics Office, 2023).

Contact: Fiona Zammit Gauci, fzammitgauci@gmail.com

As schools mirror wider society, local schools are populated by a considerable numbers of migrant students and educators of different faiths, beliefs and religions, meaning that Maltese schools are today less homogeneous than they were about two decades ago in terms of social, religious and cultural identities (Chircop, 2019). Nevertheless, the type of religious education taught in Maltese schools is confessional in nature, which is based on Catholic religious education, and seeks to support learners in associating their day–to–day life experiences with the Catholic religion (Sultana, 2022). Consequently, students of different religions, faiths or beliefs must either receive an education which is aimed at Catholic students and attend lessons which do not do justice to their belief, or else opt out of religious education and other religious activities entirely.

Students in Maltese public schools and some independent schools can opt to attend Ethics classes instead of Religious Education. However, in independent schools which do not offer Ethics, students may have to spend this lesson time in the library and do different work instead. The lack of recognition or representation of students' faiths, religions or beliefs may lead to students feeling uninvolved, excluded, or different. A paucity of literature investigating such practices in the local context exist. Thus, this study sought to investigate the extent to which Maltese schools provide adequate space and opportunities for the expression, practice and sharing of different religions, faiths and beliefs by focusing on the practices of one local independent school.

Definition of Multifaith

The term "multifaith" has generated diverse definitions over the years beyond the denotation "involving several and different religions" (Macmillan, 2009–2022). While the term refers to the process of learning about a "number of religions" (Stern, 2007, p. 3), "multifaith participants" are individuals who have different religious traditions (Page et al., 2017). When applied to education, Dinama (2010) uses the phrase "multi–faith" to refer to a religious education curriculum which focuses on a variety of religions, and which does not require students and teachers to be religious. Although the idea of multifaith and pluralistic societies has become more widespread across the Western world in the 21st century, multifaith approaches remain more problematic in places like China which observe religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism (Xia et al., 2023).

In this study, the term 'multifaith' is positioned in the context of religious

education and the school environment. Accordingly, it will refer to the idea of involving and including students of different beliefs, opinions, standpoints, faiths and religions.

Religious Education

Religious education has consistently been the focus of controversies and disputes in countless ecclesiastical and educational dialogues. The issue of whether religious education should even be in the official curriculum has been central to these discussions (Boeve, 2016). In some countries, religious education is not included in their educational programmes, as religion is considered to bring divisions among communities. For instance, in China only theology institutions or schools supported by other religions are permitted to teach religious education. Moreover, the techniques and methods used to teach it must be appropriate for today's relevant communities (Erricker, 2010).

Added to the complexity of such a discussion, religious education differs wherever it is taught. Different pedagogical methods are adopted in different parts of the world, namely the Confessional, the Experiential, the Interpretive, and the Multifaith religious education approaches. In pedagogy, the confessional approach emphasises the theological aspect of a particular religion, such as Christianity or Islam, and is known to adopt an indoctrination approach (Robb, 2003). The experiential approach to religious education aims at making religion real to students by bridging the students' experiences together with the religious subject (Luke, 2010). The interpretive approach aims to provide methods for developing understanding of different religious traditions (Jackson, 2009), whilst the multifaith approach helps students appreciate religious practices in various cultures and religions (Stern, 2007). Such a variety of descriptors have surfaced largely because of developments in society. In some countries, different approaches are adopted to mitigate and safeguard schools in view of the diversification of beliefs and ideas. Teachers may thus have to identify the religious education that is relevant for their students (Wright & Brandom, 2005).

The Confessional Model of Religious Education

Confessional education may be typified as the handing down of knowledge which is considered and believed to be true and accurate by a particular religious tradition. It mirrors a single, stable understanding of the world which remains always correct and is not challenged in any way (McHugh, 2002). The confessional model of religious education traces its origin to the 8th and 9th

centuries, when the teaching of the Christian faith first started in schools. In this process, students learn the truths of the Christian faith and also the handing down of Christian teachings that particularly focus on morality. Confessional education is often open to the charge of indoctrination and accused of being biased (Robb, 2003). In Maltese schools, religious education is offered as a school subject (Constitution of Malta, 1964) and combines 'religion' and 'education'. As a school subject, religious education in Malta is distinct from catechesis, whose primary objective is to strengthen the faith of students. In Maltese schools, religious education seeks to support learners to associate the Catholic religion with their day–to–day experiences and their life accomplishments (Sultana, 2022).

