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PhD Thesis

The Challenges of Teaching the Religion Component of the Ethics and Religious Culture Program: A Study of Secondary Teachers in the Montreal Area

By

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Abstract

In 2008, the Ministry of Education (MEERS) instituted the new program entitled *Ethics and Religious Culture* (ERC). The program is now compulsory in elementary and secondary education, in both public and private schools. The advent of the ERC program marks a significant change in the history of religious education in Quebec. Prior to 2008 courses in religion were primarily designed as either Catholic or Protestant. The introduction of this secular non-confessional program was met with a great deal of resistance, controversy and debate, including court battles, criticisms in the media, and discussions in the scholarly literature. One of the most frequent concerns expresses in the scholarly discussion relates to the expedited implementation of the program and the impact of this on teachers. Here teachers' lack of preparation to teach the religion competency is particularly underscored. In spite of this concern, there has been almost no empirical research to date which focusing explicitly on the experience of teachers, studies which provide a voice to those who are primarily responsible for the implementation of the program, and hence, in the end, responsible for its success.

This study investigates the experiences of secondary school ERC teachers. It focuses on the challenges they face, particularly with respect to the religion component. The study also contains an auto ethnographic component which considers my own experience teaching ERC. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus group to answer four questions: *1) "How do teachers understand their role and responsibilities as teachers of religion in secondary public schools? 2) What challenges does teaching the religion competency pose for the secondary school ERC teachers? 3) How do teachers view the program's commitment to neutral teaching as the preferred professional posture? 4) What types of professional support would assist in addressing the challenges they face?* The responses from the teachers

interviewed served as points of reference for my reflection on the challenges I face with the program.

There are four conceptual themes emerging from the findings. The first theme relates to administrative and systemic support. The teachers in the study are very frustrated with the lack of importance given to the program, in terms of both workload allocation and professional development. The participants are very positive about the religion component of the program. At the same time, they yearn for greater knowledge about religious culture. The second theme, *Pedagogical Resilience and Support*, addresses how the teachers manage given the absence of professional training and resources. The teachers in the study are animated by a sense of professionalism which reflects a deep concern for the well-being of their students. The third theme, *the need for professional development*, further highlights the pedagogical resiliency of the participants and the overwhelming need for in-service training. The first three themes relate to concerns over implementation as discussed in the scholarly literature. The last theme, *the professional postures of teachers*, highlights how adopting an appropriate professional posture is complex and far from obvious. The ERC program's preference for teacher neutrality generated a great deal of critical reflection, questioning, nuancing and contextual considerations. My own position on this issue, which was highly assured at the beginning of the study, evolved significantly through my interactions with the teachers in the study.

Résumé

En 2008, le Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEERS) a institué le nouveau programme intitulé Éthique et Culture Religieuse (ECR). Le programme est maintenant obligatoire au primaire et secondaire dans les écoles publiques et privées du Québec. L'avènement du programme ECR marque un changement significatif dans l'histoire de l'enseignement religieux au Québec. Avant 2008 les cours de religion étaient de nature confessionnelle, principalement catholique ou protestante. L'introduction de ce programme non confessionnel laïque a été accueillie avec beaucoup de résistances et de débats, y compris des batailles juridiques et des critiques dans les médias. L'implantation a aussi suscité énormément de discussions dans la littérature académique. L'une des préoccupations les plus fréquentes concerne la mise en œuvre accélérée du programme et l'impact de cette situation sur les enseignants. Ici, le manque de préparation à enseigner la compétence religieuse est particulièrement souligné. En dépit de cette préoccupation, il n'y a pratiquement aucune recherche empirique à ce jour se concentrant explicitement sur l'expérience des enseignants, c'est-à-dire ceux qui sont principalement responsables de la mise en œuvre du programme et, par conséquent, responsable de son succès.

Cette étude donne la parole à des enseignants du programme ERC au secondaire. L'étude met l'accent sur les défis auxquels ils sont confrontés, notamment en ce qui concerne la composante de la religion. L'étude contient également une composante auto ethnographique qui considère ma propre expérience avec le programme ECR. Les données ont été recueillies au moyen d'entrevues semi-structurées et un groupe de discussion pour répondre à quatre questions: 1) Comment les enseignants comprennent-ils leur rôle et leurs responsabilités en enseignement de la religion dans les écoles publiques secondaires? 2) Les enseignants font face à quels défis en

particulier? 3) Comment ces enseignants voient-ils la posture professionnelle mise en avant par le programme? 4) Quels types de soutien professionnel les aideraient à relever les défis auxquels ils sont confrontés? Les réponses des enseignants on servit de repères pour ma propre réflexion sur le programme.

Il y a quatre thèmes conceptuels qui se dégagent de l'étude. Le premier thème porte sur la mise en œuvre du cours ECR. Les enseignants interrogés sont très frustrés par le peu d'importance accordée au programme, tant en termes d'attributions des charges d'enseignement qu'au niveau de l'absence de formation professionnelle. Les participants voient d'un œil très positif l'enseignement de la compétence religieuse. En même temps, ils aspirent à une formation qui leurs permettrait d'avoir une plus grande connaissance en culture religieuse. Le deuxième thème, la résilience pédagogique, démontre que malgré une formation qu'ils considèrent déficiente, les enseignants de l'étude son animés par un sentiment de professionnalisme qui s'inspire d'une profonde préoccupation pour le bien-être de leurs élèves. Le troisième thème met l'emphase sur l'impérieuse nécessité pour une formation plus étendue, tout particulièrement en culture religieuse. Le dernier thème, la posture professionnelle de l'enseignant, révèle à quel point l'adoption d'une posture professionnelle appropriée est complexe et loin d'être évidente. La préférence du programme ERC pour une posture neutre a suscité énormément de réflexions critiques, de questionnements, de nuances et de considérations contextuelles. Ma propre position sur cet enjeu, qui était très campé au début de l'étude, a sensiblement évolué au cours des entrevues.

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"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." — Psalms 119:105

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"Set your life on fire. Seek those who fan your flames." — Rumi.

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"*What the teacher is, is more important than what he teaches." — Karl A. Menninger.*

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"*I am the beginning, middle, and end of creation.*" *— Bhagavad Gita*

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"And we talk to each other through our eyes in between…I love you," — Jill Scott

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"Respond to every call that excited your spirit." — Rumi

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Introduction

The advent of the ERC program marks a significant change in the history of religious education in Quebec. Prior to 2008 courses in religion were primarily designed as either Catholic or Protestant. The social impetus for this change can be traced back to the Quiet Revolution. During the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s the Church's influence began to decline as Quebec society began a movement toward a secular and more pluralistic society. The education system changed to reflect this societal evolution. A key historical marker during this period was the creation the Ministry of Education in 1964. Although this entity was no longer under the auspices of religious authority, religion remained an integral part of the curriculum. Public schools in Quebec were still designated as confessional, as either Protestant or Catholic. These schools continued to offer a confessional course in religious instruction.

The year 1995 marked another major transition in Quebec education. With the intention of reforming the entire education system, the Québec government mandated a special Commission to undertake a vast public consultation on education in Québec. This consultation process, referred to as *The Estates General on Education*, involved 56 days of public hearings. Out of this consultation emerged a new curriculum known as The Quebec Education Curriculum (QEP). As Bouchard and Morris (2012) explain, this period is also marked by "extensive public debate, consultation and parliamentary commissions on the place of religion in the Québec education system" (p.180). Out of these consultations came the decision to replace all confessional religious instruction courses, along with the non-confessional course in moral education, with a single course called Ethics and Religious Culture. This course became part of the QEP and it became mandatory in 2008 for both public and private schools.

The creation and implementation of this new course was supported by the *Commission de Consultation sur les Pratiques d'Accomodement Reliees aux Differences Culturelles*[1]. The Commission, led by sociologist Gerard Bouchard and philosopher Charles Taylor, was given the mandate to explore how far society should go to accommodate requests for religious and cultural adjustments made by individuals from minority groups. In 2008, after 15 months of extensive public hearing in all regions of the province, the Bouchard and Taylor Commission made 37 recommendations, many of which supported the new ERC program.

The Bouchard-Taylor report generated a great deal of controversy, debate, and even hostility, particularly regarding the issue of reasonable accommodations for religious minorities. The fact that both the report and the program were released practically at the same time contributed to create a climate of resistance toward the new program (Bouchard, Haeck, Plante, Venditti, 2016). This made for a particularly challenging period of implementation. Other challenges came from critical scholarly responses, media challenges, parental resistance, and school legality challenges. Parents' opposition to the program's mandatory status led to legal battles where some petitioned the court to be exempted from the program (Morris, 2011a). The most visible legal challenge was the drawn-out battle between the Ministry of Education and Loyola High School. This battle was finally resolved in 2015.

The developments described above say a great deal about the significance of the new ERC program. The program reflects a new social reality as it attempts to cultivate an ethos for the kind of society Quebec aspires to be (Morris, 2011b). Not surprisingly, the advent of the program has generated a substantial body of academic literature. Surprisingly, however, very

[1] Bouchard, G. & Taylor, C. (2008). *Commission de Consultation sur les Pratiques d'Accomodement Reliees aux Differences Culturelles.* Retrieved May 23, 2015. https://www.mce.gouv.qc.ca/publications/CCPARDC/rapport-final-integral-en. pdf

little of this academic literature is based on field studies. Most notably, hardly any attention is given to the experiences of teachers responsible for the implementation of the ERC program. In their comprehensive review of the scholarly literature on the program, Bouchard, Haeck, Plante and Venditti (2016) conclude that there is "a flagrant absence of empirical data" on the teaching, formation, implementation and the appropriation of the program by teachers (p. 38). The need for empirical research on teachers' experience is particularly pressing considering that that the program was implemented quickly and that teacher training, as a result, was precipitated, and then suddenly abandoned altogether (p.31). To date we know very little about teachers' experience with the program. How do they view the program? Do they feel prepared to teach it? What challenges do they face? What kind of support do they need? Estivalèzes (2016) points to the absence of comprehensive research on the teacher's point of view. She adds that research in the future must make a distinction between elementary and secondary school teaching.

One of the few empirical study focused on the implementation of the program, and, in a limited context, referred to the experiences of secondary school teachers (Rymarcz, 2012). Another study surveyed only the elementary school teachers' perception of the program (Morris, Bouchard, De Silva, 2011). This study found that although elementary teachers support the goals of the ERC program, they continue to have problems with teaching the religion competency. In their review of literature on the ERC program, Bouchard, Haeck, Plante and Venditti (2016) found that the religion competency has generated a great deal of resistance, ambivalence and questioning. Although some scholars note that the religion competency of the program is "highly innovative," most teacher educators worry that teachers do not have adequate knowledge for this competency (p.36). These reservations expressed in the literature, combined with my own observations of teacher colleagues, is the main reason I have decided to focus

specifically on the challenges teachers face with the religion competency. Moreover, as noted above, the research that has been conducted to date is limited to exploratory surveys of elementary school teachers. No empirical study to date has focused on secondary teachers.

The ERC program's position on the professional posture of teachers is another area where empirical research is clearly needed. Here the program states that teachers must remain viewpoint neutral, objective and impartial. Teachers are not to convey their own values, positions or beliefs so that students can think on their own. Bouchard, Haeck, Plante and Venditti, (2016) found that this is also one the most discussed and debated aspects of the program in the academic literature. Yet, we don't know what sense teachers make of the professional posture as defined by the program. Do they agree with it? Is the posture desirable? Is it achievable? Do they enact a different posture? Do they find it hard to implement? How do they navigate through its complexities and nuances? Do they need training and pedagogical support to enact the proposed posture?

This study is a qualitative inquiry which aims to fill a gap in the academic literature by focusing specifically on the experiences of teachers. The main purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the challenges and difficulties facing secondary school ERC teachers. As Frost (2005) argues, teachers are the front line recipients of educational reforms. As such, their voices and experiences are invaluable for their successful implementation.

The milestones envisioned for this study are: 1) to fill the gaps in the scholarly literature, particularly the absence of qualitative empirical research; 2) to understand how teachers view the current ERC program and its implementation; 3) to better understand how teachers are dealing with the religious component of the program; 4) to understand the sense teachers are making of the program's position on the professional posture of teachers; and 5) to identify what training is

needed to support teachers in teaching the religion competency and in navigating through the neutral impartiality injunction of the program.

Situating the Researcher

My interest in the teacher experience of the ERC program, as well as in religion itself, is both highly professional and personal in nature. I have been teaching for fifteen years. I am presently an ERC teacher. I started teaching a course in religious education first in London, England in 2001 and now in Montreal, Canada. I am the child of parents who are culturally, racially, and religiously different. My mother is an Afro-Canadian Christian and my father is an Indo-Guyanese Muslim. Through my culturally mixed background and upbringing, I have come to love teaching about religion. This love is not necessarily shared by some of my colleagues and many of my students, who do not particularly enjoy religious education or religious matters in general.

My mixed heritage has given me a different perspective on life and religion. Growing up in this familial plurality, I have always seen and appreciated the beauty in my parents' backgrounds. From a young age, both parents exposed me to religions, cultures, and races. It was this exposure that nurtured my natural attraction to religion. I grew up in an environment where religion was perceived as beautiful. For my parents, religion was a gift from God. It is their celebration of difference that I find particularly beautiful. Even after my parents divorced, they separately took me to church and the mosque on the respective holy days and days of rest. Their divorce from each other was not a divorce from my religious experience. As a result, I became an adult whose belief system understands, recognizes, and respects all beliefs.

This family experience is what prompted me to pursue a Bachelor of Education at McGill University, specializing in history and moral and religious education. During that time, I was trained and educated in how to teach about religion in secondary school classrooms. It was not until my first teaching position in London that I began to really appreciate the necessity of an effective religious education program. It is here that I saw the positive impact a good program can have on students. As a new professional in England, it was helpful to find a national curriculum, supporting religious education with lessons and resources. This provision for support was markedly different from what I experience in Montreal.

While in London, I became an examiner for Edexcel, which is part of Pearson Education Ltd group.[2] This is a company that brings together education experts to assess and develop qualification that will support young people in the UK. In 2003, I became an examiner for the religious education examinations. This is a position where teachers across England are allocated a number of exams to correct anonymously. The process to be an examiner is quite systematic. It requires that the examiner goes through a number of standardization exercises in order to ensure accuracy and validity when correcting the exams. I have held this position for 13 years.

Upon my return to Montreal in 2005, I undertook a Master's degree in Theology to deepen my knowledge and love of religion and religious education. I also started teaching religion at a Montreal high school. Here I saw the struggles of my colleagues who did not have the sufficient content knowledge or resources to teach religion. They had no access to in-service formation and they were clearly not comfortable teaching religion. This situation only worsened with the introduction of the Ethics and Religious Culture Program in 2008.

[2] Pearson UK. (n.d.). Retrieved May 12, 2016, from https://uk. pearson.com/

In 2006, anticipating the new ERC program, my principal selected me as a "trainer" for other teachers. This training was extended to over twenty-four selected teachers across Quebec. Out of the 24 teachers, 8 of us were from the English Montreal School Board (EMSB). This training took place over two years in Quebec City and in Montreal. The training was quite extensive and encompassed both theoretical and practical aspects. I was relieved from my teaching duties for at least twelve days in the first year and seven days in the second year. During the training workshops teachers learned about the program content, its goals, the competencies, and teaching approaches. The training also had a field component, which involved visiting and exploring a number of places of worship such as a mosque, a mandir (Hindu temple), and a synagogue.

Admittedly, during the first year of training I was not a fan of the ERC program. I was often critical of its content, and especially of its outlook on First Nations. I vividly remember one meeting in Montreal, where I asked the ERC trainers why First Nations were perceived solely as Christians. I was concerned that First Nations peoples were represented through a colonial bias. In my view the role of the ERC program was to challenge, and not perpetuate, these kinds of misrepresentations. For me this raised serious concerns because I wanted to support this program. I voiced my concerns at our last meeting in Quebec City. Although my concerns did not lead to changes in the program, I began to see how I could address these kinds of issues by referring to the program's commitment to social justice and co-existence ("le vivre ensemble" in French).

The second year of ERC training focused on professional development of in-service teachers. The EMSB teacher-trainers and I were working on ways to present the program to our colleagues. Our team created a series of workshops through the EMSB's pedagogical services.

Between 2008 and 2009 the school board provided approximately 2-3 days of mandatory workshops for teachers. I had the opportunity to be a facilitator for these workshops. Since 2008 there has been no professional development for ERC available for English Montreal School Board teachers.

By 2009, the ERC program was fully implemented in all Quebec schools. By this time, I was promoted to Head of the ERC department. I managed seven teachers and had eight years of teaching about religion under my belt. As a Head of Department, it was evident that there was a high turnover of teachers assigned ERC. It was particularly apparent that the turnover of teachers was going to be cause for serious concern. Some colleagues who had no background in the area were assigned to teach ERC. Still other colleagues participated in a very brief 12-hour program. Conversations with colleagues at my school quickly revealed the extent of our differences. Considering that I flourished teaching this program, I was surprised to witness the extent to which my colleagues struggled. They were untrained, uncomfortable, and overwhelmed. It is with the intention of providing professional support for my colleagues that I decided to pursue doctoral studies in 2012. During my program of study I eventually discovered that I could make a contribution to the professional community and to the scholarly literature.

Structure of Dissertation

I have structured this dissertation in seven chapters including this introduction. In Chapter One, I provide an overview of the history and evolution of religious education in Quebec and how this evolution has led to the current ERC program. The chapter will also provide an overview of the program, as well as an overview of scholarly responses to the program. This

overview will highlight the primary challenges as articulated in the literature. These challenges are particularly important in that they provide the scholarly impetus for the study.

Chapter Two presents the conceptual framework for the study. I will discuss the scholarly work whose theoretical focus is relevant to the challenges facing the ERC program. I will draw primarily form Moore's conception of religious literacy. Moore's work on Religious literacy is particularly rich because it shares many of the goals and orientations of the ERC program. It provides points of reference for the design of the study and for the interpretation of the findings. Given the extent to which he scholarly literature discusses the program's position on the professional posture of teachers, I will also draw from Kelly's typology of professional postures. This typology will serve as an interpretative lens for teacher responses to this question.

In chapter three I present the methodology for this qualitative study. Given its aim to better understand lived experience and meaning-making, the study draws from both phenomenology and ethnography. The study gives priority to teacher perspectives and voices. In this chapter I also discuss how my own voice as an ERC teacher is part of the study. Drawing from auto ethnography I consider the possibility that my voice as an experienced ERC teacher can shed light on the challenges of teaching in this area.

In chapter four, I discuss the research design and methods. I discuss the contributions of auto ethnography, phenomenology, and thematic analysis principles, including how these apply to my data collection and analysis. I also provide a detailed description of the research design. Furthermore, I articulate how analysis of the data took place, and address considerations of ethics and validity. The reader is also presented with a detailed description of the participants, my relationships to them, as well as the benefits of the study.

In chapters five and six, collectively, I present a thematic analysis derived from the transcripts of all six participants. In the final chapter, I integrate the theoretical framework so as to further expound on the narratives and themes of the teachers' experience. I reiterate my research questions and discuss the key findings that relate directly to the questions and purposes of the study, as well as the recent literature on the topic. The task of the chapter is to go beyond simply describing the data. I seek to understand and communicate what the data might mean. This includes explanations of why teachers struggle with the program, specifically the challenges with the program's the religion component and with the program's position on professional posture. I also ask what type of professional development is necessary. In the conclusion, I present implications for teaching, research, and practice.