Approaches of Religious Education in Four Multicultural Societies

The United Kingdom

In many schools around the United Kingdom, religious education adopts a thematic approach that incorporates major religions that are represented in the country, which results in secondary school students receiving a more effective type of religious education. Religious education is taught in a way that advances multifaith understanding. For instance, a topic on "practices and ways of life" explores how Muslims and Christians observe Ramadan and Lent, respectively. Topics against animal abuse are examined through topics on "the environment" from both religious and non–religious viewpoints (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education, 2010). Students of different faiths or non–religious students are thus invited to participate in activities which promote inclusivity and teamwork such as thematic assemblies.

Furthermore, mosques and churches together with Muslim and Catholic schools provide networks to improve mutual respect between students of different beliefs. They also provide social learning opportunities, create meetings which contribute to the students' spiritual advancement and promote opportunities for cross–curricular learning. Religious education theme days are organised to allow in–depth learning on religious diversity, such as visits from Hindu dancers. This promotes the life of religious education whilst stimulating students' minds. During the third week of November, for example, schools celebrate Interfaith week and participate in multifaith interactive activities which engage in dialogue and include important faith celebrations such as Eid, Diwali, Sukkot and Christmas (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education,

2018). This thematic way of teaching religious education is promising: the rise in number of pupils sitting for local examinations and gaining religious education qualifications such as the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) has quadrupled in the United Kingdom since 1996 (OFSTED, 2021).

Australia

In Australia, multifaith organisations such as the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission of the Archdiocese of Melbourne (2019) issued a guideline document on multifaith education. This document emphasised the unity of students at school and concluded that students learn by comparing their own beliefs to that of others. Students thus gain deeper knowledge through diversity. In Victoria, schools emphasise multifaith inclusion, and students are free to learn about other religions and make informed decisions for themselves (Victoria State Government, 2022). In Australia, schools are making interreligious education a target for the improvement of the students' education. In this regard, prayer ceremonies and visits to different places of worship are organised. Buddhist monks, Muslim Imams and representatives of the Jewish communities are invited to visit schools and explain their customs, rites, styles of clothing, dietary religious requirements and modesty (Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission, 2019).

Finland

Like other Nordic nations, Finland has a robust Christian formation, including Evangelical Lutheran and Orthodox views, and religious education which is mandated (Sakaranaho, 2013). The subject was taught in a confessional manner in the past; however, with globalisation and immigration, multicultural policies which provide for various religious individualities in schools were soon introduced. This encouraged students to give meaning to different faiths and understand outcomes concerning national and international multifaith societies (Lue, 2019).

The United States of America

In the United States of America, religious education is taught using mixed teaching methods ideal for pluralistic cultures, using various practices and pedagogies to create multifaith experiences. This helps students understand their own culture and that of others and explores global viewpoints rather than oppress students to follow a particular religion through confessional learning. For instance, the North Park University embarked on a music education project

to teach students of different faiths and beliefs on how to come together irrespective of their differences (Olson, 2016).

The Rise of Migration in Malta

Article 2 of Malta's Constitution (1964) establishes Catholicism as the state religion, yet it also guarantees a legal right to liberty and acceptance of other religions in the country (European Commission, 2021). Malta's recent Census of Population and Housing (NSO, 2022) indicates a threefold rise from 2011 to 2020 of persons who immigrated to Malta. This includes irregular migrants, asylum seekers and those with an international protection.

Out of a total of 44,711 persons aged between 10 and 19 years old residing in Malta, 6,291 adolescents are non-Maltese. As a result, there is an increase in the number of foreign students enrolling in local schools. In fact, Fenech and Seguna (2020) highlight that the number of international students registered in Maltese schools has more than doubled in the last thirteen years.

The Catholic Religion and Inclusion

Through the seven themes of Catholic social teachings, the Catholic Church itself teaches about inclusion, solidarity and acceptance, and promotes a good relationship with people of other cultures and other religions (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2023). The Second Vatican Council opened the gate for dialogue with non-Christian religions (Chambers, 2012), initiating the approach of Catholics to people of other religions and contributing to their peaceful co-existence. *Nostra Aetate*, the declaration on the relation of the Church with non-Christian religions, asks for reflection on what humankind has in common and what draws people together, such as peace and harmony. It stresses that there is no foundation to discriminate between people of a different race, colour or religion, as they all have dignity in God's eyes (Second Vatican Council, 1965). This is because we have all been created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27).