Chapter One: An Overview of the Religious Education in Quebec: From Past to Present

This chapter is divided into two major sections. Part one begins with Quebec's confessional history. This presentation will help to uncover how the province has addressed the changing nature of religious education. It will also provide the background and context for the Quebec's ERC program. Part two presents an overview of the ERC program, an overview of scholarly responses to the program, as well as the challenges arising from these responses.

Historical Background

In the 17th century New France was dominated by the religious orders (Boudreau, 2011). Several religious orders, such as the Jesuits, Recollets, Grey Nuns, and Ursulines held a prominent role in Quebec society. These religious orders were responsible for formal education both before and following the British conquest. After the British conquest of New France, the Catholic Church faced serious challenges, including the reduction of church properties, a decrease in the number of the clergy, and a reduction of education opportunities. Nevertheless, religious orders remained in the conquered New France, and it was clear that catechism was inseparable from education. Regardless of the conquest, the Catholic Church resisted placing the responsibility of education in the hands of the state as embodied by the British (Boudreau, 2011).

In the 1840s, several female religious orders were founded. Their main goal was to provide educational opportunities. The impact of the orders was reinforced by Section 93 of the British North America Act of 1867. Section 93 placed education in the jurisdiction of the province and protected the rights of Catholics and Protestants, in effect keeping the power of

education in the hands of Quebec's religious orders. Section 93 gave jurisdiction of education to the Church, and allowed Catholics and Protestants to operate confessional schools (Boudreau, 2011). The Canadian Constitution of 1867 made education an area of provincial responsibility. Quebec set up its first Ministry of Public Instruction in 1868, but abolished it in 1875 under pressure from the Catholic Church (Pigeon, 2010).

Religion and education have always been seen as one in Quebec. From the very beginning the school system in Quebec, the division of was along religious, not linguistic lines. Then in the 1970's, the task of operating confessional schools was given to two committees: 1) The Catholic Committee of the Council of Public Instruction and 2) The Protestant Committee of the Council of Public Instruction. Both committees ran their own schools will little or no government interference (Young and Bezeau, 2003).

Quebec underwent profound changes in the 1960s. These included another shift in Quebec's education system and religious education. This period is considered the beginning of the Quiet Revolution, or *La Revolution Tranquille*, in Quebec. According to Boudreau (2011) and Henchey (1972) the changes during this period constituted a genuine revolution. Change penetrated every aspect of society, including the identity, culture, and institutions. The most notable structural change was the advent of kindergartens, activist elementary schools, polyvalent secondary schools, post-secondary CEGEPs[3], and the formation of the Univesité du Quebec (Henchey, 1972).

[3] What are cégeps? (n.d.). Retrieved June 12, 2016, from https://www. sram.qc.ca/international-student/what-are-cegeps Quebec's education system is unique. It provides for a step between secondary school and university: cégep. "Cégep" is a French acronym that stands for *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel,* known in English as a general and vocational college.

Gauvreau (2005) maintains that the Quiet Revolution also marked the beginning of the secularization of Quebec society. Here, notes Henchey (1972), French speaking Quebecers, once attached to tradition and to the Church, began to critique the Church's elitist view of society and its distrust of change. Post-Quiet Revolution French Quebecers were committed to secular and political ethics, held an egalitarian view of society, were committed to and engaged in change, and were invested in the technology and economics of the post-industrial state. Hence the Quiet Revolution marks the decrease in the Church's role in education. Churches and convents, once power centers, became shrines of history. The theology and history courses of the classical college eventually became the sociology courses of the CEGEPs (Henchey, 1972).

As the Catholic Church was losing its stronghold in Quebec, the government established the Parent Commission in 1961 (Corbo, 2008). The Parent Commission, or the Royal Commission of Enquiry on Education in the Province in Quebec, was mandated to investigate the state of the current education system and to make recommendations for change. The commission's most notable change was the establishment of the Ministry of Education in 1964. [4] The Ministry acquired authority of education from local church boards. Power was centralized to the Ministry. The Catholic and Protestant committees retained some of their regulatory power and responsibilities; however, their main charge was to set the curriculum for religious education in schools (Boudreau, 2011).

As was noted above, the Quiet Revolution sparked societal secularization. Public schools, however, remained confessional, designed primarily as Catholic or Protestant. Several

[4] On February 27, 2015, under Decree No. 142-2015, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science, and Technology merged with the Ministry of Education, Recreation, and Sports. This happened under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister Philippe Couillard and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science, and Technology, and the merged entity is now known as the Ministère de l'Éducation, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche (MEERS).

attempts to secularize the education system during the 1970s and 1980s ultimately failed (Bourdeau, 2011). However, these failed attempts still led to a non-confessional moral option for those parents who did not want confessional religious instruction for their children. Another outcome of the secular push was that teachers could obtain the right to be exempted from teaching religion. The complete secularization of the Quebec education system would take several more years.

Young and Bezeau (2003) point out that yet another wave of change affected Quebec's education system. The Quebec government obtained an abrogation of Section 93, which guarantees the rights of confessional education in Quebec. According to Young and Bezeau in April 1997, the governments of Quebec and Canada, through a constitutional amendment, eliminated all denominational rights and privileges concerning education in the province of Quebec. Consequently, Quebec abolished denominational school boards, replacing them with English-language and French-language boards. In October 1997, former Education Minister Pauline Marois, established a task force that eventually led the Proulx Report (Boudreau, 2011).

Dickinson and Young (2003) contend that the Proulx Report signals changes in Quebec's approach to religious education. Headed by Jean-Pierre Proulx, the mandate of the task force was to examine the place of religion in school. The Proulx Report made fourteen recommendations to the government which were not well received from French Quebecers. Catholic schools had been part of the province's history since the founding of the French Colony. Quebecers felt that their identity was under attack. Although they wanted to be fair to minorities, they did not want this at the expense of their identities. Nevertheless, the government determined that education needed to reflect the religious diversity of Quebec students, who were no longer just Catholic or Protestant, or who adhered to no religion.

This recognition of diversity is akin to perspectives on secularization found in the scholarly literature. Taylor (2007), for example, argues that secularization does not mean that religion has disappeared from the public space. Rather it describes a social-cultural phenomenon where a variety of beliefs and non-beliefs co-existence. For Taylor, the role of the state in a secular society is to protect citizen's right to choose a system of belief or non-belief. Similarly, Bauberot (2012) argues that secularization describes a certain state of affairs whereas state secularism or "laicité" refers to a political culture which says that in a lay society religion is not a public institution. Milot and Bauberot (2002) also differentiate between secularization and laicity. They argue that secularization is society's internal process, where religion gradually loses its place and influence in the public sphere and as a social phenomenon. Religion may remain significant for individuals, but it no longer influences the society as a whole. On the other hand, laicization refers to the intentional steps taken by the State to both maintain neutral relations with religion and avoid and prevent any direct interventions by religions in its management. For Milot and Bauberot laicity is the *process* of laicization, namely the "progressive development of social and political institutions with respect to the diversity of the moral, religious, and philosophical preferences of citizens." (p.28).

Of the Proulx Report's recommendations, four are especially relevant to my research. These four recommendations are stage setters, in that they are preparing the stage for a secular education system and the arrival of the Ethics and Religious Culture Program (ERC) in 2008.

The first recommendation is the change of status. The Proulx Report recommends that the denominational status held by public schools should be revoked. The recommendation clearly reflects the intent to secularize the school system. The second recommendation is an amendment to the Education Act. The Education Act outlines the provisions governing

education in Quebec and the roles, rights, and responsibilities of its stake holders (parents, children, teachers, and the government). The Proulx Report recommended a change in the Education Act to stipulate that the values and beliefs of religious groups cannot be used as a standard for a public school (Boudreau, 2011). The second recommendation also clearly reaffirms the government's position regarding a centralized and secularized education system. Thirdly, the Proulx Report suggests that the Ministry of Education should encourage flexible measures for in-service teacher training regarding the study of religion from cultural perspectives. It also advocates the necessary financial resources for such training and changes. The last recommendation suggests dismantling the Catholic and Protestant Council on Public Instruction Committees. These recommendations clearly prepared the way for changes to Quebec's overall approach to religious education.

The recommendation to terminate the Catholic and Protestants Committees was met with resistance. The Catholic committee presented alternatives to the government's proposal of a common program. It offered a model where the government would extend the right to religious education to other religious groups under certain conditions, and would continue to offer non-confessional moral options. Additionally, the committee suggested that all students be put together in a common program of religion in the last two years of secondary school. This model, according to Boudreau (2011), received support from the Evangelical churches but not from their Protestant counterparts.

The Protestant Committee favored the report's recommendation to create a common program because, in reality, the majority of Protestant schools were teaching a program that looked very much like the current ERC program. Prior to the de-confessionalization of schools, all denominations and faiths other than Catholic attended Protestant schools. The school

populations of Protestant schools were defacto multi-faith and required, therefore, a program that reflected that reality.

Bill 101, the charter of the French language intended to protect the French language and culture, also had an impact on the composition of school populations. As McAndrew (2010) points out, Bill 101 made it mandatory for all francophone and allophone students to attend French-language schools, while preserving the historical right of the English community and anglicized immigrants to attend English language institutions. The growing presence of immigrant allophone students, observes McAndrew, meant that the French school system became increasingly multi-ethnic. Catholic school populations were no longer just Catholics, but instead a diverse population of faiths (Boudreau, 2011).

The Proulx Report and the abrogation of Section 93 secured the end of confessional school boards and the founding of linguistic boards in 1999. In 2000, the Catholic and Protestant school boards—a presence in Quebec since 1867—were officially abolished. The only remaining feature of confessional education was the religious education course options: Catholic, Protestant, or Moral Instruction. However, those options would disappear in a few years. Moreover, the position of pastoral and/or religious animator was abolished and replaced with the current non-denominational spiritual animator and attendant guidance, which was also one of the recommendations from the 1999 Proulx Report (Boudreau, 2011).

The Catholic and Protestant Committees were replaced by a non-confessional advisory committee entitled the Religious Affairs Committee (RAC). Unlike its predecessors, the Religious Affairs Committee has no regulatory powers. Membership of the committee consists of parents, educators, and experts in religious and philosophical matters. The committee's role is

to advise the Ministry of Education on all issues related to the place of religion within schools. The committee also gives opinions in regards the socio-religious evolution of Quebec society and the impact of this evolution on the ERC program. It acts as an interface between the population, religious groups, the school system, and the State. In November 2010 the Committee began to meet with religious leaders for the purpose of building long term ties and to construct a better understand their respective positions on the place of religion in schools. The Committee also monitors public expectations on the place of religion in schools. Lastly, the committee's mandate is to offer advice to the Ministry of Education in regards to the contents of the program, the pedagogical approaches, the necessary resources, and the skills necessary for teacher education in order to make the program a success[5] (Boudreau, 2011).

The Ministry of Education created the Religious Affairs Office (REO), a specialized unit that handles issues related to religion in schools. The Office supports the Religious Affairs Committee. The REO also has other responsibilities, such as policy-making, planning, evaluation, and information. According to the former Minister of Education Francois Legault, these changes in the Ministry aim "to make sure that in a pluralistic and evolving society, our schools are helping young people find meaning in their lives" (cited in Bourdeau, 2011, p. 219).

The introduction of Bill 95 in 2005 confirmed the end of confessionality in Quebec Schools. Bill 95 (*loi modifiant diverse dispositions legislatives de nature confessionnelle dans la domaine de l'education*) is a law eliminating all confessional religious education in public schools. The former Education Minister, Jean Marc Fournier, only renewed the

[5] For more information on the Committee see the following link to the Ministry of Education website: http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/parents-et-tuteurs/culture-religieuse/comite-sur-les-affaires-religieuses/

"notwithstanding clause[6]" for another three years, as opposed to the usual five-year renewal. The notwithstanding clause in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is an override power that allows Quebec to supersede certain portions of the Charter. With the abrogation of section 93 of the British North America Act, which removed the right to have confessional schools, along with a limited renewal of the notwithstanding clause of the Canadian constitution, the stage was set for the introduction of the ERC program (Boudreau, 2011).

With these changes Quebecers had no choice but to reevaluate their identities. They now had to think hard about how to deal with religious accommodations (McAndews, 2010). In 2006, a controversial case arose concerning with a Sikh student who wore his *kirpan*, a ceremonial and essential religious dagger worn by baptized Sikhs, to a Quebec public school. McAndrew points out that the case brought a lot of negative attention to Quebec and spiraled into a crisis of identity for Quebecers. In February 2007, the former premier Jean Charest established the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Difference, later known as the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, in response to public discontent concerning religious accommodations.

As noted in the introduction, the most recent reform of Quebec education was the result of a vast public consultation process known as *The Estates General in Education*. The Proulx Report in 1999 set the stage for a reform on the teaching of religion in public schools. In 2008

[6] Section 33(1) of the Charter of Rights permits Parliament or a provincial legislature to adopt legislation to override section 2 of the Charter (containing such fundamental rights as freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, freedom of association and freedom of assembly) and sections 7-15 of the Charter (containing the right to life, liberty and security of the person, freedom from unreasonable search and seizure, freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention, a number of other legal rights, and the right to equality). Such a use of the notwithstanding power must be contained in an Act, and not subordinate legislation (regulations), and must be express rather than implied. For more information website. http://www.lop.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/bp194-e.htm.

the non-renewal of the notwithstanding clause abolishing all confessional options in public schools was the final piece of the puzzle for the implementation of the present non-confessional ERC program. As McAndrews (2010) notes, confessional religious education was not abolished entirely considering that private schools can still be identified along confessional lines. In Quebec, these schools are partially subsidized by the state. Confessional private schools must teach the new non-confessional ERC program

The Present Context: Quebec's Ethics and Religious Culture Program

In 2008, the Ministry of Education (MEERS) instituted the new program entitled *Ethics and Religious Culture* (ERC). It replaced the former options in Moral Education. Scholars see different motivations behind its implementation. For Estivalèzes (2016) the ERC program represented an important paradigm shift in education. Cherblanc (2011), on the other hand, argues the program came into existence mainly for political reasons. Presently, the program is compulsory in elementary and secondary education, in both public and private schools. The ERC program has two goals: 1) to pursue the common good; and 2) the recognition of others. The first goal, the pursuit of the common good, goes beyond the satisfaction of personal interests and involves the greater welfare of both the collective and the individual. This goal speaks to three main actions: "1) the search, along with others, for common values; 2) the promotion of projects that foster community life; and 3) respect for democratic principles and ideals specific to Quebec society." The second goal, the recognition of others, is connected to self-knowledge and the principle that all people possess equal value and dignity (MEERS, 2013, p. 12). The ERC program states that the two objectives take diversity into account and contribute to the further

enhancing of community ties and the constructing of a common public culture, a culture that is distinctively Quebecois (p. 12).

The program aims to meet these goals through the development of three competencies: 1) the reflection on ethical questions; 2) the demonstration of an understanding of the phenomenon of religion; and 3) the engagement in dialogue. The ERC program also divides itself into Cycle I (grade 7 and 8) and Cycle II (grade 10 and 11). Within each cycle, there are two themes: 1) ethics; and 2) religious culture, which dictate the content for the teachers. Lebuis (2012) adds that the program and its aims place special emphasis on the historical and cultural aspects of Catholicism and Protestantism in Quebec.

The ERC program defines ethics as ‘‘critically reflecting on the meaning of conduct and on the values and norms that the members of a given society or group adopt in order to guide or regulate their conduct” (p.1). The ethics competency, ‘‘reflects on ethical issues,’’ aims to teach students how to think critically about ethical questions and issues. According to the program, student will develop: (1) the ability to identify issues and analyze these issues ‘‘from an ethical point of view;” (2) the ability to recognize salient points of reference; and (3) the ability to evaluate ‘‘options or possible courses of actions,’’ and how options and actions might ‘‘foster community life’’ (p.16).

To demonstrate an understanding of the phenomenon of religion, students will “analyze forms of religions expressions,” will make connections “between forms of religious expression and the social and cultural environment,” and will examine “various ways of thinking, being and acting” (p. 26). The program places considerable emphasis on the cultural context of religion. For Lebuis, this new component is a radical move away from confessional to a cultural approach on religion. It takes a cultural approach, which:

> promotes an understanding of the main components of religions that is built on the exploration of the socio-cultural contexts in which they take root and continue to develop. Sacred texts, beliefs, teachings, rituals, ceremonies, rules of conduct, places of worship, works of art, practices, institutions…knowledge of these aspects will enable students to grasp the many dimensions of religion…moral, political, social, historical…among others.(p. 20)

The policy document on the ERC program describes the religion component as follows:

> At the elementary level, students will discover the principal characteristics of different religious traditions and what they have in common, based on elements which students can detect in their immediate environment: celebrations, holidays, places of worship, clothing, common expressions, rites, celebrating milestones …At the secondary level students will analyze common and specific aspects of different religious traditions (e.g., symbolism, beliefs, teachings, modes of organization, etc.), based on the realities of Quebec society and societies around the world. They will learn to recognize that, as well as secular representations, religions propose views of life that, although different, are worthy of respect and give meaning to existence, suffering, and death. (p. 315)

The program aims to provide students with the tools that will allow us to "live together" (le "vivre ensemble) in a pluralistic democratic society. This goal is shared by several scholars in religious education. Lebuis (2012) believes that the program helps children address a society that is clearly diverse in its beliefs. Harry Brighouse (2009), for example, argues that schools can cultivate democratic competence in students by teaching both about religious and non-religious perspectives. Walter Feinberg (2006) contends that religious education is consistent with the core values of liberal democracies. It allows students to develop a set of principles that they can adopt in order to co-exist in a productive and mutually beneficial manner. In the UK, Copley (2008) asserts that religious education also helps students to develop their sense of identity and belonging in a plural society. Here religious education promotes values and attitudes needed for citizenship in a democratic society by helping students understand and respect people of different beliefs, practices, values, and cultures. Similarly Miedema's work in the Netherlands (2013) focuses on the importance of going beyond "a mono-cultural life" where "there (is) no encounter, no dialogue, and no possibility for a growing understanding of each other" (p. 236). For Miedema, encounters with the "other" enhance social cohesion.

Diane Moore's perspective on religious literacy shares many elements with the ERC program. For Diane Moore (2007), an absence of religious literacy in American society and American schools is cause for concern. "Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses" (p.56). She asserts that the United States' relationship with religion is ironic in that the country is both one of the world's most diverse religious nations and one of the most illiterate when it comes to understanding and discussing the diversity of religion. She argues that religion has always been, and continues to function as, a powerful dimension of human

experience. Religious literacy will enhance democratic discourse by cultivating discernment, understanding, and respect in American public life. Public schools need to help students develop the tools of deliberation concerning controversial matters, and to be able to approach these issues from an informed perspective rather than from a place of antagonism. She argues that an increase in our collective understanding will deepen our appreciation while giving students the tools to critically engage in current issues in the world. Ignorance about religions and its traditions promotes misunderstandings and diminishes respect for diversity. I will return to Moore's conception of religious literacy in the next chapter.

The ERC program takes a special interest in Quebec's religious heritage (MEERS, 2013, p.11). Here religious heritage and history are seen as a means of understanding the present. According to Leroux, the Quebec philosopher who articulated the foundational principles for the program, this emphasis on the heritage of Quebec is critical because the "present that will remain incomprehensible if it is not received through history ...'' (cited in Morris, 2011, p. 200). This consideration for Quebec's history was also highlighted in The Bouchard-Taylor report with the recommendation that religious sites in Quebec were to be preserved for their heritage value.

According to Maxwell et al (2012) the program's focus on diversity, heritage and dialogue is linked to Quebec's interculturalism policy. Interculturalism integrates citizens within a common societal Quebec culture. They maintain that the dialogue competency of the program is used to construct a common political culture with citizens of various cultures, in an expression of interculturalism. They contend that the ERC program highlights the three main actions stated above: the search for common values, projects that foster community building, and the building of democratic principles specific to the Quebec society.

Waddington, Maxwell, McDonough, Cormier, and Schwimmer (2012) also contend that the religious competency contributes to dialogue and community building. They assert that when citizens have a substantial knowledge of religious diversity, it better equips students to live in a pluralistic society where they will interact with different people. Maxwell et al. argue that societies can only flourish if citizens can develop a capacity for resolving conflicts. It is therefore necessary to prepare students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds with the skills and attitudes for dialogue and a respect of the difference of others. They contend that all three competencies reinforce interculturalism and therefore also how to justly live in pluralistic Quebec society. Interculturalism thereby highlights the educational function of ERC, especially in terms of preparing students to be capable of respecting others.

It is important to emphasize that the ERC program frames the study of religion in academic terms. In the final stage of development the ERC program removed all references to the personal, subjective and interpretative dimensions of ethics and religion. In the following passage, Morris (2011b) describes how this evolved.

> The initial formulation of the ethics competency did recognize the importance of the personal-subjective dimension of ethics. Both the policy document that preceded the program and the 2006 version of the ERC program described the ethics competency, not as ‘‘reflecting on ethical issues,’’ but rather as ‘‘positioning oneself reflectively on ethical questions.’’ In the original formulation of the competency the aim was to cultivate an ability to consider one’s own life in relationship to broader ethical issues. Emphasis was explicitly placed on both the subjective and social world of learners. (p.196)

Morris notes that the development of the religion competency followed a similar route. "Like with the ethics competency, learners are expected to learn about religion" as it exists ''out there,'' independent of the knower-learner…The 2005 policy document on the ERC program emphasizes, in bold lettering, that the program will allow students to ''position themselves after due consideration with respect to religions and new religious movements'' (p.201)

This decision to move away from a subjective-interpretive dimension is in stark contrast to the work of Robert Jackson. In his book *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality* (2004), Jackson argues that the aims of RE should be "to help children and young people to find their own positions within the key debates about religious plurality" (p. 87). Jackson argues that there needs to be a bridging between the personal and public domains in order for participants to feel a sense of belonging in society regardless of their religious, cultural, or ethnic identities.

Jackson's (2012) interpretative approach considers individuals within the context of their affiliated groups or religious traditions while encouraging a critique by an interpreter's lens. Overall, his approach aims for representation, interpretation, and reflection in three different stages: 1) student self-awareness; 2) empathy; and 3) edification. According to Jackson (2006), an interpretative approach ''requires a balanced backwards and forwards movement between the learner's and the other's conceptions and experiences" (p. 402). ''The interpretive approach,'' writes Jackson, ''includes the possibility that students might have their own views deepened through the study of other positions'' (p. 411). It ''recognizes that students' own experience can and should be part of the subject matter of religious education,'' and that such an approach has a ''potentially transformative character'' (p. 412).

Miedema's work also includes the concept of *Bildung*, which he uses to describe personhood education (2012) or religious edification (2014). For Miedema it is the personal

formation of the student is what leads to his call for a multi-religious, inter-religious, and inter-worldview pedagogy that specifically encourages students to learn, work, and play together with people of varying differences at an early age. Like the ERC program, Miedema's pedagogy is secular, multi-religious, and inter-religious. However, unlike the ERC program, he sees a secular religious education as encouraging all students to interpret, investigate, explore, and question the possibilities of religion for themselves. He contends that there is a strong connection between the combined discipline and the development of a student's personhood through *Bildung*.

Challenges Arising

The ERC program has experienced a number of challenges since its inception. These challenges fall into two broad categories, namely public responses and scholarly-conceptual responses.

Public responses to the program include media representations and court challenges. In an overview of public responses to the program, Morris (2011a) notes that articles in popular media often use an inflammatory rhetoric to discredit the program. One of the best examples is a *National Post* article entitled "Quebec's Creepy New Curriculum." Here the author accuses the program of interfering with the parental realm of authority. She also argues that the program promotes a dressed-up form of moral relativism, and that it promotes witchcraft. Morris observes that this program is often cited on the websites of conservative religious groups.

In terms of court challenges, certain parents and schools have enacted legal procedures to obtain the right to be exempted from the program. Cherblanc (2011) points out that there have been a number of objections since 2002. In 2012, Catholic parents from Drummondville fought to withdraw their children from the ERC course. The parents argued that the ERC program was harmful for their children, that they should be able to raise them in the Catholic faith, and that the course would confuse their children and undermine parental religious efforts[7]. The Quebec superior court struck down the parents' argument on the basis that they did not prove that their children were being harmed by the content of the program. The court ruled that the program does not violate parental rights because it teaches about religion and does not impose religious beliefs.

It's interesting to note that a Leger poll conducted in October 2008 suggested that 72% of parents wanted to be able to choose the moral and religious training of their child. Parents expect to be able to choose between the ERC program and the traditional religion course[8]. A year later statistics showed that there was an increase in the number of parental opposition from 72% to 76%, who wanted to choose the religious training of their child.

The most notable court challenge has come from Loyola High School, a Montreal English-speaking private Catholic High School. In 2008 Loyola High School petitioned the government to exempt their school from teaching the program. The government denied the request in 2009, and Loyola made the decision to take the matter to court. In court, Loyola argued that the government did not allow them to create a Catholic version of ERC. They argued that they could teach the goals and competencies of ERC within a structure and methodology

[7] Supreme Court of Canada Renders Ruling on Application for Exemption from Ethics and Religious Culture Program.(n.d.). Retrieved January 12, 2015, from http://www.newswire.ca/

[8] Quebec's new state religion: Cultural relativism. (n.d.). Retrieved August/September, 2015, from http://www. nationalpost. com/opinion/columnists/story.html?id=29cc5794-da45-4e35-bdac-101eb0ab189a

that is in keeping with its Jesuit and Catholic identity[9]. Loyola's argument was struck down by the Quebec court of appeal. Loyola High School's Board of Directors pursued the matter and took the case to the Supreme Court of Canada. In March 2015, Loyola High School won its case again the government of Quebec. The court ruled that the Ministry's decision limited the freedom of religion more than necessary and that the government could not compel Loyola to teach Catholicism neutrally (Estivalèzes, 2016). The court decision raised some eyebrows, given that Quebec private schools are partially funded by the state.

The second category of challenge, namely responses from the scholarly literature, is most relevant for this thesis. This challenge can be subdivided into two major categories: conceptual challenges and implementation challenges.

A number of scholars have focused on the conceptual foundations of the program. Some scholars are generally positive about the program, referring to its highly innovative character (Bouchard, Haeck, Plante and Venditti, 2016, p. 36). Others agree, but suggest that the program needs to strengthen its theoretical foundations. Duhamel and Estivalèzes (2013), for example, argue that program needs the input of political philosophy to better articulate the social dimensions of dialogue and deliberation in democratic societies. Other scholars are concerned with the very idea of combining ethics and religion in a single program. Weinstock (2006), for example, objects to the combination. For Weinstock, the combination cannot work because ethics and religion are two stand-alone subjects. In his analysis of the conceptual foundations of the program, Morris (2011) does not object to including both ethics and religion in one course. He does, however, have concerns regarding how the religion and ethics competency are

[9] Ethics and Religious Culture program - Loyola High School granted leave to appeal to Supreme Court. (n.d.). Retrieved October 15, 2015, from http://www. newswire.ca/news-releases/ethics-and-religious-culture-program---loyola-high-school-granted-leave-to-appeal-to-supreme-court-512579661. html

conceptualized. He suggests that the religion competency lacks an interpretative dimension and that the ethics competency does not address the domain of substantive ethics. His critique draws from the work of those who focus on interpretation, for example the work of Jackson discussed above. In their review of literature on the ERC program, Bouchard, Haeck, Plante and Venditti (2016) found that religion competency has generated a great deal of more resistance than the ethics competency.

Bouchard, Haeck, Plante and Venditti (2016) also found that one of the most discussed aspects of the programs concerns its position on the professional posture of teachers, namely the idea that the teachers ought to remain neutral and impartial when addressing both religion and ethics. Here the debate revolves around questions relating to desirability, feasibility, language, and interpretation. As was seen in the introduction, this particular concern is especially relevant for the thesis as it relates directly to classroom practice and to the experience of teaching ERC.

Cherblanc argues that the postures of neutrality are one of the major deficiencies of the program. Estivalèzes recognizes that the teacher is not neutral, but she nevertheless defends the aims of the program. Begin (2009), one of the two academics who oversaw the progress of the ERC program, argues that teachers should remain neutral. Teachers are a reference person for students and a model. According to Begin, any other role runs the risk of exerting undue influence on students. Furthermore, he contends that a teacher's role is to get students to think for themselves (p. 15). Estivalèzes (2015) adds that teachers who restrain themselves may avoid the problem of students who want to please their teachers by complying with their opinions. She states that students who feel free from the teacher's opinion will be able to develop their own thinking. Begin offers another reason why teachers need to adopt the program's neutrality stance – to gain the confidence of parents. He contends that it is important to prioritize the public's

confidence. Begin writes that "the surest way for a teacher to gain the trust of parents is to exercise restraint and to follow the stance of the program, and not to confuse their role with that of the parents," (p.14).

On the other hand, there are some scholars who argue that in a pluralistic society teachers have a right to express their beliefs. Jeffrey (2015) contends that when teachers are banned from wearing religious symbols, there is a risk. The risk is development of a certain xenophobia or even Islamophobia. George Leroux (2015) states that teachers expressing their positions bring authenticity to the class. Leroux believes that a teacher making their beliefs evident, avoids the "Hidden Curriculum," which is seen through the teacher's attitude, judgment, and choice of texts etc. (p.15). Furthermore, he raises another point that the teacher, who wears religious symbols, is actually vulnerable. The wearing of religious symbols, brings attention to a possible bias, which requires the teacher's attention and explanation. In Stephanie Gravel's (2015) work, we see teachers substantiating Leroux's point. In her research, the teachers interviewed believed that the neutrality was compromised by their choices, choice of text, body language, etc.

Paradis (2009) agrees with Leroux and adds that teachers who do state their beliefs are actually positive role models for their students. Unlike Begin, she believes it shows the humanity of a teacher. Morris (2011) adds that teachers will not have a reason to mask in front of their students rather encourage students who can think independently. Instead he reckons that impartiality can be built into a dialogic process. Teachers are capable of engaging in self-criticism. Gagnon (2012) supports teachers revealing their opinion. He believes that teachers can lay out their perspective and be open to critical examination. For Gagnon, teachers are not actors and should not avoid discussion or confuse students with their impartial stance. Instead, they should offer their opinions.

A second major challenge coming from the scholarly literature relates to issues of implementation. This category of challenge is also especially relevant for the thesis. Bouchard, Haeck, Plante and Venditti (2016) found that much of the literature on the ERC program raises concerns over the precipitated implementation of the program. Boudreau (2011) observes that since its founding in 1964, the Ministry of Education has never implemented a program across grades 1-11 in the same year. All other programs were implemented one year or one cycle at a time. Boudreau asserts that it usually takes up to ten years to implement a program. Yet, due to the three-year renewal of the notwithstanding clause, the program had to be implemented by September 2008. A later implementation date could have led to possible human rights violations and court challenges.

The precipitated implementation of the program has had considerable impact on the work of teachers. It has led to a precipitated and abbreviated process of teacher training. Boudreau (2011) describes how the restricted time of implementation means that a vast amount of resources were spent on both the professional development of teachers and on new education certification, a challenge which continues to the present. Lebuis (2012) argues that the quickness of the program's implementation is one of the great downfalls of the program. Teachers have been given very few opportunities and very little time to cultivate their religious literacy. Morris (2011c) considers that the relative absence of teacher formation to be the "Achilles heel" of the program. It is particularly disconcerting to see that teacher training was precipitated and then abandoned altogether (Bouchard, Haeck, Plante and Venditti, 2016).

Chapter One Summary

This chapter provided an overview of key historical events and forces which have shaped religious education in Quebec. Despite the many political and social changes in Quebec, the concept of teaching religion—or teaching *about* religion—has not disappeared. Although the teaching of or about religion has been reconfigured or even reduced, its impact on Quebec's education system is still significant. The ERC program ushers in a new era of religious education in Quebec, one that is reflecting its evolving and pluralistic society.

The chapter also presented an overview of the present ERC program and how the program compares to scholarly perspectives on religious education. The chapter described how the transition to the new program has faced several challenges. The challenges regarding the religion competency, the professional posture of teachers, and the precipitated implementation of the program are particularly relevant for this study.

In the next chapter, I will present the conceptual framework for the study. I will draw from Moore's conception of religious literacy. Moore's work has several affinities with the ERC program, particularly in terms of its cultural approach and its focus on teacher formation. I this chapter, I will also draw from Thomas Kelly' typology of professional postures. This typology will serve as a framework to discuss teacher responses to this issue.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework: Theorizing about Religious Literacy and about the Professional Posture of Teachers

This chapter presents my conceptual or theoretical framework for the study. According to Maxwell (2013), a conceptual framework represents "the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories" that supports research. As such, it is a basic component of research design. The conceptual framework is the "idea context" for the study (p. 39). This framework is critical because it helps to define goals, raise questions, and select methods. It is different from a review of the literature in that it does not aim to "cover the field," but rather it aim to focus "on studies and research that are particularly relevant" to the study (p. 40). The idea context provides a way of thinking about the design and the research findings.

Seen in this light, the academic literature on the ERC program presented in chapter one constitutes part of my conceptual framework. In this chapter I did not just "cover the field. " Rather I considered the literature that is relevant for the study, particularly the literature that focuses on the challenges relevant to teaching the ERC program. The near unanimous concern over the precipitated implementation of the program, and the problems this raises for teaching the religion competency in particular, helps to define the goals, questions, and areas of concern for my study. In this chapter, Moore's theory of religious literacy will provide further justification for my focus on teaching the religion competency. Kelly's typology of professional posture will provide an idea context or framework for my questions and interpretation of how teachers view and wrestle the preferred professional posture of the ERC program. Before I discuss Moore and Kelly's perspectives I will begin by clarifying how I am using the terms

learning religion, *learning about religion*, and *learning from religion*. This presentation will serve as Segway into Moore's theory of religious literacy.

Defining key Terms:

Hull (2006), building on the work of Grimmitt (1987), presents three ways to approach the learning of religion. The first is *learning religion*, which Hull explains as the learning of a single religious tradition. This single religious tradition is the religious education curriculum and is taught from the *inside.* What this means for teachers is that they are expected to be believers and that the object of instruction is to enable students to learn religion and to strengthen their commitment to it. Hull describes it as "faith to faith" instruction, where specific religion groups control the curriculum and the methods of teaching rather than following the state's system of education.

The second type of learning is learning *about religion*. Hull (2006) posits that this type of learning is where the pupils learn about the beliefs, teachings, and practices of the great religious traditions of the world. This approach is very similar to the approach in the Ethics and Religious Culture program and to Diane Moore's cultural studies approach. Here religion taught from the *outside.* Hull contends that learning about religion—or, in the case of this dissertation—teaching about religion, includes historical and descriptive approaches. He posits that this approach can be a reaction against the mono-religious ways of learning religion. It is an approach that gives students critical skills and enables them to challenge religious intolerance and stereotypes.

Learning *from religion* involves pupils learning about themselves in their study of religion. Here students are given the space to wonder about the ultimate questions and consider how faith may or may not nourish these questions. Learning from religion engages in two kinds

of evaluation: 1) impersonal evaluation where the students are able to distinguish and make critical evaluations; and 2) personal evaluation, where there is an attempt on the student's part to confront and evaluate religious beliefs and values as a process of self-evaluation.

In my dissertation I use learning about religion, since it is the concept that aligns itself best with my research, namely the teaching of the religion competency and the challenges of the ERC program. Moore's theory of religious literacy elaborates on what it means to teach about religion.

Moore's Cultural Studies Approach to Religious Literacy

Moore's approach is fitting for this study because, like the ERC program, it favors a cultural-academic approach. Although the ERC program does not refer explicitly to "religious literacy" it shares many elements with Moore's cultural studies approach. As was seen in chapter one, some scholars argue that the ERC program could more fully articulate its conceptual foundations. In my view, the affinity of Moore's concept of religious literacy with the program can serve this function. Moreover, Moore's approach is relevant for this this study because of its focus on the importance of professional development of teachers. As noted in chapter one, the academic literature on the ERC program raises concerns over adequate teacher preparation.

Moore defines religious literacy as the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social, political, and cultural life through multiple lenses (Moore, 2014). A person literate in religion will possess: "1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts, beliefs, practices, and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions, especially as they continue to be shaped by particular social, historical, and cultural

contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social, and cultural expressions across time and place" (p.56). Here religion is understood in understand in context, as inextricably woven into all dimensions of the human experience. Moore is critical of approaches that reduce religion to practices or scriptures which often lead to simplistic and inaccurate representations of the roles that religion plays in human understanding.

Moore's (2007) describes the epistemology of religious literacy as "situated knowledge. " Drawing from the work of Donna Haraway, she asserts that all knowledge claims are situated and defined by their specificity, transparency, and capacity for accountability. For Moore, "situated knowledge" is a way of describing the "human endeavor of interpretation," where one's perspective is inseparable from with one's experience, background, and education. Moore argues that situated knowledge claims offer the firmest ground for objective inquiry. Situated knowledge claims provide a more realistic sense of objectivity because knowledge claims are transparent and accountable. In the study of religion, the cultural studies approach of "situated knowledge" allows religions to expose their internal complexities while also showing how religion is interwoven into human fabric. Situated knowledge engages with a variety of beliefs and convictions. This view of situated knowledge is similar to Johnson's conception of objectivity as transperspectivity. According to Johnson (1993), objectivity involves a "realistic" and "reasonable" capacity "of a physically, historically, socially and cultural situated self to reflect critically on its own construction of the world, and to imagine other possible worlds that might be constructed" (p. 241).

Moore (2007) posits three overarching reasons for the study of religion from a non-sectarian perspective. First, she proposes that *illiteracy of religion exists worldwide*. Moore's research, which extends from East Africa to the United States, highlights shared practices and

assumptions in spite of massive differences between and within these varied communities. She describes the manifestations of religious illiteracy in the following way:

> 1) Religious traditions are often represented inaccurately by individuals who define themselves as "religious" as well as those who self-define as "non-religious." For those who define themselves as "religious," this inaccuracy often manifests itself in relationship to their own traditions as well as the faith traditions of others. (Moore, p.381)
>
> 2) Religious traditions are often represented as internally uniform and static as opposed to diverse and evolving.
>
> 3) Religion is deeply and nearly exclusively equated with sectarianism in ways that render the study of religion a difficult concept to grasp and apply.
>
> 4) Practitioners of a given religious tradition are assumed to be the best sources of information about the tradition and are often looked to formally or informally as "experts." This fails to recognize the distinction between an academic study of religion and the devotional expression of a particular religious worldview.
>
> 5) In some contexts, religion is interpreted as a "private" affair distinct from the secular "public" sphere of political, economic and cultural life. (p.381)

Moore (2007) argues that these expressions of religious illiteracy are shared by educators. She emphasizes, however, that the manifestations of religious illiteracy among educators is not evidence of a lack of intellectual capability or awareness. Moore points out that the main source of information about religion derives from the media. It should come as no surprise that

religious illiteracy is widespread. Furthermore, those who are raised in, or converted to, a particular faith tradition will identify with the values that are consistent with it. Non-religious individuals learn their particular visions and values from family and/or community members that are often a-religious or anti-religious. Like religious believers, non-religious people also rely on the media as a main source of information about religion. This information is frequently both inconsistent and unreliable for understanding the complexity of religious traditions.