During a meeting with other world leaders on the global compact on religions and education, Pope Francis declared, "If we desire a more fraternal world, we need to educate young people to acknowledge, appreciate, and love each person, regardless of our differences". He explained that "education must be established not only on the fundamental principle 'know yourself', but also on

other essential principles especially 'knowing one's brothers and sisters'" (Wells, 2021).

This may indicate that schools should perhaps go beyond confessional religious education and adapt methods that are pertinent to multicultural and pluralistic societies.

Methodology

In order to offer suggestions for the involvement and inclusion of multifaith students, this paper investigates viable venues outside the confines of the religious education curriculum to foster a multifaith educational environment within a Catholic school ethos. Concretely, this study seeks to answer the research questions: 'How can one educate for a multifaith environment beyond the curriculum?' and 'How would a multifaith environment fit within a Catholic ethos?'. Hence, it investigates the possibility to educate in a way that informs, shapes and transforms people's lives (Groome, 2007).

This paper draws its findings from a wider sequential explanatory mixed methods research study carried out in one independent school in Malta that utilised questionnaires and focus groups as research tools. The research focussed on students and educators coming from the senior sector of an independent school. The students' focus group was held during a 40-minute school break to minimise any absence from class. A series of simple, student-friendly questions were devised to address the research questions for this focus group. As the focus group was made up of minors, the questions were asked in a semi-structured manner, with most questions leading to others via a questioning route.

The school that was invited to participate in the study was selected to ensure that it would include local and foreign participants. This was done to strengthen the possibility of having participants of different religions, faiths, beliefs, and those who claim they do not belong to any religion or declare they are unbelievers. The school in question has a Catholic ethos and adopts Christian beliefs to carry out its mission. The school's mission statement advocates the promotion of love, respect, acceptance, faith, hope and community-building. It celebrates diversity and accepts intercultural realities with the aim of establishing a pleasant atmosphere, guaranteeing equality and equity.

Table 1

Frequency of the Students' Nationality and their Religion/Faith/Beliefs

Religion grouped	Maltese	EU	Non–EU	Total
Christian	54	95	61	**296**
Atheist	20	58	71	**296**
Other Religions	38	43	109	**296**
Total	**27**	**74**	**55**	**296**

Research Participants

This paper focuses on the findings obtained from the focus groups carried out with students. Thus, the qualitative data gathered as part of the wider research study will be the focus of the findings and discussions in this paper.

Table 1 provides an overview of the students' demographic profile and their religious affiliation, obtained through the quantitative phase of the study. It was necessary to enquire about the participants' religion, faith and beliefs since no such data was kept at the school or the education department. It was determined that a 5–point Likert–scale questionnaire would be used to gather this information, along with demographic questions. This data was to inform the interview schedule for the focus group and choose members for the focus groups for the qualitative phase of the sequential explanatory mixed methods research design this paper draws its findings from so that different religions, faiths and beliefs would be represented. For the qualitative component of the research, 10 students were invited and agreed to form part of the focus groups. Catholic, Orthodox and Church of England participants were grouped as Christian. Those who declared they were Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim were grouped as Other Religions.

Data Collection

The students' responses from the Likert–scale questionnaire reflected the school's endeavour towards inclusion and respect towards all faiths. However, they also indicated that the school falls short in translating this into concrete initiatives of representation and inclusion of different faiths indicating that these aspects need to be prioritised to enact the school's ethos more effectively.

Data collected through the students' focus group was analysed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase guide was followed. This consists of the familiarisation with data, initial coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and conducting analysis. Once familiar with the data, codes made up of a word or a short phrase were produced. These codes allocated a comprehensive and significant point for a segment of linguistic-based data (Saldana, 2016), and aided in the detection of distinct themes (Medelyan, 2019). The coding frame used in this study was a hierarchical one. During the process, several codes emerged repeatedly since they were mentioned by more than one participant. Thus, patterns were identified, especially when repeated in a recognisable way, for example 'inclusion', or 'representing everyone', whilst in other cases some more evaluation was needed, for example, 'the feeling of community'. Aspects with something in common, rather than because they were alike, were grouped together (Saldana, 2016). Categories involving a class of codes which shared similar characteristics were then identified into themes. A theme is a phrase or sentence referring to an additional subtle and inferred process (Saldana, 2016). For example, while 'respect' can be a category, 'a false sense of respect' can be a theme. Themes were reviewed to ensure they were accurate representations of the data.

Results and Discussion

A Multifaith Environment that Promotes Learning and Development

Students' opinions related to the definition of a multifaith environment were diverse, ranging from descriptions of a setting that fosters a variety of religions, faiths and beliefs, to a place where respect can be promoted. This ties very well with the school's ethos in study which promotes love, respect, acceptance, faith, hope and community-building. A multifaith environment is important as it honours distinctions between different religions, faiths and beliefs, and permits students to bring together those qualities which help them develop and learn in a school environment which heightens success (Mayhew & Rockenbach, 2021). Some students defined a multifaith environment as one which does not focus only on one's own faith, but rather an environment which accepts and learns from the faith of others. These students seemed to be proposing dialogue between students of different beliefs. This echoes Patel's (2016) conviction to appreciate other people's cultures and religions.

On the contrary, some students indicated that they were exposed to religio-

centrism at school, which Corsini (1999) defined as the "conviction that a person's own religion is more important or superior to other religions" (p. 827). This could be also linked to the fact that the school's ethos promotes a Catholic worldview rather than a multifaith one.

Other students which do not follow religious education at school indicated that they started questioning some of their classmates about other religions and found this very interesting. This may be indicative of a lack of education with regards to different faiths at school and connects with the findings of Debattista (2006), who found that 68.7% of the students who participated in her study specified that they would like to learn more about different religions. To create multifaith education, the school must put what is visible into practice. This includes the celebration of holy days, feasts and allowance of religious symbols (e.g., jewellery or dress codes) and what is less visible, such as dialogue, respect and inclusion, into practice.

Unity and Bringing People Together at School in Relation with Religion, Faiths and Beliefs
Students claimed that peers would be able to see beyond stereotypes and prejudices once they learn about others' faiths. A non–Catholic student commented on the practice of prayer and said that they are not forced to pray what Catholics pray but are allowed to say their own prayer silently, which does not show celebration of diversity. The student's contentment with this practice indicates how some people consent to the hegemony of one religious group over the others and perhaps accept the normalisation of Catholic values, beliefs and practices at school. A school which truly celebrates diversity would opt for an assembly where all students can participate. Patel (2016) posited that religious diversity becomes apparent when one learns to appreciate other people's religions and seek out the best and the estimable in those religions. Thus, it is crucial that a school's learning environment fosters a feeling of belonging for students (Ralph, 2022). Educational institutions are essential in promoting respect and acceptance of different religions, faiths and beliefs by avoiding inequitable and prejudiced behaviours and minimising cultural and religious discrimination in schools (Vilà et al., 2020). Some students claimed they had to leave the classroom and go to the library when the religious education lesson took place. Students emphasised the importance of not creating an 'insider' or an 'outsider' group, referring to Christians as the 'insiders' and the other faiths and beliefs as the 'outsiders'. This relates to Chircop's (2017) claim that despite

many schools boasting of a multifaith population, most practices concerning religious activities at school benefit only 'insiders'. Inclusion builds a culture which actively invites every person and group to contribute and participate (Barney, 2003). Such is an environment that supports and embraces differences.

Students suggested that different religions should be taught at school to reduce prejudice and ignorance. Muslim students said that they are allowed to wear the hijab (head scarf) at school, which makes an allowance to their religion. However, Hindu students were not given carte blanche to wear a Kalava, which is a red–yellow coloured, knotted, protection bracelet, which has an important meaning in the Hindu religion. This may be a consequence of the lack of education related to different religious attire, rather than the school's endeavour to be exclusionary. Wearing clothing or items related to one's religion can make students feel closer to their culture. Parekh (2006) defines it as the moment when citizens feel accepted and welcome for who they are, yet the European Network against Racism (ENAR, 2008) stated that people of minor religious ethnicities could be more subjected to intolerance, and Darmanin (2013) concludes that religion might be a good means of exclusion rather than inclusion.

Multifaith Initiatives Which Are Beyond the Curriculum

Students need multifaith learning opportunities that extend beyond the curriculum to establish inclusive, varied and engaging learning environments. This ultimately enhances their own learning experience (Sambel, 2023). During the focus group, the students provided various insights into how the school can provide ways of celebrating everyone's religion, faith and belief.