Moore (2007) advocates a study of religion where the diversity within any given tradition is knowledgeably represented, and where religion is treated as a social and cultural phenomenon, a phenomenon in need of exploration and analysis. This approach constitutes an academic study of religion. An academic approach is not faith based. Unfortunately, a limited number of people have the opportunity to engage with religion in this way.

The second premise regarding the importance of teaching religion from a non-sectarian point of view deals with the consequences of religious illiteracy. She asserts that "one of the most troubling and urgent consequences of religious illiteracy is that it often fuels prejudice and antagonism thereby hindering efforts aimed at promoting respect for pluralism, peaceful coexistence and cooperative endeavors in local, national, and global arenas" (p. 382). Moore is not suggesting that religious illiteracy is the primary cause of violence. Rather, she contends that growing and unhampered religious illiteracy often contributes to fostering a climate where certain forms of bigotry and misrepresentation can surface unchallenged and eventually serve as justification for violence and marginalization.

Training is also required to offset widespread religious illiteracy. She explains that religious literacy provides citizens with the tools to better understand how religions are socially and culturally complex, internally diverse and constantly evolving. Social, historical, and

political contexts are neglected when religions are explained solely through rituals and the expression of abstract beliefs. Given that religions exist in time and space they need to be interpreted and re-interpreted by believers. A religion can only be understood when situated in its cultural context and culture can only be understood with reference to religious practice. Religion and culture are inextricably linked.

Learning about religion also helps people understand and critically analyze how religion is used to justify the full range of human agency, from the heinous to the heroic. Religious literacy allows learners to critique universal and unsubstantiated claims, and hence contribute to a deepening of the discourse about religion in the public sphere. Moore does not claim that learning about religion will guarantee that religious bigotry and chauvinism will stop. However, religious literacy makes it more difficult for such perspectives to be unwittingly reproduced and promoted.

The last premise is that "it is possible to reduce religious illiteracy by teaching about a religion nonsectarian perspective in primary and secondary schools" (p. 380). Nonsectarian perspectives are quite rare and controversial. Conservative religious practitioners from many faith traditions again and again oppose learning about religion in school because they argue that it is the role of faith communities and families to teach about religion. Learning about religion through an academic lens presumes the legitimacy of multiple worldviews, which is theologically problematic in some circles. Additionally, those who identify as religious and non-religious alike fear that if religion is introduced in schools, some teachers will surely proselytize either by intention or default. Here the opponents to religion in education immediately see teaching as devotional rather than academic.

Moore (2007) recognizes these concerns as legitimate and offers two responses. Firstly, she argues that religion is already being taught in classrooms across the globe in intentional and unintentional manners. She asserts that uninformed and often unconscious assertions about religion are regularly transmitted to students, who in turn absorb these assumptions without question. Secondly, Moore points out that the objections stated above further highlight an important point, namely that this way of teaching about religion is not neutral. Most schools or systems of education have established a statement of purpose reflecting the vision and version of education they choose to promote. On a larger scale, many nations, such as the United Kingdom and Finland, have also imbedded in their own narrative histories the values they desire to instill in their citizens through education in schools. In some cases, it is the larger educational values that have led to a clear decision not to include the non-partisan study of religion in the curricula. For the most part, however, the larger goals of education are compatible with learning about religion in an open manner, especially in contexts where pluralism and the cultivation of respect for diversity are explicitly articulated values. Moore's point is that education is never neutral and that therefore all educational decisions, including content, pedagogical practices, and assessment standards, need to be justified in light of a larger educational vision, namely one that is intentionally articulated and embraced. Further, it is sound practice for any and all educators to consciously align beliefs with practices in this manner, in particular when engaging in potentially controversial issues such as teaching about religion.

The challenges of teaching about religion are also examined from a nonsectarian perspective. The first challenge is the fact that few teachers are trained in the methods and content required to teach responsibly about religion. She argues that it is essential that teachers

and educators gain the minimum level of competence in these areas, and that they require more training than the typical in-service or pre-service workshop can offer.

The second challenge lies with teachers and students. Teachers and students often harbor a host of embedded assumptions about religion. Some of these assumptions are conscious, and as such can be openly interrogated, while others may be unconscious, and therefore more challenging to uncover and engage.

A third challenge relates to the reception from parents, educational administrators, and/or community leaders concerning the efforts of teaching about religion. Allegations of proselytizing can arise even if the teacher is clearly not doing so. Lastly, there is the challenge of pedagogy. It can be especially challenging to connect method and content. How one teaches about religion is just as significant as the content one teaches.

Moore (2014) believes that the cultural studies method is well suited to address and respond to these challenges. She proposes that the method itself should be applied across the curriculum, and claims that it is particularly useful and effective as a framework for teaching about religion.

Moore (2007) proposes three premises that represent the nonsectarian approach to a cultural studies approach. These three premises are the following:

> 1) Religions are internally diverse as opposed to uniformed
>
> 2) Religions evolve and change over time as opposed to being ahistorical and static
>
> 3) Religious influences are embedded in all dimensions of culture as opposed to the assumption that religions function in discrete, isolated, "private" contexts. (p. 381)

Moore (2014) contends that a cultural studies approach is both a multi- and inter-disciplinary exemplar that takes into consideration how political, economic, and cultural lenses are fundamentally weaved together within religion rather than being discrete entities. The cultural studies method emphasizes that a given cultural lens should include political and economic influences.

As was seen above, the method of inquiry in a cultural studies approach assumes that all "situated knowledge" is defined by its specificity, transparency, and capacity for accountability. When it comes to the study of religion, "situatedness" provides a tool for recognizing that religious claims are no different from other forms of interpretations in that they, too, emerge out of a particular context. These contexts represent particular contextual assumptions as opposed to absolute universal or ahistorical truths.

The concept of "situatedness" implies that all forms of inquiries are interpretations filtered through a particular lens. The acknowledgement of that filter can make transparent certain lenses that may have otherwise been hidden.

The method also calls into questions the dominance of particular perspectives in the study of religion. Moore (2007) asserts that the cultural studies approach ensures an analysis of power relations between dominant outlooks. It can also reveal the reasons why some theological interpretations are more prominent than others. The dominance of certain views is related to social and historical contexts. The approach therefore provides the ability to investigate the converging factors that lends social credibility to some religious traditions over others, and it provides an opportunity to understand how, why, and by whom some interpretations are deemed orthodox while others are considered heretical.

Lastly, the cultural studies model has a dimension of cultural anthropology. Cultural norms are fluid as well as socially constructed. They do not constitute objective or absolute truth. The cultural studies approach provides an excellent foundation for discerning and representing the varied ideological influences religions have had on human affairs.

Moore's model is relevant for this study because of the way it understands religious literacy and because of its focus on the importance and challenges of professional development. Critics of Moore might argue that her approach to religious literacy is overly functionalist. Unlike Jackson (2004), Miedema (2013), and Morris (2011b) who argue for a personal-subjective-interpretative dimension to the study of religion, Moore's conception of religious literacy is more "academic." She advocates learning *about religion* rather than *learning religion* or *learning from religi*on. Although I recognize the significance of a personal approach, I believe Moore's approach is well suited for this study because the ERC program is similarly academic. As noted in chapter one, the final version of the program removed all reference to the personal dimension.

As seen in the introduction to the chapter, a conceptual framework represents "the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories" that supports research. The conceptual framework is the "idea context" for the study that helps to define goals, raise questions, and select methods. When taken alongside the academic literature on the ERC program, Moore's theory of religious literacy supports my choice to focus specifically on the challenges teachers face when addressing the religion competency of the ERC program. The questions guiding the research consider both the tensions experienced with the religion competency and the challenges arising for professional development. Moore's theory will also offer guidelines to interpret and discuss the findings.

This is not to say, however, that the study did not remain open to concerns not articulated in the conceptual framework. For example, teachers could have concerns about the absence of a personal dimension. Maxwell emphasizes that a conceptual framework is "a tentative theory of the phenomenon" under investigation (p.39). It should not foreclose the possibility of developing new theories, or the possibility of drawing from ideas not originally identified in the conceptual framework. This danger of foreclosure is why Paechter (2003) is ambivalent about establishing a theoretical foundation for a study. As a theorist herself, she emphasizes the value of grounding educational research in theory. She emphasizes, however, that theory building does not end with the conceptual framework. "It is possible," she notes, "to build theory directly from empirical findings" (p. 111).

A Typology of Professional Postures

As was seen earlier, the ERC program places considerable emphasis on the professional posture of teachers. Estivalèzes (2016) explains that the preamble to the program makes it clear that the new professional stance must meet specific requirements. The obligation of the teacher is to be discreet in the expression of their personal beliefs. Here teachers are told to be viewpoint neutral and impartial in their teaching. The ERC program states that "Teachers show professional judgment imbued with objectivity and impartiality in order to foster students' reflection on ethical questions or understanding of the phenomenon of religion. Thus, to ensure against influencing students in developing their point of view, teachers abstain from sharing theirs, (MEERS, 2013, ERC, p. 295)." In addition, the program states "the implementation of the Ethics and Religious Culture program places new demands on teachers with regard to the

professional stance they adopt. Since this subject matter touches upon complex and sometimes delicate personal and family dynamics, teachers have an additional obligation to be discreet and respectful, and to not promote their own beliefs and points of view." However, when an opinion is expressed "that attacks a person's dignity or if there is an action that is suggested that compromises the common good, the teacher will intervene by referring to the program's two objectives." Here the teacher is expected "to cultivate the art of questioning by promoting such values as openness to diversity, respect for convictions, recognition of self and others, and the search for the common good" (MEERS, 2013, p.2).

Mary Warnock (1996) would disagree with the ERC program's position on teacher neutrality. She argues that young people need role models who are full of enthusiasm and commitment. She asserts that it is a fatal move for a teacher to remain neutral. Students need to be exposed to teachers who are passionate while remaining open to dialogue. According to Warnock (1996), children should learn about differences of opinions and how to debate. Teachers who are neutral fail to engage students with the complexities of morality. In the end, for Warnock, teacher neutrality is not only impossible but also ineffective and even potentially harmful to the students. Gravel (2015) agrees with this perspective in her more current work concerning ERC teachers. Her work investigates the experiences of Francophone secondary school teachers' and their understanding of the professional stance. Gravel's teachers report that it is difficult to be impartial and objective in class. And in some cases, teachers expressed that students figured out their points of view. The research shows that neutrality is a challenge. Gravel states that a teacher's stance can be given away by one's body language, choice of discussion topics, or videos, (p. 376). Bergeron's (2012) conducted interviews with elementary teachers. She notes that teachers do not understand why it is appropriate to maintain the

program's stance, especially with students with whom they have close relationships with, (p.40). Whereas Knott (2010) found that teachers interviewed desired their privacy. Teachers states their stance was their choice. Knott refers to this choice as a "closed door policy," where teachers consider their stance, their private and professional decision.

As was seen in chapter one, the program's position on the professional posture of teachers is one of the most discussed and contested aspects of the ERC program in the scholarly literature. The idea of teacher neutrality is also contested in broader discussions about education. Warnock's critique is one example. Given this state of affairs it makes sense to focus specifically on this question in my interviews with teachers. I anticipate that not all teachers will agree with the program's position. Like in the scholarly literature, I am likely to see teachers adopt a range of different positions. Morris (2011b), for example, suggests that some teachers will adopt the posture of neutrality because they wish to avoid indoctrination. Others will reject a posture of neutrality because they do not want to appear inauthentic.

In this section I present Kelly's typology of professional postures as a framework for discussing and interpreting this range of perspectives as they are likely to appear in the data.

Kelly does not refer specifically to the teaching of religion or ethics. However, his reference to teacher postures vis-à-vis controversial issues is highly relevant for the ERC program. Kelly (1986) posits four possible perspectives: 1) exclusive neutrality; 2) exclusive partiality; 3) neutral impartiality; and 4) committed impartiality.

The position of *exclusive neutrality* is when teachers do not introduce any topics that are controversial in the broader community. It is neutral and exclusive because it excludes all discussions around controversial issues. This position would not address the kinds of issues and

themes raised in the ERC program. Kelly dismisses this position for its inability to prepare students for participation in a pluralistic and democratic society. The second position, exclusive partiality, does not avoid controversial issues. In this posture, however, the teachers make a deliberate attempt to have students accept a preferred position. Here competing points of view are neglected or dismissed. Both the ethics and religion competencies of the ERC program deliberately avoid this position. For Kelly, students in this position become pawn for ideological agendas. He argues that only the positions of neutral impartiality and committed impartiality are defensible in a democratic society.

For Kelly, the *neutral impartiali*ty position promotes student involvement in the discussion of controversial issues as part of their citizenship education. It is a position that avoids indoctrination and ensures that students have the opportunity to consider all relevant positions on an issue. Teachers should be silent about their own views on controversial issues or at most reveal their views in the context of playing devil's advocate. Kelly contends that in this position, teachers should be reluctant to disclose their personal position. This position is the preferred professional posture of the ERC program.

Kelly describes the fourth position as *committed impartiality*. In this position, teachers state, as opposed to conceal, their position on controversial issues. A posture of committed impartiality must ensure that competing perspectives receive a fair hearing through critical discourse. Here teacher disclosure attempts to avoid the "gamy quality" that gives discussion a feel of inauthenticity, even in the case of playing devil's advocate. Kelly also notes the importance of tone and timing. Age of students, context, and method will determine the appropriateness of this posture. In other words, a heavy-handed approach with children is not consistent with the ideal of a committed impartiality. Moreover, a teacher who adopts this

position must be aware of the impact of his or her contribution on the classroom discussion. In the table below, I present a synopsis of Kelly's four postures, and where the position is similar to the favored stance of the ERC program.

Typology of Professional Postures - Kelly (1986)

Exclusive Neutrality	**Exclusive Partiality**
- Teachers should not introduce into the curriculum any topics that are controversial in the broader community. - Why? It is challenging to give a fair and impartial hearing to all points of view - Genuine classroom discussions of provocative values leads to volatile and under-predictability - Preserves the non-partisan or neutral status of the school. - Value Free Teaching	- It is the deliberate attempt to induce students to accept a preferable and particular position on a controversial issue through the means of consciously or unconsciously precluding an adequate presentation of competing points of views. - Two types of exclusive partiality: authoritative and subtle. - Authoritative: teachers assert or assume the "correct" point of view while competing views are ignored or dismissed. - Subtle: The teacher appears to allow genuine dialogue and dissent yet attempts to stack the deck for one side.

Neutral Impartiality (ERC Stance)	**Committed Impartiality**
- Teachers believe that students should be actively involved in discussion of controversial issues as part of their citizenship. - Teachers are impartial - giving a fair hearing and engaging in critical dialogue. Students should be able to consider all relevant positions on an issue. - Teachers should present their views under the cover of devil's advocate in the interest of impartiality. Here impartiality is a norm guiding teaching and discussion.	- Entails two beliefs: 1) Teachers should state their position rather than conceal; and 2) they should foster the pursuit of truth by ensuing competing perspectives receive a fair hearing through critical discourse. - Disclosure: Teacher discloses their views if they are clearly owned by the teachers and not disguised as devil's advocate. The view can be initiated or a response to a direct student inquiry and it may be passionate or understated. Disclosure also includes an understanding of the impact of timing and tone. - Committed Impartiality does not mean claiming superiority; otherwise it is propaganda. - Conveys personal witness: the power of personal modelling and integrity. Here a different kind of impartiality is the norm. -

Kelly and Brandes (2001) raise critical questions about Kelly's typology. They argue that Kelly fails to provide details about the concept of critical dialogue mentioned in the position of committed impartiality, and also that he neglects to show what it would look like in practice. Kelly and Brandes also raise concerns with what they see as Kelly dismissal of "individuals advocating feminism, ethnic and black empowerment and neo-Marxist social reconstruction" (p. 4). They argue that Kelly does not address how these ideologies and positions expose students to a "concentration of oppositional ideology" in order to counter the effects of prior "indoctrination" (p. 4). Lastly, Kelly and Brandes (2001) point out that while some teachers may want to hold a form of committed impartiality, others continue to struggle to achieve this type of neutrality due to societal inequalities. In the end, Kelly and Brandes criticize Kelly for failing to

describe the interventions that teachers would need to make in order that competing points of view get a truly "fair hearing" (p.15).

Kelly and Brandes (2001), however, agree with Kelly when he asserts that neutrality is sometimes desirable. They argue that in the face of controversial issues, temporary teacher neutrality is possible and preferred. This kind of position encourages students to think for themselves. This is especially important for elementary school students because they are more impressionable. Kelly and Brandes (2001) further assert that it is necessary for teachers to maintain a balance of ideas, allow students to think through the "marketplace of ideas" available to them. They argue that it is not natural or desirable for a teacher to pose as neutral on every issue. This teacher could appear apathetic, whereas other teachers who argue or feel strongly about an issue may look more human to their students. Teachers should take stands from time to time as a form of modelling on how to take a position.

The critics of Kelly raise important issues but they do not offer anything that resembles Kelly's discussion of the range of possible positions. For this reason, Kelly's typology will serve as conceptual lens to examine the teachers' perspectives on this question. At the same time, my discussion of the findings will remain open to alternative interpretations. The typology will enable me to place the participants, including myself, in a concrete or visible frame of reference. Moreover, Kelly's typology will help me better understand how teachers handle and address pedagogical uncertainties. I am especially concerned with the following question: How are secondary school teachers negotiating and relating to religion pedagogy, and what role does their professional posture play in this negotiation?

Chapter Two Summary

In this chapter, I described how Diane Moore's conception of religious literary serves as further justification for my focus on the religion competency of the ERC program. The idea of religious literacy helps to raise questions about the challenges of teaching about religion in the ERC program. Its focus on professional formation is particularly relevant for the study.

Kelly typology of professional postures provides a frame of reference for the questions on teacher neutrality. It also provides an interpretive lens to better appreciate what sense teachers make of the program's preferred professional posture.

In the next chapter I will discuss the methodology of the study. The two methodologies used are phenomenology and auto ethnography. The selected methodology allows me to focus specifically on the *experience* of secondary school ERC teachers.

Chapter Three: Methodology

LeCompte and Preissle (1994) explain that qualitative research is grounded in interpretations of observations. These descriptions address a fundamental question: what is happening here? Most qualitative research designs are intended to address a range of questions about ordinary occurrences, extraordinary events, and circumstances that are puzzling to the investigator. What is crucial is the attention to the unfolding of events in the natural flow of human activity. Creswell (2009) adds that qualitative research is the method of choice when the research question requires an understanding of processes, events, and relationships in the context of social and cultural situations. Qualitative research is useful when one wants to obtain insight into situations and problems where knowledge is lacking.