The students suggested that the school should organise special assemblies devoted to each specific religion so that they can learn about each other's faith at school. They also recommended school excursions to different places of worship such as a synagogue or mosque, since they are curious to learn about the acts of devotion and veneration of others at their place of worship. Students asked for time to be allocated for everyone to pray in their own different ways to feel involved and to ensure that the hegemony of one religious group is not taking place. Furthermore, they hailed activities related to religious festivals, such as Holi, the Hindu festival of colour to help them learn about different religious identities. According to students, authorised people of different religions could give talks or even teach about different faiths and explain

their customs, rites and styles of clothing. Students hinted at cross–curricular approaches such as food activities related to different religious feasts, rituals or festivals which could highlight the celebration of diversity and plurality.

Moreover, they also hoped that the school would invest more in books about different religions and faiths in the library. The lack of books and resources demonstrates how the needs of multifaith students were not being met. Students felt there is nothing the school can do for 'nones', as if they form part of a subculture demonstrating lack of empathy and understanding towards them. 'Nones' refers to those who claim that they do not belong to any religion or who identify as atheists, unbelievers, not spiritual, not religious, agnostic, or apathetic towards religions (Bullard, 2016). When looking through the students' eyes, it was perhaps difficult for them to grasp that 'nones' do not believe, and so they could not see any solution. However, this does not mean that 'nones' do not need to learn about other religions; they do as much as others, and they can learn topics which are more neutral, such as humanism, for example. Students suggested having a prayer room, or rather, a safe space where anyone in the school community can go to reflect, meditate, pray, or simply spend some time in silence. Non–Catholic students, such as followers of Hinduism, suggested that perhaps a small Hindu statue can be placed in the corridor together with a poster that includes information about the statue so that students walking through the corridor could learn from it.

The analysis presented does not only provide suggestions that demonstrate how religious education can occur outside the confines of the religious education curriculum itself, but also indicates that a multifaith environment can still fit within a Catholic ethos. This implies that the school needs to translate these aspects into more concrete multifaith initiatives that involve and include everyone regardless their religion, faith or belief, and educate in a way which upholds inclusion and respect for diversity.

Conclusion

Schools that have a Catholic ethos in multifaith and pluralistic societies face several challenges. Schools need to learn how to gradually address challenges by redefining their Catholic ethos and making it relevant for today's culture. Whilst remaining committed to their own character is essential, schools must nonetheless not be afraid from responding to the variety of multifaith and socio–educational situations. They must therefore be ready to work together

with all stakeholders to implement new multifaith teaching methods.

All students deserve equal learning opportunities, irrespective of whether they are a religious minority group or the largest group at school. Ultimately, such a principle is closely associated with Catholic Church teachings that promote the celebration of diversity and inclusion. During a media press release given by the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society to mark the World Interfaith Harmony week, Garg (2022) stated, "different people of different religions are flowers. Many flowers of the same kind make a bouquet, a plant. But many flowers of a different kind make a garden." It is hoped that the suggestions put forward in this dissertation are implemented and that this study sets into motion further investigation for other schools to follow.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that schools may be required to undergo certain changes to successfully support inclusive multifaith efforts while remaining compatible with their Catholic character.

For students to eventually be able to make logical, independent decisions about their beliefs and that of others, it is important to introduce them to various religions from within the religious system. The school should offer subjects like "Ethics" or "Religion, Values and Ethics" in addition to religious education, rather than sending pupils who choose not to participate in religious instruction to the library. To overcome preconceptions and misunderstandings, and thus promote greater religious literacy, the school should observe "Interfaith Week" to develop awareness and understanding of various religions, faiths and beliefs. The library needs to receive additional funding, and books from other religions, ideologies and faiths should be included. Spaces such as corridors and other small areas can also be better utilised to raise awareness of different faiths.

Furthermore, cross–curricular and other multifaith activities such as music, dance, art, stories and role play can be organised to include and foster respect amongst all students and help them seek, acquire and use knowledge in an organic way. Every member of the school community should have access to a safe space where they can reflect, meditate, pray, or simply spend some time in silence. It is necessary to address the school's calendar and the school's timetable too. This can be achieved by planning activities about different religious observances, which in turn can be celebrated in different ways at school.

Multifaith assemblies which all students can participate in should be adopted. This can include praying in different ways and delivering presentations about different religious rituals, festivals and attire. One can also delve into neutral topics such as the environment and war, and explore them through religious and non–religious values. Excursions to different places of worship such as a cathedral, a mosque or a synagogue should be organised by the school so that students experience them first–hand. Break clubs can be formed, which show movies or video clips about important people from different religions such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr and explore the effects these people have had on social justice and respect for all. Talks and encounters led by knowledgeable persons to teach about different religions, faiths and beliefs should be organised, so that students learn about different religious customs and rites.

The school needs to become a place which fosters a safe and comfortable environment where students can feel more accepted and welcome (Parekh, 2006), and to identify ways to better balance the hegemony of the majority over that of the minority to provide justice to its Catholic ethos (McLaren, 2003).

Notes on Contributor

Fiona Zammit Gauci is an educator of Religion and teaches in the secondary sector. She received a Bachelor (Hons) degree in Theology from the University of Malta and is currently a third–year student reading for a Master of Education (Religious Education) with the Institute for Education, Malta.

References

Barney, N. (2003). *Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)*. Tech Target Network. https://www.techtarget.com/searchhrsoftware/definition/diversity–equity–and–inclusion–DEI#:~:text=Diversity%2C%20equity%20and%20inclusion%20is,religions%2C%20cultures%20and%20sexual%20orientations

Boeve, L. (2016). *Theology at the crossroads of university, church, and society*. Bloomsbury T&T Clark. https://lirias.kuleuven.be/1536472?limo=0

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, (3), 77–101. http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bullard, G. (2016). *The world's newest major religion: No religion*. National Geographic. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/160422–atheism–agnostic–secular–nones–rising–religion

Chambers, M. (2012). Students who are not Catholics in Catholic schools: Lessons from the Second Vatican Council about the Catholicity of schools. *International Studies in Catholic Education, 4*(2), 186–199.

Chircop, L. (2017). The teaching of one religion in a pluralist society. Implications on curriculum, school ethos and teacher attitudes in the Maltese public school system. *Il Mulino–Rivisteweb. Scuola Democratica, 3*, 511–530. https://www.doi.org/10.12828/88613

Chircop, L. (2019, April 6). *Muslim students in Maltese schools: Outsiders looking in.* Isles of the left. https://www.islesoftheleft.org/muslim–students–in–maltese–schools–outsiders–looking–in/

Corsini, R. J. (1999). Religiocentrism. In *Dictionary of Psychology*. Psychology Press.

Darmanin, M. (2013). The 'smallness' of minimalist tolerance. *Education Inquiry, 4*(1). https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v4i1.22061

Debattista, L. M. (2006). *Maltese secondary school students' understanding of different religions: A study of form four students.* [Bachelor's dissertation]. University of Malta.

Department of Children, Schools, and Families. (2010). *Religious education in English schools: Non–statutory guidance* (DCSF–00114–2010). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190260/DCSF–00114–2010.pdf

Dinama, B. (2010). Implementing a multi–faith religious education curriculum in Botswana junior secondary schools. *Perspectives in Education, 28*(1). https://www.ajol.info/index.php/pie/article/view/76896

Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. (2019). *Welcoming each other. Guidelines for Interfaith Education in the Schools of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Australia.* https://www.multifaitheducation.com.au/wp–content/uploads/2019/10/EIC–Interfaith–Education–Guidelines–2018_V9–2.pdf

ENAR. (2008). *European network against racism, racism in Malta*. ENAR shadow report. http://cms.horus.be/files/99935/MediaArchive/national/Malta–SR2008.pdf

Erricker, C. (2010). *Religious education. A conceptual and interdisciplinary approach for secondary level*. Routledge Taylor and Francis.

European Commission. (2021, December 1). *Eurydice Malta. Population: Demographic situation, languages, and religions.* Eurydice. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national–policies/eurydice/content/population–demographic–situation–languages–and–religions–49_en

Fenech, C., & Seguna, A. (2020). Internationalisation and multiculturalism in Maltese education and society. *Malta Journal of Education, 1*(1), 24–50.

Garg, R. (2022). *Many different flowers make a garden. Malta Foundation for Wellbeing of Society marks World Interfaith Harmony Week*. Media Press Releases.