My research is a qualitative study that draws from the methodologies of phenomenology and auto ethnography. In the following, I will first briefly review the phenomenology method, an approach that focuses on both experience and the meaning people give to it. Secondly, I will describe auto ethnography. I will first discuss the roots of auto ethnography in ethnography. I have employed these two methodologies in order to develop an analytical framework for understanding the teachers' experience of teaching about religion.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a method. In this study I am using phenomenology as a methodology which draws from a particular philosophical perspective. This methodology is particularly appropriate for understanding the experiences of secondary school ERC teachers and how they make meaning of these experiences. Phenomenological

research is a way of examining how different people consciously experience the world in different ways. It is used in order to understand the meaning of a person's actions. Rossman and Rallis (1998) explain that "phenomenology is a tradition in German philosophy with a focus on the essence of lived experience." Those engaged in phenomenological research focus in-depth on the meaning of a particular aspect of experience, assuming that through dialogue and reflection that meanings of experience will be revealed. Language is viewed as the primary symbolic system through which meaning is both constructed and conveyed (Holstein and Gubrium, 1994). The purposes of phenomenological inquiry are description, interpretation, and critical self-reflection into the "world as world" (Van Manen, 1990). Central are the notions of intentionality and caring: the researcher inquiries about lived experience. For Creswell (2009) a phenomenological study considers a small number of subjects in order to observe and record emerging patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell, 2009). Ultimately, the goal is to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon studied.

For Husserl's (1962) "we can only know what we experience." (p. 472). Schwandt (2000) notes that phenomenological analysis seeks to understand "how the everyday, inter-subjective world is constituted" from the participants' perspective. Thus, for Girogi (1985), phenomenology does not necessarily engage in "sciences of facts" because there are no absolute facts; instead, it can only establish knowledge from the perspective of the knower. Phenomenology attempts to uncover or understand the meanings ascribed to lived experience by the knower.

Husserl (1970) focuses on two perspectives concerning phenomenological analysis of the perception of lived experience: 1) that of the people who are living through the phenomenon; and 2) that of the researcher, who has great interest in the phenomenon. Husserl argues that the

research should not impose meaning upon the participants. This is challenging because it is all but impossible to detach one's own interpretations from the subjects of interest. As a result, the researcher must be aware of how his or her own experience is being injected into both the interviews and the analysis of data.

Phenomenology as a method is not without its challenges. For Lester (1999) one of the challenges relates to the subjectivity of the data. It is also challenging to uncover or prevent researcher-induced bias. Moreover, the data that the phenomenology produces is not generalizable, but is instead specific to the sample set. With the sample generally being very small, in other words, can the experiences be considered typical?

For Lester, the highly qualitative nature of the findings can make them difficult to present in a way that is useable by practitioners. He explains that since the data is subjective and draws from a selected sample, it may be a challenge to use the data in other similar studies. Additionally, some participants may have challenges when expressing themselves. Participants should ideally be interested in the research and able to articulate their opinions (Morse, 1994).

Despite the challenges pointed out by Lester and Morse, Lester (1999) finds that phenomenology can provide an in-depth understanding of an individual phenomenon, and that the researcher can gather rich data from the experiences of individuals. The findings are permitted to emerge on their own instead of being imposed by the researcher.

Armstrong (2010) explains that phenomenology can look at changes and gather data over a period of time, which is a natural approach. He also notes that phenomenology helps to understand how people make meanings, which can in turn help them adjust to new ideas and issues as they emerge. For Armstrong, the approach provides a rich and complete description of human experiences and meanings. Lester (1999) also adds that the researcher should be as

faithful as possible and use careful techniques in order to keep the descriptions as close as possible to the raw data.

Ultimately, for my qualitative study, the phenomenological approach will assist with understanding both the meaning of the participants and their experiences with the phenomenon in question, namely teaching the ERC program. Presently, there is very little literature that depict and tell the "lived experience" of secondary ERC teachers, including their experiences with teaching about religion. In quantitative research, the voice of the participants is rarely taken into consideration. In qualitative research, however, the emergence of voice in context is critical to educational inquiry (Bogden and Bilken, 2003). It is especially important to give voice to those who have not been given an opportunity to express themselves on matters that concern them directly. This is clearly the case of the participants in this study.

Ethnography

Ethnography is a qualitative research method that uses participant observations and interviews, both of which are ultimately used to gain a deeper understanding of a group's culture. It focuses on the interaction of the beliefs and practices of others (Marechal, 2010). Bochner and Ellis (2006) assert that first and foremost, ethnographers are communicators and story-tellers. Ethnography is a story that re-enacts an experience by which people find meaning, and through this, researchers are able to understand this experience. It describes human social and cultural phenomena from the point of view of the subjects of the study (Ellis, 2004; Spindler & Hammond, 2006).

John Brewer (2000) argues that ethnography is a newcomer to the discipline of social science. He notes that the method started in Britain and North America. It began formally in the

twentieth century, and with two entirely independent intellectual developments, one British, the other North American. The first of these was the emergence of the classical tradition of social anthropology in Britain, and the second was the work of the Chicago School in sociology, which used observational techniques to explore groups on the margins of urban industrial society in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. Brewer notes that some scholars perceive ethnography not as a method of data collection, but rather as a style of research that differentiates itself by its aim, namely that of understanding the social meaning and activities of people.

Salvador, Bell, and Anderson (1999) add that ethnography is a way of understanding the particulars of daily life. It is a social science method that observes and records personal experiences up-close. Ethnography as a method can consist of interviews, observations, narrative conversations, documents, field notes, and surveys. Narrative description is used to tell a story. Ethnography is a means to represent graphically and in writing the culture of a group. Harris and Johnson (2000) explain that ethnography is a written description of a particular culture, including its customs, beliefs, and behavior, and that it is based on information collected through field work. To this end, they assert that "ethnography literally means a portrait of a people" (p.87).

Picken (2006) outlines three key features of ethnography. The first feature is an emphasis on the researcher's first-hand experience. The ethnographer takes an interest in the many aspects of a social situation and he or she is active and reflexive in the research process. The ethnographer observes, asks questions, has conversations, makes notes, and spends time with those conducting the business they wish to understand. Ethnographers also analyze their own role in the research.

The second feature of ethnography is the focus on the data. Here data is naturally generated through the contextual setting. This feature takes ethnography away from controlled or predicted data. The last key feature of ethnography is the use of a variety of methods. Contemporary ethnography employs a number of data collection methods, such as field notes, interviews, observations, conversations, the gathering of relevant texts, and documentary evidence, along with observations of practices, behaviors, rules, and beliefs (Picken, 2006).

Auto Ethnography

Ethnography provides the ground work for auto ethnography. Both are associated with the study of action and meaning in context. In auto ethnography, the researcher plays a more prominent role. Ellis (2004) contends that auto ethnography embraces the researcher's subjectivity, whereas ethnography limits the subjectivity of the researcher. This is relevant for this study because I too am part of the culture. I am talking and observing the culture of ERC teachers as someone who participates the same culture on a daily basis.

In auto ethnography the subjectivity of the researcher is paramount. He or she is reflective about his or her influences on the research. The researcher is a primary participant. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) explain that auto ethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*). Auto ethnography as a method is both process and product of introspection and description.

Bochner (2011) explains that auto ethnography was born out of a reconceptualization of the social science methods. A "crisis of confidence" inspired by postmodernism in the 1980s introduced new and abundant opportunities to reform social science and re-envision the

objectives and forms of social science inquiry. Scholars turned to auto ethnography because they were seeking a positive response to critiques of canonical ideas about what research is and how it should be done. According to Ellis and Bocher (2006), scholars wanted to concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us.

Ellis (2004) explains that auto ethnography is more than research writing. It is a story and a method that connects autobiography and the personal to the cultural, social, and political. Auto ethnography is writing about the personal and its relationship to culture (Ellis, 2006). Marechal (2010) employs a more scientific definition of auto ethnography. She describes it as a method of research writing involving self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing. It therefore includes a focus on the researcher's experience.

For Ellis and Bochner (2006) auto ethnography requires and reveals the multiple layers of consciousness of the writer. An auto ethnographer first looks through an ethnographic wide angle lens focusing outward on the social and cultural aspects of their personal experience, and then looks inward to expose a vulnerable self.

Starr (2010) adds that as a methodology, auto ethnography draws on the concept of *conscientization*, which involves the individual becoming aware of one's position and creating a space to change the perception of the resultant reality. She asserts that auto ethnography is the space between self and culture that engages the individuals in experiences that cultivate authenticity. Here auto ethnography is the process of self-exploration and interrogation that

helps individuals locate themselves in their own stories, history, and culture. It allows the researcher to broaden their understanding of their own values in relation to others. For Starr, educational auto ethnography is particularly important as it provides educators with the opportunity to take a stance on certain issues. Similarly, Bocher and Ellis (2006) argue that the aim of an auto ethnographer is to depict people who are struggling to overcome adversity and to show people in the process of figuring out what to do and how to live, as they make meanings from their struggles.

Ellis (2004) and Marechal (2010) note that, even though auto ethnography has achieved recognition and importance, a consensual definition for auto ethnography continues to be an issue in the field. Recognizing the value of auto ethnography has been a slow process. Ellis (2004) writes that in a recent past, the researcher's own experience was not viewed as interesting, or even legitimate to look at in its own right. There was little discussion of the researcher's emotion other than the advice on dealing with the stresses of the field work settings. She asserts that an appreciation for the role of the researcher as primary participant emerged progressively. She writes, I did not think about it then (her role) but my participation with others clearly was part of what I was observing, not just a strategy for getting information.

Ellingson and Ellis (2008) advance that auto ethnographers are story-tellers who employ tools such as: 1) journaling; 2) interviews with one's self; and 3) various writings that generate self-cultural understandings. Similarly, Anderson (2006) suggests that auto ethnography, like ethnography, has a number of methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and self-study method. Auto ethnography is sometimes described as the construction of a self-portrait through a process of self-reflexivity (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Here self-reflexivity allows this autobiographical genre to produce writing and research that illustrates various levels

of the researcher's thinking process. Auto ethnography therefore sheds light on the researcher's total interaction with the setting by making emotion and thought of the researcher visible to the reader.

Anderson (2006) explains that auto ethnographic work is divided into two main types: 1) analytic auto ethnography; and 2) evocative auto ethnography. Analytic auto ethnographic work is an approach that develops theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena. In analytic auto ethnography the researcher is 1) a full member in the research group or setting, and 2) visible as such as a member in published texts. Evocative auto ethnography focuses on narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotions. According to Anderson, this form of auto ethnography dominates the research. Most auto ethnographic work is "almost exclusively 'evocative auto ethnography' that draws upon postmodern sensibilities and whose advocates distance themselves from realist and analytic ethnographic traditions" (p. 373). For Anderson (2006) the two types of auto ethnography, analytic and evocative, can be further divided into six main forms: 1) native ethnography; 2) narrative ethnography; 3) reflexive ethnography; 4) layered account auto ethnography; 5) community auto ethnography; and 6) personal narratives.

Native ethnography deals with a colonized or economically subordinated group of people and the imbalance of power. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) explain that native ethnography can develop from "colonized or economically subordinated people, and are used to address and disrupt power in research, particularly a (outside) researcher's right and authority to study (exotic) others" (p. 16). Narrative auto ethnography, on the other hand, are texts presented in the forms of stories that include the ethnographer's experiences.

Another type of reflexive ethnography documents how the ethnographer changed as a result of the research process. Ethnographers often study their life alongside the cultural group members' lives. Reflexive auto ethnography focuses "on the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics of the interview itself. Though the focus is on the participant and her or his story, the words, thoughts, and feelings of the researcher also are considered, e.g., personal motivation for doing a project, knowledge of the topics discussed, emotional responses to an interview, and ways in which the interviewer may have been changed by the process of interviewing" (p. 18). Ellis, Adams, and Bochner note that even though the researcher's experiences add context and layers to the stories (p. 18).

The layered account is another approach of auto ethnography. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) explain that the layered account focuses on the researcher's experience alongside the data. In a layered community auto ethnography the personal experiences of the researcher are addressed in relation to the community under observation. This relationship illustrates how the community influenced the researcher and the data, while highlighting how the community resolves their social and cultural issues.

Personal narratives can play an important role in auto ethnography. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) describe personal narratives as stories about authors, "who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their academic, research, and personal lives" (p. 24). Personal narratives are especially valuable when they are dialogical in nature, that is, when they "propose to understand a self or some aspects of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect with other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflection on, understand, and cope with their own lives" (p. 24).

Ellingson and Ellis (2008) argue that auto ethnography is not meant to be an objective methodology in the way quantitative research understands objectivity. The aim is not to produce neutral knowledge as it exists in itself via scientific methods. This does not mean, however, that the research is entirely subjective or arbitrary. Ellis (2004) draws from Richardson's five criteria which to evaluate personal narrative. These criteria are: 1) substantive contribution; 2) aesthetic; 3) reflexivity; 4) impact; and 5) reality. For Ellis, the substantive contribution criterion asks if the piece of writing contributes to an understanding of social life. Is the auto ethnographic text offering insight to society and/or bringing an issue to light? The second criterion concerns aesthetics. Does the text appeals to the reader? Or, simply, is the text boring? Is the piece of writing too complex for the reader, and is the result that it overshadows its substantive contribution?

The third criterion, reflexivity, requires that the authors think about how they came to write this text. This principle focuses on the subjectivity of the writer as well as the produced text. It is important to note that this criterion responds specifically to the criticisms outlined by Krizek and Chang. They both argue that auto ethnography and its texts can be narcissistic, biased, or simply personal memoirs. Ellis provides a standard whereby the auto ethnographer can reflect and assess the purpose of the written piece. The fourth criterion concerns the impact of the writing and asks whether or not the auto ethnographic writing is intelligent. How does it affect both the writer and reader? More importantly, does the piece of writing generate a new question? This principle also addresses the criticism that auto ethnography is self-absorbed and isolating.

Using Richardson's criterion, Ellis shows that auto ethnography is not simply writing for the self, but that it is also asks questions of its readers. The research is not conducted in

isolation. The last criterion, reality, asks the auto ethnographer whether the written piece expresses a reality that is both a lived experience and one that is present in our current society. This last criterion thereby addresses a number of accusations made by other scholars about the nature and usefulness of auto ethnographic writing. The insinuation that auto ethnography neglects ethical standards is addressed with the proposal of benchmarks for texts. It is important to auto ethnographers such as Ellis and Bochner that their written pieces are taken seriously by both their readers and themselves.

Establishing criteria for auto ethnographic writing is not a new phenomenon. In earlier work, Guba and Lincoln (1998) sought to legitimatize auto ethnography by advancing four authenticity criteria. The four principles include: 1) fairness, where the researcher examines the potential conflict in the multiple value systems in their work; 2) ontological authenticity, where the extent to which individual respondent's own constructions are improved, matured, expanded, and elaborated, 3) education authenticity, which speaks to self-reflexive awareness and dialogue; and 4) catalytic authenticity, where the research leads to some form of action or decision-making.

A recurring question for auto ethnography is whether it is a valid social science methodology. The criteria discussed above respond to this concern. Ellis (2004) adds that auto ethnography struggles for legitimacy partly because it challenges very the definitions and criteria of traditional social scientific approaches. In other words, the lack of clear support is, arguably, just as much a matter of resistance to changing research paradigms. Having said that, Ellis does not eschew the responsibility of outlining the elements that contribute to solid research. For Ellis (2004) the legitimacy of auto ethnographic work lies in the search for verisimilitude. She defines verisimilitude as the appearance of a text being true or real—in other words, the authenticity of a

text. Auto ethnographic work that seeks credibility is work that is life-like, believable, and plausible, all conditions that echo Richardson's criteria for good auto ethnography.

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) determine that auto ethnography's validity is based on three conditions: 1) the function of the narrative; 2) the consequences as a result of the narrative; and 3) its usefulness as a writing piece. Narratives are legitimate if they are remembered. Here the validity of written pieces depends on how the auto ethnographer turns life into language. Bochner also emphasizes disclosure, the disclosure of oneself to others.

Richardson (2003) uses a crystal metaphor to describe auto ethnography's validity. He explains that while a crystal has an infinite number of shapes, dimensions, and angles, ultimately it also always has an underlying structure. She argues that auto ethnographic writing may not appear similarly structured to traditional social science texts, but that is not to say that a structure is not present.

Clough (1998) believes that auto ethnographic work is a vehicle for thinking. It is a vehicle which drives necessary cultural criticism and theoretical reflections. Richardson (2000) and Bochner (2000) argue that good personal narratives contribute to positive social changes. They contend that auto ethnography gives insight into both personal issues and cultural matters. Auto ethnographic texts bring to light personal yet relevant issues that may normally be overlooked, such as child abuse, sex, and questions of identity. Richardson and Bochner also contend that auto ethnographic texts can be political in nature. These texts attempt to make sense of individual experience, but also engage readers in important political issues. For Ellis (2008) auto ethnographic texts have the ability to evoke emotions. People who read a narrative that speaks to them, in this way, may compare the story to their lives and take action.

Ellis' (2004) assertion that auto ethnography should seek work that is authentic, life-like, believable and plausible, is particularly relevant for my study. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, my research goes beyond observing the culture. I am part of the culture. I am an ERC teacher. In this study I am doing more than talking and listening to teachers. I too will be reflecting on my experiences, feelings, thoughts, and challenges with the ERC program. I am, as the researcher, a full member of the culture or group being studied. I will question how I have changed through the process of conducting the study. In the end, I anticipate that a reflection on my own experience as teacher and researcher will add another layer to understanding the challenges facing secondary ERC teachers.

To conclude this chapter, it is important to briefly differentiate self-study from auto ethnography. Hamilton (2004) points out that in both methodologies the place of the "I" is critical in the research.[10] In self-study, however, the focus on the self is more prominent. The self is the primary "object" being studied. I am not doing a study of my work as an ERC teacher. Rather I am including my voice, along with the voice of selected ERC teachers, to illuminate my research questions. Here my voice is considered in relationship to the social and cultural aspects of the personal. Put differently, auto ethnography places a greater emphasis on the larger social context by referring to stories that include the researcher as one character in a larger story.

[10] Hamilton (2004) defines self-study as to study one's self, actions, and ideas in an autobiographical, cultural, historical, and political manner. It involves taking a thorough look at the texts one reads, along with one's experiences. It draws on one's life and involves a thoughtful look at one's self. A life story and one's voice represent powerful aspects of self-study.

Vicki LaBoskey (2004) outlines five elements for self-study: 1) self-initiated; 2) improved-aimed; 3) interactive; 4) uses multiple methods; and 5) definition of validity, including the process of trustworthiness. LaBoskey explains that self-study is self-initiated because it addresses a problem that initiated completely within one's self.

Self-study, like auto ethnography, has received its fair share of criticism. Lunenberg, Zwart, and Korthagen (2008) explain that self-study is perceived as idiosyncratic and narcissistic. This perception has limited the number of published self-studies.

Chapter Three Summary

This chapter described how the research methodologies of auto ethnography and phenomenology are particularly appropriate for the study. I discussed how the focus on voice and "lived experience" in phenomenology is relevant for a study the experience of ERC teachers. Auto ethnography is particularly promising because it allows for the study of self in context and in relationship to the culture or group being studied. In this study I am a member of the community being studied. I am both researcher and teacher. In the subsequent chapter, I will discuss the research design of the study.

Chapter Four: Research Design and Research Methods

Research Design

For this study I chose a two-tier research design that combines the methodologies from auto ethnography and phenomenology. Semi structured interviews, a focus group interview, and my own observations were used to gather the data. Thematic analysis was used to authenticate the narrative of each participant.

Including my own place in the evolving story sought to better understand the experiences and concerns of ERC teachers. The use of these two methodologies provides for a more comprehensive data set, while also making inconsistencies easier to find. I used a purposeful selection of participants to ensure that the participants fit the research criteria.

For the most part, the aim of qualitative research is to understand a research problem from the perspective of the people most directly involved. I interviewed six secondary school ERC teachers and held one post-interview group conversation with five of the six teachers. Due to a family emergency, one of the teachers was unable to make the group interview. I chose to add a post-interview focus group because some themes required further discussion. Group discussion allowed the participants to elaborate on the selected themes.

The interviews and the follow up group interview permitted me to discover both factual information (about teacher preparation) and personal meaning (for example how teachers perceive their own level of religious literacy). The interviews and the focus group conversation provided a safe space for the teachers. They supported each other and could express themselves without any fear of judgment.

For the interviews, I used open-ended questions. Each interviewee was asked the same questions, based on the interview guide that was prepared beforehand. The aim was to identify

possible themes and disparities across the interviews. Meanwhile, the open-ended questions allowed a degree of freedom and pliability for unique participant response.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study were**:**

1) How do teachers understand their role and responsibilities as teachers of religion in secondary public schools?

2) What challenges does teaching the religion competency pose for the secondary school ERC teachers?

3) How do teachers view the program's commitment to neutral teaching as the preferred professional posture?

4) What types of professional support would assist in addressing the challenges they face?

Research Setting

In total, six interviews were conducted in a different location, agreed upon by myself and the participant. The location of the interviews had to be convenient for the participants; therefore the location of the interviews was determined only when the teacher expressed their preferred location. Each location was both quiet and secluded to ensure that the participant felt comfortable and safe to speak in confidence. It was also essential that each participant felt that they could answer without reservations and fear of from being judged by co-workers, as well as

avoid being reprimanded by either the school or the respective school board as a result of their possible responses. Two of the interviews were conducted at my office at the university's Faculty of Education, one interview was done in the home of the participant, and three of the interviews were conducted in outdoor settings. The location and parameters for the follow-up group interview were also held to the same standards. The one follow-up group interview was held in a setting that each participant agreed to. The location of the group interview was quiet and private. The teachers clearly felt comfortable with each other as they expressed themselves freely and without reserve.

Participants

The participants of my study are secondary school teachers who are employed at two of the English school boards in Montreal and surrounding areas. Due to the restriction of time and the challenge of finding participants that fit the study's criteria, I interviewed a relatively small number of teachers, six individuals in total. Each participant spoke fluent English and five of the interviews were conducted in English, while the last one was a bilingual interview using both French and English. I did not strive to have an equal number of male and female teachers; rather the focus was teachers had had at least three years of experience teaching ERC. Some teachers had as much as seven years of experience. These teachers have been teaching the program since its implementation. Here I wanted to see how their experience and perceptions evolved over time. The average age of the participants was 38 years. The youngest was 30 and the eldest was 40 years old. The average amount of teaching experience was 8.8 years; the shortest was 5 and the longest 11 years. All the participants are certified teachers.

Table 4. 1 Participants

	Gender	Age	Teacher Experience	Certification	Subject Specialty
Participant 1	Male	37	10	Yes	French
Participant 2	Female	40	11	Yes	History and Spanish
Participant 3	Male	40	10	Yes	Contemporary World, Philosophy, ERC and History
Participant 4	Female	38	10	Yes	ERC and History
Participant 5	Male	30	5	Yes	History
Participant 6	Male	44	10	Yes	English and History

The teachers interviewed are not generalists. They have different specialties and only one participant is an ERC specialist. They all, however, teach the ERC program. Additionally, each teacher has a full-time contract. The interviewees were selected to ensure that their responses would be based on real experience rather than speculation.

Access and participant relationships

The recruitment and selection of the participants created an interesting challenge for the study. Most teachers do not teach ERC as the primary subject and therefore are not categorized as ERC teachers. In most cases, teachers, in need of a full-time schedule, are given ERC as a means of reaching a hundred percent teaching status. At the time of recruitment, I was only

aware of one other teacher who taught ERC at a hundred percent status. Hence, the participant criteria were designed to recruit teachers who had taught ERC for at least 3 years, and for whom the course represented 25% of their teaching schedule. Additionally, they needed to belong to one of the two English school boards.

Originally, I sent out nine invitational letters (appendix A). Out of the nine, I secured a total of six participants between November 18, 2014 and November 18, 2015. It must be noted that I knew all six participants and worked with five of the participants. Out of the five participants that I worked with, I also worked with them in the capacity as their Head of Department.

All the participants agreed to participate in the research by providing their verbal consent in a pre-interview conversation and over email. I emailed the invitations letters, which included the study's requirements, time commitment, the request to record the interviews, and the consent forms. At the start of the interview, I provided two written copies of the consent form, which was previously emailed. Before commencing the interviews, the participants were asked to read and sign both copies of the consent forms, with one to be retained by them and another used for my own records.

Data collection method

Initially, I prepared an interview guide for the teachers. The interview guide was used with each participant to make certain that each interview covered the same themes and topics. . Also, the participants and I are co-creating a collaborative understanding of the issues that I am investigating in this work. The interview guide was created in consultation with my supervisor and members of the thesis committee. The guide addressed four themes: 1) perceptions of the

program itself, particularly its focus and content; 2) implementation; 3) resources; and 4) the professional posture of teachers. The questions were based on my own experience of the program and a reading of the academic literature discussed in chapters one and two. I developed questions such as "What type of training have you received to teach the Ethics and Religious Culture Program?" Another question was "Some argue that the program should only focus on ethics. Others argue that it is important to teach about both ethics and religion. What is your view?" (See Appendix B for the Interview Guide.)

At the start of the interview I explained the purpose of the study with a review of the invitational letter (see Appendix A for invitational letter). The interviewees signed the consent form and we began the recorded conversations. The start of the interview raised general questions about their teaching career, such as "How long have you been teaching in secondary schools?" and "how long have you been teaching ERC?" The interviews took place over one meeting and varied from 30-45 minutes in length, depending on the participant.

Follow-up conversations and emails were sent. Each participant had the opportunity to read over their transcribed interview and check to make certain their responses were accurately represented. If the participant felt their views were misreported, the question could have been re-visited. However, all the participants felt their responses were accurately represented in the interviews. Interestingly, the participants were excited about their responses, something I always noted in my reflexive memos. Their enthusiasm indicated that the teachers felt my research was important. They wanted their voices heard. As I indicated in the previous chapter, giving a voice to people who are rarely consulted about matters that concern them directly is one of the goals of qualitative research.

Each participant was debriefed about the direction of the study. I emphasized their right to confidentiality. I also discussed the possibility of asking questions in the future. A follow-up interview guide was created after an initial analysis of the interviews. The findings emerged after three readings. I read and transcribed the initial interviews. The interviews were read again and transcribed by a professional. I added my reflexive memos to the third reading. Certain patterns emerged after these three readings. The teachers' responses revolved around five themes: 1) collegial relationships; 2) reactions to the ERC program; 3) pedagogical training challenges; 4) content challenges; and 5) wider Issues. These five themes steered the follow-up group interview guide.

The follow-up interview was held after each teacher had verified their interview transcripts. Out of the six participants, five participants were able to attend. One teacher was unable to attend due to a family emergency. Rescheduling the focus group was not a possibility due to the short notice given by the absentee participant. In the follow-up interview, the questions delved deeper into the five themes. I asked questions such as: "In the interviews, it was mentioned that most of you had limited in service training, how can this issue be rectified? What are your suggestions?" (See Appendix C for Follow-Up Interview Guide).

Thematic Analysis

Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) define thematic analysis as a tool that searches for themes that emerge as important to the description of the phenomenon or data. The process involves the identification of themes through "careful reading and re-reading of the data." (p.4) Thematic analysis is a form of pattern recognition where emerging themes become the categories for analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) add that thematic analysis is the foundational method for

qualitative inquiry. They contend it is especially valuable for conducting many other forms of analysis.

Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2011) see thematic analysis as one of the most useful methods for capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set. Thematic analysis is a research tool that evaluates the frequency and co-occurrence of particular words and/or phrases in a body of textual data. It identifies key words and ideas. For Burtow (2007), this method attempts to reveal core consistencies and create categories or codes of meaningful data segments.

Holloway and Todres (2003) refer to "thematizing meaning" as a skill for thematic analysis. Here themes are identified through the process of identifying salient concepts. The identification of patterns then leads to the creation of categories, which are then grouped to form a theme. According to Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), concepts can be used to organize data. This can then leads to thematic identification. In this view, a theme is different from a concept.

Boyatzis (1998) defines a theme as a "pattern of information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon." (p.161) Torres and Holloway (2003) add that a theme is a group of concepts that recur through the text, and connect to each other in a patterned way. A theme represents a level of patterned response or meaning from the data that is related to the research question. Here the frequency at which a theme occurs is not a value in itself; rather the researcher's judgment is the key tool in determining which themes are more crucial than others. Themes need to provide an accurate understanding of the "big picture" of the data set. Boyatzis (1998) also suggests different ways that thematic analysis can be approached. He lists several ways, such as 1) inductive thematic

analysis, where coding and theme development are directed by the content of the data; 2) a deductive analysis, when the coding and theme development are directed by existing concepts or ideas; 3) semantic analysis, where the coding and theme development reflect the explicit content of the data; 4) a latent analysis, when the coding and theme development reports concepts and assumptions underpinning the data; 5) a realist or essentialist way, which focuses on reporting an assumed reality evident in the data; and finally 5) a constructionist analysis, where the focus is on looking at how a certain reality is created by the data. In my data analysis, I initially did inductive coding because it makes the most sense for this kind of analysis. After noticing certain patters in the raw data, I organized the concepts as mentioned by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane. Once the organization was completed, I began to see the commonalities between the concepts, such as the perception of the ERC program. This is where my themes began to emerge. For Boyatzis, a researcher can take a variety of approaches to using thematic analysis with essentially the same rigor. He argues that all of the approaches have something to offer for qualitative data analysis.

These layers of thematic analysis are also discussed by Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012). They explain that thematic analysis usually focuses wholly or mostly on one level. In the case of semantic themes, it attempts to identify the explicit and surface meaning of the data. The research does not analyze beyond what the participant said or wrote. The researcher's focus is to give the reader a sense of the important themes. One of the drawbacks of the semantic approach is that it loses some of its depth and complexity. But one of the benefits is that semantic themes provide a rich description of the entire data set. On the other hand, Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) point out that latent theme identify underlying ideas, patterns, and

assumptions. This approach requires much more interpretation of the data and researchers might have to focus on one specific question or area of interest across the complete data set.

Braun and Clarke (2006) further discuss the different types of thematic analysis: 1) exploratory or inductive and 2) confirmatory or deductive. Exploratory analysis is content-driven. This is where the researcher carefully reads and re-reads the data, looking for key words, trends, themes, or ideas that will help outline the broad themes before any analysis takes place. In my study I used exploratory/ inductive analysis. Throughout the entire process, I re-read the data, looking for patters, and noticing concepts in order to see themes. On the other hand, a confirmatory analysis is hypothesis-driven. The researchers have a rationale prior to the reading or the analysis of the data. With inductive analysis, the objectives of the research are formulated differently. The research questions are better suited for exploratory analysis, which is the case with my own research. Inductive analysis samples are usually non- probabilistic samples of research participants and therefore generate primary data. On the other hand, with confirmatory analysis the objectives are driven by the thesis and are affirming in nature. When it comes to the samples, deductive analysis, unlike exploratory analysis, is a combination of probabilistic sampling strategies to select texts from existing sources. Braun and Clarke (2006) are clear that the fact that exploratory analysis is not hypothesis-driven does not mean that it is not theoretical in nature. Rather, inductive thematic analysis approaches are used to build a theoretical model derived from the data. They further add that exploratory thematic analysis addresses a practical problem based in theory. No matter how implicit, theory gives direction to what we examine and how we examine it. Theory provides guidance about what is important to study from existing literature.

In addition to using thematic analysis, I used elements of constant comparative analysis. Glasser and Strauss (1967) define the constant comparative method as offering a way that the researcher may access and analyze these articulated perspectives so that they may be integrated in a model that seeks to explain the social processes under study. Braun and Clarke (2006) further describe six phases of thematic analysis. They describe how the first phase is for the researcher to familiarize themselves with the data. This process includes transcription of the data, reading, and re-reading the data and noting down initial ideas. The second phase is to generate initial codes, where one codes interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set and collates data relevant to each code. The third phase is to search for the themes. This process includes collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. It is also here where the constant comparative method was also helpful. I was able to simultaneously identify codes and analyze the data in order to develop concepts. I continually compared specific responses in the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that this process also gives the researcher the time to refine these concepts, identify their properties, explore their relationships to one another, and integrate them into a coherent explanatory model. One of the recurring comments from the data was focused on the lack of professional development. In all six interviews and the follow-up group interview, each teacher mentioned in different ways that in-service teachers were lacking sufficient professional training. The recurrence of this particular concept made it clear that it was not only an issue but a clear theme of the study.

In the fourth phase of thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that the researcher reviews themes, which entails checking that the themes work in relation to both the coded extracts and to the entire data set, in a process that generates a thematic "map" of the

analysis. The fifth phase involves defining and naming themes. In this phase, there is ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story that the analysis will tell, as well as to generate clear definitions and names for each theme. The last phase is to produce the report, and this is the final opportunity for analysis. The produced report involves the selection of compelling extract examples as well as the final analysis of selected extracts relating back to the analysis of the research question.

In the following chapter I will paint a picture of how secondary school ERC teachers experience and address the challenges of the program and the religion component. The thematic approach permits me to provide meaningful patterns from the interviews, providing an end product that is clear and easy to read and decode.

Using thematic analysis is one of the effective forms of categorizing the data after the interviews. As a researcher, I was able to find the codes from the dataset leading to the themes. Furthermore, I was looking at undertaking an inductive thematic analysis allowing the data to determine the codes and themes to emerge from the data set. An inductive thematic analysis allowed me to review the data, make notes, and sort it into categories, helping me to move my analysis from a broad reading towards uncovering patterns and developing themes. Thematic analysis was the selected tool because it can be used in many kinds of qualitative data and with many goals in mind. I will discuss my own process in more detail in the rest of the chapter.

Furthermore, thematic analysis is flexible and gave me the ability to uncover different possibilities in lieu of the research and in the process of analysis. In my research study, thematic analysis was a way to get close to my data and develop a deep sense of appreciation of the content.

Holloway and Todres (2003) introduce some critiques of thematic analysis as a method. They argue that thematic analysis is not a specific method but rather a tool to use across different methods. Although Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a way to do thematic analysis, they agree that thematic analysis lacks a clear and specific series of procedures, and that its flexibility, therefore, can make it difficult to concentrate on what parts of the data need to be focused on. In light of these critiques, I will make note and take precaution with the data in order to guard against some of the potential limitations.[11]

For the analysis of the data, I chose to use a thematic form of qualitative work that employs categories and categorical field texts to produce a conceptual understanding of experiences. These are ultimately constructed into overarching themes (Guest, MacQueen, Namey, 2012). I selected inductive thematic analysis because it has components of involvement and interpretation from the researcher. Thematic analysis permits me as researcher to move beyond counting explicit words or phrases in order to focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data and eventually identify its themes (Braun and Clarke, 2007). This process of interpretation raises the question of validity. Maxwell (1992) discusses interpretive validity as the match between the meanings attributed to the participants' behaviors or responses and the actual participant's perspective. With this in mind, I tried to use the words and concepts of the teacher interviews in order to judge the data accuracy based on their perspectives. In my study, inductive thematic analysis allows the data set to speak for itself. The themes from the interviews and follow-up group appear from the data, as opposed to the data being driven by a hypothesis.

[11] Miles and Guberman (1994) note that there are issues with validating themes in the early and late stages of data analysis. They suggest that the research should involve an outsider review during the early phase to evaluate and identify themes. While the problem for Braun and Clarke (2006) the issues are related to reliability.

First level of analysis

My first step began with listening to all the interviews and the follow-up interview. I hand-transcribed the data in order to have my own copy of all the interviews. There were both hard copies of the audio-taped interviews, the transcribed interviews, and electronic copies on my encrypted and password-protected computer. Tuckett (2005) agrees that it is important to create coded files in order to differentiate them and to secure that the files protect the research participants' real names and other sensitive information. Pseudonyms were created as a means of identification for the purpose of data collection. I labeled the files as individual interviews and the focus group. Coding was vital for efficient retrieval on the computer and in order to be able to constantly compare the data. I kept a log of my personal thoughts, a reflexive memo during the structured interviews and follow-up group interview and made notes before, during, and after each interview.

Afterwards, the files were sent to a professional and confidential transcription company, where each interview was transcribed using the verbatim option. The company's confidential agreement and service ensured accuracy. The decision to send the files for transcription was made in order to avoid omissions and increase transparency. The transcription was verbatim and made a validity check with the participants possible. Once the interview transcriptions were complete, I sent the document to each of the participants in order for them to carefully review and verify their remarks, in addition to discuss any changes desired if they thought their views were misrepresented. The participants' verifications also ensured descriptive validity and credibility.

Tuckett (2005) writes that coding represents an extension of the "data reduction" and "conclusion drawing." There are some scholars who do have issues with coding in the qualitative research. However, I used the coding as a means of identifying important concepts and categories that emerged from the data through coding to develop my thematic units. The process helps develop the "theme" identification and "theme comparison." With the respondents' approval, I carefully read each interview to get a sense of the direction of each interviewee's responses, and also to familiarize myself with the data. I also used this time to do an initial identification of the categories or themes. The initial identification was easily achieved due to the fact that my interview guide was broken into sections (i.e. perceptions, resources, neutrality, and religion component). Tuckett (2005) discusses that in coding and theme development, the researcher will assign "tags" to relevant data and begin to ask the data such questions as what is being described in the text, how is the data to be understood (the process), and eventually what does the data mean?

Once I had a general impression of my data, I began a close reading of each interview. Tuckett (2005) emphasizes that researchers should take more than one look at the data. He explains that once the researcher has completed the "first run" at the coding and theme data, it is important to reconsider looking at it again for further salient trends and patterns. During the second and closer read, I started highlighting passages using different colors per interviewee, while also underlining important concepts and patterns. It was clear that the questions from both the interviews and the focus group had helped the theme take shape (Appendix B and C). In the re-read and review process, the intention is to differentiate between the existing coded data and the non-coded data. This is done to ensure that nothing important is set aside (Tuckett, 2005).

This level includes two phases of reviewing and refining. The first phase consists of naming themes and the second one deals with the identification of emerging themes.

Second Level of Analysis

This phase includes establishing and refining the rules of inclusion. The first part consists of creating the rule of inclusion and the emergence of sub-themes, and the second part concerns the emergence of the themes and sub-themes.

With common themes identified, I devised the rules of inclusion for each. These rules help decide if particular data excerpts belong in the categories, such as the implementation of the program, the challenge of teaching religion, professional development or the question of neutrality. These categories and rules helped me locate the theme in each participant's answers. In addition, the rules differentiated which data extracts belonged in each particular theme. Once the rules and themes were established, I re-read the interviews, looking for sub-categories or sub-themes within the larger categories. I established four themes, and within each theme a sub-theme that spoke to a different aspect of it. To review the themes, I used the hard copies of the data to verify the parts of the excerpts that supported each theme, and I also began another re-read of the data set within a particular theme to explore or uncover a more focused logic (Tuckett, 2005).