Groome, T. H. (2007). Advice to beginner and to myself. *Religious Education, 102*(4), 362–366. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00344080701657634

Jackson, R. (2009). *Studying religions: The interpretive approach in brief*. European Wergeland Centre. https://theewc.org/content/uploads/2020/02/Studying-Religions-The-Interpretive-Approach-in-Brief.pdf

King James Bible. (2017). King James Bible Online. https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/ (Original work published 1769)

Lue, L. (2019). *Religious Education in Finland*. https://www.suol.fi/index.php/religious-education-in-finland

Luke, J. (2010). *Using experiential education to teach religious studies. The many and the one: Summer institute*. https://raac.iupui.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Luke-Using-Experiential-Education-to-Teach-Religious-Studies-Unit-Plan.pdf

Macmillan Education Limited. (2009–2022). Multifaith. In *Macmillan dictionary*. https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/multi-faith

Malta House of the Representatives. (1964). *Constitution of Malta*. Art. 2(3).

Mayhew, M. J., & Rockenbach, A. N. (2021). Interfaith learning and development. *Journal of College and Character, 22*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2020.1860778

McHugh, A. (2002). A new argument for confessional teaching. *Journal of Christian Education, 45*(3), 153–169. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/002196570204500304

McLaren, P. (2003). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations in education* (4th ed.). Pearson Education Incorporation.

Medelyan, A. (2019). *Coding qualitative data: How to code qualitative research*. Thematic. https://getthematic.com/insights/coding-qualitative-data/

National Association of Teachers of Religious Education. (2018). *Interfaith week activities for secondary schools*. Department for Children, Schools, and Families. https://www.interfaithweek.org/uploads/Inter_Faith_Week_Ideas_for_Secondary_Schools_2018.pdf

National Statistics Office [NSO]. (2023). *Census of population and housing 2021. Final report: Population, migration & other social characteristics (Volume 1)*. https://nso.gov.mt/wp–content/uploads/Census–of–Population–2021–volume1–final.pdf

OFSTED. (2021). *Research review series: Religious education*. Gov.uk. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research–review–series–religious–education/research–review–series–religious–education

OLSON, G. (2016). Why Culture and Diversity Matter. *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*.

Page, S. J., & Yip, A. K. T. (2017). Gender equality and religion: A multi–faith exploration of young adults' narratives. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 24*(3), 249–265. https://doiorg.ejournals.um.edu.mt/10.1177/1350506815625906

Parekh, B. (2006). *Rethinking multiculturalism: Cultural diversity and political theory* (2nd ed. [expanded]). Palgrave Macmillan.

Patel, E. (2016). *Interfaith leadership: A primer*. Beacon Press.

Ralph, M. (2022). *How to cultivate a sense of belonging in schools*. Edutopia. https://www.edutopia.org/article/importance–belonging–in–schools/

Robb, M. M. (2003). An Outline and Assessment of the Significance of the "Confessional" Model of Religious Education. *Religious education*. https://www.academia.edu/8620895/An_Outline_and_Assessment_of_the_Significance_of_the_Confessional_Model_of_Religious_Education

Saldana, J. (2016). *An introduction to codes and coding. The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Sakaranaho, T. (2013). Religious education in Finland. *Temenos – Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion, 49*(2), 225–254. https://doi.org/10.33356/temenos.9547

Sambell, M. (2023). *What is learning beyond the classroom?* Schoolbox. https://schoolbox.com.au/blog/what–is–learning–beyond–the–classroom/

Second Vatican Council. (1965). *Nostra Aetate*, par. 1, 5. Vatican. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat–ii_decl_19651028_nostra–aetate_en.html

Stern, J. (2007). *Teaching religious education: Researchers in the classroom*. Continuum.

Sultana, C. M. (2022). Religious education in transition: From content–centred to student–centred. *Religions, 13*(10), 986. http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/rel13100986

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2023). *Seven themes of Catholic social teaching.*
https://www.usccb.org/beliefs–and–teachings/what–we–believe/catholic–social–teaching/seven–themes–of–catholic–social–teaching

Victoria State Government. (2022). *Multicultural education programs and resources.* Department of Education, Australia.
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/multicultural/Pages/multidepth.aspx

Vilà, R., Freixa, M., & Aneas, A. (2020). Interreligious and intercultural dialogue in education. *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society, 6*(2), 255–273.
https://doi.org/10.30965/23642807–00602002

Wells, C. (2021, October 5). *Pope: Religions reaffirm mission of integral education.* Vatican news.
https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021–10/pope–religions–reaffirm–mission–of–integral–education.html

Wright, A., & Brandom A. (Eds.). (2005). *Learning to teach religious education in the secondary school: A companion to school experience.* Taylor and Francis.

Xia, T., Biddington, T., & Crompton A. (2023). The middle way of multifaith. *Architecture and Culture, 11*(1).