After establishing the themes, categories, sub-themes, and rules, I began to examine the interview with the intention of looking at portions of the texts in order to support each theme and eventually each sub-theme. Developing themes involves an effort to make sense of the data as a

cohesive narrative (Tuckett, 2005). In my study, the themes provided an interpretive sequence that moved between description and analytical abstraction, in order to illustrate the experience of secondary school ERC teachers, and, more specifically, how they go about teaching about religion. In the table below, I provide an example of a set of concepts and categories that led to the development of the broader theme of professional development.

Table 4. 2 Theme Development – The Professional Posture of Teachers

Categories	Rules of Inclusion The Data Excerpts	Themes
Teacher Authority	… kids do look to us for as a value center, that principle center. They see how we behave in the hallways, right. They listen to us talking, they talk amongst themselves and so on, we have a reputation… here's the thing, is that there are certain givens in the teaching and learning process. Look, I'm in a position of authority obviously, right.	The Professional Posture of Teachers
Religion and the Professional Posture of Teachers	Il faut comprendre que quand on est pas spécialiste là-dedans, aller dans les détails des religions. Y a aussi un truc organisationnel, moi j'avais 4 cours de français et on m'avait mis éthique. On m'avait imposé éthique. Moi je l'ai fait par ce que je suis professionnel, mais c'était pas mon premier choix… Je veux simplement dire que je faisais quand même comme ils m'ont demandé. Ils m'ont demandé: est-ce que vous êtes catholique, j'ai dit oui, mais je suis pas catholique pratiquant, il faut quand même être honnête avec eux. Je me suis pas laissé influencer…on doit être neutre, mais il faut aussi utiliser son jugement professionnel. (Sebastien)	The Professional Posture of Teachers

Ethical Considerations

In order to comply with the McGill Research Ethics Board's (RBE) ethical policies and regulations, I consulted with the Ethics Review Administrator for REB-II (the board assigned to the Faculty of Education) and conferred with my supervisor and the REB-II website to make certain that I abided by the application process and submission guidelines.

Considering that my research involves human participants, I needed to be extremely vigilant when determining the risks and benefits of the study. It was essential that I follow the guideline and obtain approval from REB-II before I collected any of the participants' responses or started the interviews. It was also important to inform the participants of the risks and benefits before they gave consent to take part in the study. In addition, because the topic could possibly generate contentious answers, I took various measures to protect the participants' responses. It was also necessary to inform the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time and without penalty, and that their perspectives and privacy were (and continue to be) the main priorities of the study. To establish privacy, the participants were made aware that they could opt for a pseudonym instead of having their names published. Additionally, I made certain that they understood that their recorded responses were destroyed once the transcriptions were complete, which was guaranteed by the transcription company. Finally, the participants were assured that the only people to have access to participant responses would be my supervisor and myself.

Validity Considerations

Cook and Campbell (1979) define validity as the best available approximation to the truth or falsity of a given inference, proposition, or conclusion. In short, was the researcher right? One consideration was the time with the participants. Since the time of the participants was limited, it was not realistic to have intensive and lengthy interviews with the participants. Furthermore, it was crucial to address the fact that I worked with some of these participants and acted in a role of authority over four of them. Therefore, to ensure that there was no pressure to partake in this study from my colleagues, I created a section in the follow-up guide addressing the issue, and also noted not only the respondents' general thoughts but also non-verbal cues.

The goal of recording the interviews was to assist me in gathering the data. Although I did not take on the job of transcribing the interviews, I did take notes throughout and often used color-coding to distinguish the participants in my notes. And by using a transcription company, the chances of making mistakes were reduced. I reviewed the transcribed data from the company. This process of multiple reviews of the data allowed me to ensure descriptive validity. It also permitted participants to trust me more because I took great lengths to ensure accuracy in the interviews. I also believe it added legitimacy to my data because I took the steps necessary to reduce human error. Furthermore, prior to our focus group the participants received their own transcribed interviews and had the opportunity to substantiate or reject the document. These measures were decided on in order to assure both descriptive and interpretive validity.

As an ERC teacher myself, it is ludicrous to think that I could ignore my own beliefs and assumptions on this topic. I choose to acknowledge them. Apart from being an ERC teacher, I am also the Head of the ERC department. In addition, I strongly believe and am committed to a

solid and thriving Ethics and Religious Culture program in all Quebec schools, and especially in secondary schools. Nevertheless, it was important to me that I do not influence or judge my participants' answers as much as possible, or that I select the data that fits my belief system. With this concern in mind, I was extremely cautious with the wording of my questions and refrained from guiding my participants to answer in a particular way. I made sure to not select participants whose answers would primarily fit into my preconceptions, and instead kept an open mind to the variety of beliefs and ideas of the teachers interviewed.

My intention is not to generalize the findings. As I stated previously, the goal of this study is to gain insight into the teachers' perceptions about the Ethics and Religious Culture program and teaching about religion (i.e. their views about the program and teaching about religion, the professional development, the resources and the implementation of the program), and what they believe is needed for the creation of a substantial program in secondary schools. Gathering detailed information from a variety of teachers, the data adds to the minimal (but growing) body of knowledge on this subject. And given that the aim of this study is to better understand and appreciate teachers' points of view, the replication of the finding is far from the priority. Nevertheless, it is more than possible that teachers in similar settings may hold similar perspectives.

Chapter Four Summary

In this chapter, I described the methodologies used to design the interviews and the follow-up group interviews of six teachers. I also discussed the characteristics of the interviews, their merits, and limits. I described the research setting and research question, my role as a

researcher and how I recruited the participants. I explained how I conducted the initial interviews and the follow-up group interview. Specifically, I reviewed the method of thematic analysis as well as the procedure of data collection, management, and analysis. Finally, I explained how I identified the theme and patterns from the data to gain a deeper understanding of the interviews.

The next chapter will present the findings. It unpacks the collected data and offers a guided roadmap for the categories and themes that emerged from the participant interviews.

Chapter Five: Presentation of the Findings

In this chapter, I present two of the four themes established from the interviews and the follow-up conversation. Under each thematic analysis, individual categories are explained and addressed. The data are used to support the development of each theme.

In total, four themes emerged after refining the data set: 1) *Administrative and Systemic Support,* notably how the program is marginalized by administrative imperatives; 2) *Pedagogical Support and Resilience,* characterized by the challenges teachers encountered with the content of the program; 3) *professional development*, addressing the teachers' call for on-going professional training in the teaching of the ERC program; 4) *the professional posture of teachers and the question of neutrality*, drawing on the teachers' view of neutrality and its impact on teaching. In this chapter, I will look at the first two themes: 1) Administrative and Systemic Support and 2) Pedagogical Support and Resilience.

Theme One: Administrative and Systemic Support

This theme explores concerns related to administrative and systemic issues. The teachers interviewed expressed a great of frustration over negative perceptions of the program, particularly how ERC is typically situated at the bottom of the totem pole. This is reflected in scheduling, workload allocation and teacher selection. ERC is placed into the category of a "step-child" subject, one that is less important or neglected altogether. The excerpt bellow captures the sentiment of all the participants.

> Well, I teach Spanish and I can't speak for other secondary subjects, but I do feel that it is seen as sort of not as important as say core subjects like math, French or English. I see that in history a little bit too, even though social sciences in my core subject, I see it through like the concentration is sciences and language and history sort of third. So I do think unfortunately that is the place ERC has been given. I think it does depend on the school, it does depend on how it's presented in the team and things like that. But I do think that the value of the ERC, like Rob mentioning, and Evan, in terms of teaching about real life issues and being open and how you're going to live as a person in society, in a plural culture, is super important, beyond what's in the material in some book or some exam. (Chantal)

The teachers reiterated that one of the recurring challenges with ERC is the limited number of hours allotted to the subject. One participant noted that course would gain in credibility if it was given more often. For three of the respondents the limited number of hours makes it more difficult for teachers and students to connect to the content. In the excerpts below the participants describe how this situation makes it difficult to do more than scratch the surface, especially with the younger students.

> C'était peut-être mieux, peut-être que tant qu'à faire quelque chose de le faire au secondaire deux, mais quatre sur neuf. C'est comme si on étirait un peu. Tsé on commence à faire un projet, moi la dernière fois que, pas cette année, mais l'an passé, je voyais les élèves exemple le lundi et le vendredi et l'autre semaine je ne les voyais pas. Alors là, je les voyais quatre fois par mois, mais deux fois une semaine et zéro l'autre semaine. Puis quand il y avait des congés, de fois on manquait des cours. (Sebastien)

> It's really hard to have an influence or…that connection. (Evan)
>
> Ben c'est ça. It's good to have a good connection with the kids, surtout seven and eight. Avoir une influence concrète sur eux. Je sais pas à quel point j'ai eu une influence, j'ai fait un bon travail mais… (Sebastien)
>
> I agree with, but despite the fact that you don't really see them a lot and you can't… the continuity of something you do is forgotten from one week to the next oftentimes. (Chantal)

Concerns about Administration

The teachers feel more supported when the school's administration respond positively to the ERC program. The interviewees noted that the confidence and support of administrators would go a long way to help teachers find their footing with the program's content, and in particular with the religion component. This is especially important for teachers who are unfamiliar with the program. The interviewees are adamant about the need to stop treating ERC as their "filler" subject to meet administrative--scheduling imperatives. In one of the interview and the follow-up interview, the following teacher reflects on the consequences of scheduling decisions on teaching. Like the other teachers, he is critical of the Ministry of Education for not taking this reality into account.

> They schedule every subject first and then whatever's left over, whoever doesn't, whoever has some time on their schedule, guess what, you're a Moral Ed teacher. And we still see that going on with ERC which is not only problematic, it's dangerous because putting people in there that are not well versed in these religious traditions, who are

> harbouring their own biases, has the potential to do real harm…And of course the administrators are going to prioritise those courses that have ministry exams, but that's the situation that the ministry should have foreseen, because it's entirely predictable. (Robert)

The participants strongly emphasized that the absence of a positive welcome in schools predisposes all teachers, even those teachers assigned to teach it, to see the program in a negative light. It also leads to negative student reception, which further devalues the course. This makes teaching the program even more difficult. In the excerpts below, the teachers discuss how managerial priorities perpetuate lack of interest in the program, and can even potentially do a great deal of harm given the highly sensitive nature of the subject.

> And the issue is, if there wasn't somebody like myself who was fighting for the course, who was demanding that certain things had to happen to defend its integrity as a course, and you're just throwing people in year after year after year, you know, there's nothing good that's going to come out of that, just confusion and misdirection and a lot of efforts and resources wasted for nothing. (Evan)

> If somebody isn't trained, if they're teaching it, that maybe even making it a prerequisite that you have to have done some, like at least a one-day workshop. But to be honest, I also wonder about some kind of screening process as well. I mean there are people, and this is, we see these in extreme degrees here in Quebec, that has very, not just intolerant but sort of anti-religious views that a lot of people who have had a very kind of extreme atheist position where…And like I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that, but I

> just don't think that those are types of people that should be teaching the course. If they're coming in with an agenda, I mean that to me is the same as someone coming in with some kind of extreme religious agenda, wanting to use the course to convert people to their religion. And, you know, at the very least there should be some kind of questionnaire that people are asked about their own beliefs and, like I said earlier, sort of whether they would like to teach this and think it's a good idea. (Robert)

> They schedule every subject first and then whatever's left over, whoever doesn't, whoever has some time on their schedule, guess what, you're a Moral Ed teacher. And we still see that going on with ERC which is not only problematic, it's dangerous because putting people in there that are not well versed in these religious traditions, who are harboring their own biases, has the potential to do real harm… And putting someone with such views into this course has the potential to do real damage in terms of, you know, working in an opposite direction of the course's intent to, you know, help kids understand and feel good about the diversity side of religion. (Robert)

For most participants, the administrative use of the course to finalize the schedule of a teacher creates a major problem. The participants note that administrators in their school will say that the course is valuable. However, if ERC is a valued course, why does it continue to be assigned to teachers who are either unqualified or indifferent? Although the participants recognize that in some case administration is left with little choice, the consequence for ERC teachers is that this undermines their efforts to convince colleagues and students that this is an important course. One participant pointed out that, in some cases, administrators continue to see ERC like its predecessor, the old Moral Education program, a course which was rarely used to

create a full-time timetable for their teachers. Ultimately, this lack of serious attention and value given to ERC creates a great deal of anxiety among teachers.

The teachers stressed the importance of *wanting* to teach ERC. Although this might appear obvious, it underscores the fact that teachers are often assigned the course even if they have no background and no interest whatsoever in the subject matter. Each participant emphasized that they have a professional responsibility to teach the subject as best they can, regardless of whether the subject is their teachable subject or not.

When asked if they felt ERC was implemented properly in their schools, the participants were pulled in two directions: 1) irritation and 2) sympathy. On one hand, some participants expressed frustration that some schools continue to view and compare ERC to the old Moral Education or Moral and Religious Education program. One the other hand, they recognize that administrators are given few options. It is clear that some participants see the negative bias of school administrations. At the same time, there recognize that some administrators value ERC, but still cannot "compete" with core subjects when it comes to workload allocation and scheduling. The following excerpts speak to this tension.

> But I think the problem is that administrators don't see it that way. They are still viewing the course I think much like they viewed the old moral ED course. (Robert)

> Yeah, then that's not necessarily their fault. I don't think that they're like sort of saying oh, yeah, some course to get the short end of the stick. (Robert)

The participants had a number of reservations about teacher selection. In the passage below, they highlighted how the slotting of any teacher into the course is a major issue for the participants. And one teacher referred to the role of the Ministry in this particular challenge.

> I think if the teachers were more comfortable with the material and have a passion for it and then the authority will come and you will be able to deliver it. And, in turn, I think the kids will pick up on your enthusiasm or your expertise and I know for a fact that I teach it as a course itself and the way it's supposed to be taught. (Salome)

> They are still viewing the course I think much like they viewed the old moral ED course and will even, I mean we've even seen this in our school, give the course to teachers who explicitly don't want to teach it. I mean, you know, there's this whole issue of training for it, but then there's the secondary issue of even like do you want to. And I think that just should be just a very basic minimum…this should be something that the teachers are at the very least interested in teaching it, want to teach it and hopefully feel somewhat passionate about. But I would also say that the ministry has done a rotten job. (Robert)

The participants all agreed that the ERC course should remain in public schools. They were equally enthusiastic about teaching ERC. Nevertheless, there continues to be problems with systemic challenges, especially with the allotment of ERC to teachers who may be apathetic. The teachers all felt that the program requires better administrative decisions, namely ones that are in the best interest of the subject, teacher, and students. The participants expressed the view that administration should report teachers' frustrations to their respective school boards and to the MEERS.

Teacher Emotions: Frustrations and Feeling Overwhelmed

In the following passage, a participant reflects on how administrative decisions can lead to a feeling of being overwhelmed.

> C'est que c'était un sujet imposé, puis c'était le dernier cours que tu vas développer pour enseigner et c'était pas vraiment ta spécialité. En finissant, on a déjà …qui est spécialiste là-dedans. On a …qui est aussi spécialiste. Mais j'ai un peu l'impression qu'avec les autres enseignants qui le donnent, c'est comme un peu, malheureusement, imposé. Ce qui fait que le message passe un peu moins. Les enseignants on est un peu débordé. Quand on nous remet en plus un cours qu'on est pas spécialiste, qu'on veut plus ou moins. (Sebastien)

In the interviews excerpts below, the interviewees express return to their concern over continuity and the challenge with connecting to the students.

> You don't really see them a lot and you can't…the continuity of something you do is forgotten from one week to the next oftentimes. (Chantal)

> Mais le fait aussi que ce soit uniquement deux périodes sur neuf, pour les quatre et cinq, je pense que ça enlève un peu de crédibilité au cours…parce que en secondaire 1, quand moi j'enseignais en secondaire 1, y a un parent une fois qui m'a dit : « monsieur vous avez de la misère à créer un bon climat un bon attachement avec les élèves ». J'ai dit monsieur, je vois les élèves 2 fois sur 9 jours. Ça veut dire une semaine, je les voyais deux fois et l'autre semaine je les voyais pas. On les voit pas souvent quand ils sont

> jeunes et c'est pas facile de créer un lien « affectif ». Donc, ça c'est plus un truc administratif, mais qui a quand même une conséquence sur le cours. Quand on les voit pas souvent, c'est difficile ensuite de faire un suivi, à chaque semaine. (Sebastien)

The small amount of time allotted to the program leads to teacher frustration and leads them to push ERC to the bottom of their priorities, a reaction that is especially apparent with teachers who are not subject area specialists.

> I think it just comes down to what… said, that sometimes…if your core subject is not ERC – in my case it's social sciences …so it can happen that maybe you get bogged down with something else. (Chantal)

> I'm going to focus on all my other subjects because those are the most important ones. And ethics is like, oh, it's something I have to do and I only see the kids once a week so I'm not going to take it seriously. I'm not going to dedicate … (Chantal)

Another concern with teaching ERC is the potential for negative reactions from parents. The ERC program is perceived as a debatable subject open to parental interpretation. A teacher' work can be brought into question more easily than is the case of mathematics or science. One participant indicated that teaching the younger grades imposes certain limitations on what a teacher can say and do.

> I don't enjoy teaching the lower grades as much. Because I think it's obvious that you're limited with what you can do because they're little when they're 12 or 13.

> And I also feel a little cautious because at that age they're so heavily influenced with what mom or dad tells them. So then I feel a little bit, I feel, I analyze. I really analyze what is it I say. How do I say it? What are other kids doing? What are we doing with the activity to make sure everything's totally neutral? Because there is that argument that parents should be the ones educating their kids about certain topics whether it's religion or whether it's abortion or whether it's right to life or whatever. So I feel they're so fragile that that age and moldable. (Chantal)

In the follow-up interview, all the participants strongly agreed that the ERC course is valuable, but emphasize that the way it is implemented undermines its value.

> I mean I'll echo what you said, Rob. I mean it's so important what we're doing and it's not out of a book and I think it's really, really important that our kids understand that, that life is about being with people. (Evan)

> Yes, I absolutely think ERC should be taught in both public secondary and elementary school. The course allows students to properly develop an argument. It also gives students an opportunity to discuss important ethical issues and learn about empathy. (Gaetano)

From personal experience, I know how much work goes into planning, implementing, and assessing a regular program. It is truly noteworthy that every one of the teachers remains positive about the course despite their irritations with the program. They are frustrated yet remain steadfast. As I was engaged in these conversations I couldn't help but wonder where

these teachers find the motivation to teach the program? The interviews gradually revealed that it is the participants' commitment to the program originates from their deep sense of connection to the students. Teachers assert that their job entails much more than teaching the subject matter content. For them, teaching well also includes forming relationships with students and preparing them for life outside of the classroom. This commitment to students and their well-being is how the participants define their "professionalism." Professionalism and dedication to the students' development is a common thread throughout the data.

> I think that most teachers are professional people and I think it's correct in saying we receive professional training, whether it's at a Bachelor or Masters level, so we all do that… I think most of the times most people are professional and do make an effort to do it, so I think sometimes as teachers we get a bad rap for the select few teachers who do something that they shouldn't do, whether it's in ERC or whatever, right. (Chantal)

> I would agree with what Chantal is saying again. You know, you've got a whole of teachers, who are going to be professional and then sort of take the course seriously. (Robert)

> So there is a level of honesty, I think, that you have to have with a professionalism to give the kids permission to speak freely on their own behalf in regards to what they truly believe…Being aware of that process. Having that little check and balance in your head to make sure that you're not speaking in a way that will be influential to the point of where the child, as any student would, give you the answer that you expect so that they can get a good mark.(Evan)

> J'ai bien fait mon travail parce que je pense que j'ai un degré de professionnalisme élevé. C'est par ce que moi je suis professionnel vous savez alors, on me donne un travail à faire, j'va le faire… je vais faire le travail qu'on me donne, mais ça fait quand même trop quand même au niveau charge de travail. 120 élèves à corriger, plus le travail, plus les éthiques en secondaire une. (Sebastien)

The teachers interviewed emphasized that having a department head in ERC can make a difference. For them, this is one way ERC teachers can be supported in their teaching. Given that I am the Head of an ERC Department, I asked the participants if my status somehow influenced their responses. They all agreed that my status had no effect. Evan, for example, said: "Yeah, and I found it very easy to talk to you… you don't put any pressures on us. " Given the very nature of power, I cannot know for sure if this was indeed the case. However, it does make sense to say that assigning a department head for a subject that is often marginalized in the school will add a layer of support, both institutionally and pedagogically. Interestingly, one participant mentioned that he was more at ease speaking to me as researcher than as the Head of Department. It is important to point out that not all schools have a head of department for ERC, and that as one participant pointed out, there is no head of department in the French schools.

Theme Two: Pedagogical Support and Resilience

As professionals, the teachers consider that it is their responsibility to seek out resources and support of each other in the process. They also rely on their internal compass for good teaching. This is the subject of theme two.

The participants clearly expressed frustration over the absence of pedagogical support for the program, especially regarding its religious component. As stated earlier, secondary school teachers are given the ERC course even if they are not specialists in the area. Teachers are asked to take on a subject without the requisite qualifications. As was seen above, they remain committed to doing a good job because of their sense of professionalism. They also seek help from colleagues, and find ways to share resources. They point are especially critical of the little help they receive from the MEERS. As such, they need to rely on their own devices.

> I mean it's pretty pitiful the resources that are available to us from the ministry to teach this course and then because it's a course that teachers are likely to be thrown into, they should have all kinds of resources at their disposal so that they can do a good job without having to, you know, spend the whole summer researching. (Robert)

The participants stress that teaching this program well involves more than the transmission of information. Their role is to help students appreciate diversity and navigate a pluralistic world. Students must be knowledgeable and informed on matters of ethics and religion that are quite complex. This knowledge allows students to make critical and sound decisions, and to exhibit compassion. The teachers hope to challenge ignorance and intolerance by instilling an appreciation for the richness and diversity of the world we live in. They see the ERC program as an opportunity to achieve these goals.

> And, you know, there's a lot of stuff that you can learn from books, whether it's now or whether it's later, but to get to a young mind early about how important it

> is to have some values and some principles and for them to be more clear about what they believe and so on, to have that opportunity to let that child, you know, explore that situation. (Evan)

> The kids were genuinely interested in that and they wanted to know about that. So that was fun. So when they're interested, it makes it interesting for me too. (Chantal)

> And it really gets them to question themselves and listen to others. And I think it's a valuable opportunity. (Chantal)

> I think the kids will pick up on your enthusiasm or your expertise and I know for a fact that I teach it as a course itself and the way it's supposed to be taught. (Salome)

Having access to resources is another way to provide pedagogical support. Two of the teachers express their frustrations with the MEERS, as well as with the English resources approved and produced for ERC.

> I mean, the stuff that ministry produces is garbage. It's like not, it's not engaging and it's … I find, you know, lame. If the ministry provided more materials, the pressure would not be on the department heads as it is right now… I've got two great sources. I mean the BBC is one site and the CBC radio show, Tapestry. Between those two I get everything that I need. (Robert)

All the teachers agree that they are engaged in finding meaningful resources. The excerpts below speak to this.

> Sharing. Sharing stuff. I mean, I, I, you know, when you've had to deal with teachers …, I've certainly helped share my materials and given them advice when I can. (Robert)

> Having a database of activities so that each person has to contribute an activity and then goes into a grade level. And then teachers have access to activities. And then the challenge was, well, some people will do it and some people just copy it and don't share the work. So there's no problem in sharing. (Chantal)

> There are some textbook and workbooks that none of the ERC teachers actually use. Most of the time, I developed my own resources and used the many available online. (Gaetano)

The Call to Teach about Religion

The teachers in this study emphasize that their devotion to the students motivates them to do the best they can with the program. However, most of the participants agree that the religion component remains difficult for them. They are primarily concerned about content accuracy and the delivery of sensitive topics. The teachers want to make certain that they provide the most accurate information to their students. All the teachers echo that teaching ERC requires at least some basic knowledge, and one participant believes that teaching ERC warranted that teachers

take at least one university-level course and perhaps even a bachelor's degree in religious studies. Despite their uncertainty, most teachers remain committed to teaching the religion competency, thus highlighting, once again, their professional commitment and resilience.

One participant felt strongly that the religion competency of ERC is the most important aspect of the course. The ERC teacher needs to have particular requirements attached to it, such as a basic understanding in religion in order to avoid misunderstandings or misrepresentations of faiths and tradition. The teacher was equally concerned with the "hidden" or biased agendas of teachers. In the excerpts below the participants advocate for the importance of teaching about religion. They also emphasize that, in most cases, the enjoy teaching ERC. One teachers feels more committed to the religion competency than he does to the ethics competency.

> To be honest, if I had to drop one side of it, it would be the ethics side. Like to me, the religion side is the most important because it's about, you know, promoting values of acceptance, of diversity. (Robert)

> I enjoy doing religions. I really enjoy doing religions. I find that's interesting. I find there's so much you can do. And sort of it's interesting too because you can do different things. (Chantal)

> You should not be allowed to teach this course if you have not taken at least one university level course in each of the world's major religious …. Traditions. And maybe a course or two in comparative religion. (Robert)

> I mean there are people, and this is, we see this in extreme degrees here in Quebec, that has very, not just intolerant but sort of anti-religious views that a lot of people who have

> had a very kind of extreme atheist position…And like I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that, but I just don't think that those are types of people that should be teaching the course. If they're coming in with an agenda, I mean that to me is the same as someone coming in with some kind of extreme religious agenda, wanting to use the course to convert people to their religion. (Robert)

All the participants agree that possessing a good foundation of religious knowledge would increase their level of comfort for the subject. Without this knowledge, some teachers shy away from the religion component. Three of the participants confess that despite considering themselves open-minded, and despite seeing the religion component as valuable, the religion competency presents a challenge and often overwhelms them. Along with the limited school, school board, and ministerial accountability, the lack of pedagogical support means that teachers often find themselves leaving ERC at the bottom of things to do. In the passages below the teachers are concerned about misrepresenting and misinforming their students.

> Well, yeah, because it all comes down to how you feel in terms of your own competency. You know, when I'm teaching younger grades I don't feel…I have no religious background. I mean I could be very mechanical, I suppose, in a certain way, or very factual and just kind of go through things. I can look that up and so on. But there's a sense in me that I'm not doing that justice, so I imagine that if I teach grade ten and grade 11 I have to do that, or if I was in a position to do that, one, I wouldn't be comfortable; two, some of the students know a lot more about the religions than I do, right, and so on, so put pressure on you…I had a student come up to me one year after we discussed

> Sikhism I believe it was. And I like Sikhism, like, its general principles and so on and its sense of equality that's in it. And then this female student came up to me privately in the hallway and said to me very clearly, this is not how we practice it in our culture. Okay. (Evan)

Reservations about ERC's religion competency are clearly not due to the content itself, but rather they are rooted in the lack of preparation time, the absence of useful resources, lack of continuity and adequate background knowledge. As noted above, all the teachers mention that they enjoy teaching religion. Two of the participants assert that they look forward to teaching about religion. The other four agree but stress that they need more time to prepare.

> I always liked religion and so on, even since grade seven. I had a great moral ED teacher,..who's been with me forever and ever and ever, you know, like in my head. So when I approached the subject, I do my research, alright. I'm not saying I'm great at it, okay, but I'm very careful in terms of how I deliver the material, as I said. I always back it up with if I'm getting something wrong, please let me know. (Evan)

> Oh, in the religion competency, I, pretty much like all the themes I find really engaging...interpretations can and should be debated. I mean, this is one of the things, for example, I love about the Jewish tradition. It's sort of right up front in the Jewish tradition that rabbis are supposed to debate the text. That it's not about one way of understanding. It's about, it's about, these, this, these are open texts that we're supposed to wrestle with and we're supposed to debate what they mean and …. (Robert)

> I like the program and find the content fascinating… I also enjoy exploring the commonalities of Religious and teaching about the major Religions. (Salome)

> Religion is there to explore one's own spirituality as well as establish a spiritual compass for living one's life. Learning about different religions also encourages tolerance and understanding between faiths. …I specifically enjoy exploring the similarities between different belief systems and rites of passage. It help the student to relate to and understand someone else's religion. (Gaetano)

The participants are not afraid to admit that they need to improve their level of knowledge about religion. However, all the participants explain that they take extra time to prepare and educate themselves about religions. The subject matter is too important to do otherwise. They are concerned that some teachers do not take the time to prepare themselves and will even avoid the religious themes in the program. The teachers interviewed for this study take it upon themselves to create resources in order to teach the religious themes as best they can.

> There are some textbook and workbooks that none of the ERC teachers actually use. Most of the time, I developed my own resources and used the many available online. (Gaetano)

> This is how the religions present themselves. Okay. This is what they believe. How that belief is then practiced by community and by culture will be close to or farther away depending upon the context, the place that there are in the world, their gender issues, their cultural issues. But as a belief system, this is the belief

system. So that's how I began to present it …But you're never too sure where to go and, because you're never too sure… (Evan)

Any resource that allows us to not have to do the work again or reinvent the wheel if you will, right, will be helpful. But on the other side of it if you don't have any training in it, you have this guidebook basically. So you can obviously prepare yourself with the resources we have but at least the guidebook will provide you with a structure…. And I don't think that's a good enough standard… So when I approached the subject, I do my research,…I'm not saying I'm great at it, okay, but I'm very careful in terms of how I deliver the material, as I said. I always back it up with if I'm getting something wrong, please let me know. (Evan)

I can't imagine someone teaching this that doesn't have a strong foundation in that. Like, to me, it's scary and I don't know how I would handle the course had I not the background that I do in terms of knowing some things about the world's different religions. (Robert)

The CBC radio show Tapestry I listen to it almost religiously every Sunday because it gives me talking points in my ERC class…I mean, that I think is, like those resources that are, that the BBC is producing are excellent…And no matter what, I'm going to show a video, even a video of Mohammed's life or whatever to grade seven, I'll look at different videos to see are they all…Is one talking really not about, you know…? I need to make sure that there is, just like I would check a reference for any subject… I'm creating a lot of my materials. (Robert)

In the following excerpt Robert reflects on the complexity of teaching about religion.

> I'm not saying just reducing it to the belief, but even also a little bit on the historical evolution of these religions and the diversity that exists within them. Because I think that's another problem that I think we run into, the sort of oh, the Muslims believe this and then Christians believe that, whereas, you know, if you're looking closely at any one tradition, my God, the amount of diversity in terms of beliefs and practices within those traditions themselves is enormous. And I think that's almost one of the things that we need to be prepared for most, because I think one of our [talents] is to debunk the stereotype and stereotypes are always based on generalizations. And when it comes to religion, generalizations are almost always untrue. So I think, you know, providing this overview with I think an emphasis on debunking the stereotypes, and I think the program should be explicit about that… So I think there's got to be more coming from the ministry to teachers. (Robert)

> Y a quand même maintenant des cahiers assez bien fait. Ce pourrait être une piste de solution peut-être. C'est évident que la chef de ce département (nom) a préparé un espèce de guideline assez général quand même mais très bien fait. Quand on sait que les gens ont pas la formation on sait qu'ils ne veulent pas vraiment le faire, peut-être que c'est une bonne ressource supplémentaire pour les élèves d'acheter un cahier supplémentaire. On pourrait être certain qu'il y a une continuité à chaque fois plutôt que de montrer des films plus ou moins approprié. On sait qu'on a quand même une certaine autonomie professionnelle et y en a des fois qui en abuse un peu. (Sebastien)

The excerpts above draw attention to the complexity of teaching the program. The teachers are trying to ensure they do a good job. Under normal circumstances, a mandated curriculum acts as a safety net, meaning that there is a level of implied accountability such as a ministerial or school board exam. Furthermore, a mandated curriculum also means that there is a legal ground for teachers who may face a backlash on topics that could be deemed inappropriate by some. However, in the case of ERC, the teacher's work is susceptible to interpretation and critique. Despite its compulsory status, the topics are chosen at the teacher's discretion, leaving the door open for parental attacks. Rather than risking parental complaints, appearing unprofessional, or leaving oneself open to disciplinary action, teachers prefer to make safe choices in ERC. In these quotes below, two of the teachers describe how they prefer to stay safe and even use the neutral stance of the program as a shield, a concept to be discussed in the following chapter.

> I also feel a little cautious because at that age they're so heavily influenced with what mom or dad tells them. So then I feel a little bit, I feel, I analyze. I really analyze what is it I say. How do I say it? Certain topics whether it's religion or whether it's abortion or whether it's right to life or whatever. So I feel they're so fragile that that age and moldable. How do you teach about abortion without offending parents?… Like, what are the things that you should say and should not say. What are the objectives you want to do and not..I would need more guidance and this is how it's going to be. (Chantal)

> Well… how is this going to be received back home, whatever, and if there are some parents who really feel adamant that they should be the ones to teach their kids about

> religion. And I have to respect that, I mean we all have to respect it; that's their right. And then there are other parents who are like please go ahead and teach my kids some things because I don't know about those different things, right. So it has come up many times where the parents were like no, I don't want my kid learning about that religion or I don't want my kid learning about whatever moral issue, so I find that the sort of the taboo of the courses, are you going to get attacked because you're doing your job. (Chantal)

> Je pense que c'est un peu relié. Quand ils ont mis le cours éthique et religion en place, premièrement il y avait beaucoup d'opposition des parents. Même les parents ne voulaient pas nécessairement le faire. Quand on se fait imposer quelque chose, qu'on doit l'enseigner, c'est évident que le message passe un petit peu loin. (Sebastien)

Chapter Five Summary

In this chapter, I gave an overview of two themes emerging from the data: 1) The systemic challenges of the ERC program and 2) Pedagogical Resilience and Support. The interview excerpts indicate that teachers are very positive and enthusiastic about the program. They consider the religion competency to be particularly important. However, they are frustrated by the lack of institutional and systemic support and by the lack of pedagogical resources. They wish they had more time to teach the course and they yearn for more specialized knowledge in religion. However, because of their commitment to the subject and the students, they do their best to prepare themselves to teach the religion component of the program. The participants insist that they will continue to teach the program in a professional manner. In the

next chapter, I will present the last two themes: 1) professional development and 2) the professional posture of teachers.

Chapter 6: Presentation of the Findings: Professional Development and the Professional Posture of Teachers

The last two themes emerging from the data are: 3) *professional development*, which addresses the teachers' call for on-going professional training; and 4) *the question of the professional posture of teachers*, drawing on the teachers' responses to the preferred posture of the ERC program. These themes gave way to the following a sub-themes: 1) the need for training in the teaching about religion; 2) the tension between committed impartiality and neutral impartiality; 3) the neutrality of the teacher; and 4) challenges with the Neutral impartiality posture.

Theme Three: Professional Development

This theme explores how the participants view the in-service training received for teaching the religion competency of the ERC program. As was seen in the previous chapter, the teachers strongly agree that better training and support is needed to effectively teach the program in secondary schools. Asking high school teachers who are not subject area specialists to teach a subject like ERC is creates several problems which could be remedied with in-service training. Most of the teachers explain the in-service training received, or not received, determines both their comfort with the curriculum and their approach to the topics. All the teachers believe that they are religiously literate to some degree, and assert that religious literacy is a prerequisite for the teaching of ERC. However, they do not believe that they have sufficient background to provide students with the skills and knowledge students need. Moreover, the availability of

professional development signals to the respondents that the MEERS and school boards are interested in the program and its success, or even survival.

When asked if they felt adequately prepared to teach the ERC program, the majority of the respondents answered "no. " Below is an excerpt of the interview with Evan which speaks to the yearning for professional development.

> Evan: Yeah, that's a tough question. I think people have to develop a certain open mindedness to the world. And I don't know how you teach that necessarily. But I think you have to bring people into, to contact with their limited visions. All our limited visions. And I think when you bring people into contact with their limited visions, especially when it comes to religious literacy, is that it allows for the opportunity to see that it's really beneficial to know about that thing. In this case, religion. It's really beneficial to understand that person's viewpoint from a religious perspective. And I think that and I'm talking, I guess, it's more of a less, it's a formal, it's a less formal kind of religious literacy.
>
> Sabrina: Right.
>
> Evan: Right. Because there's, I don't have any actual pre-service training. That would definitely help. If we could get some kind of additional training, some time off. Something to, delivered to us that gives us more foundational work in that regard.

This dialogue excerpt is revealing because it illustrates how ERC in-service training is seen as a personal and professional investment for the teachers. The participants are eager to learn in order to deliver a more meaningful program.

The ongoing demand for in-service training from the teachers is rooted in a profound sense of professionalism and responsibility. Although each teacher holds a university degree (in one case a bachelor's degree in religious studies), each respondent recognized that their background is insufficient. They yearn for training in both knowledge and pedagogy, something that is difficult to obtain solely through individual initiatives. In this passage, the interviewee summed up this dilemma.

> The program is important… it's so important that I think it warrants saying in order to be eligible for this, you need a BA in religious studies. I think that that is not an unreasonable demand… there's this whole issue of training for it, but then there's the secondary issue of even like do you want to. And I think that just should be just a very basic minimum…this should be something that the teachers are at the very least interested in teaching it, want to teach it and hopefully feel somewhat passionate about… (Robert)

As was seen in the previous chapter, the participants are motivated to teach the program in spite of receiving little support. Without in-service training, however, they risk losing this enthusiasm. They are especially critical of being left to "figure out the program" for themselves. As was seen in the previous chapter, the sense of being overwhelmed is a significant concern for less experienced teachers. Teaching ERC can be a very stressful experience. Greater support in the form of ongoing in-service training could increase their competency and also make a difference in terms of their health and well-being.

> C'était un peu trop pour ma charge de travail honnêtement, personnel… Si on commence à faire une image plus globale, on des cours d'éthique à des gens qui veulent pas toujours l'enseigner. (Sebastien)

> One teacher see the limited training opportunities given by his board to be boring and useless. Moi j'ai reçu zéro formation et même s'il y en avait eu dans les commissions scolaires j'imagine que ça aurait été ennuyant et inutile, comme ceux qu'on a en français où c'est une perte de temps complètement. (Sebastien)

The participants blame MEERS for the lack of communication, follow-through, and resources. They assert that it is the MEERS' is not taking responsibility for the program. They also see professional development as a responsibility of their school board. These interviewees believe that the administration and teaching of the ERC program should be a shared responsibility. At present, no one is accountable for the program.

The Special Challenges of Teaching Religion

All the teachers agreed that having disciplinary knowledge is insufficient. Teaching the religion competency requires openness to religion on the part of the teacher. It is not only the students who should be accepting and tolerant of different faiths and religions. Learning how to approach religion requires that teachers examine their own questions, assumptions and perhaps even stereotypes. In the following passage, Evan speaks to the difficulty of teaching open-mindedness.

> I think people have to develop a certain open mindedness to the world. And I don't know how you teach that necessarily. (Evan)

Teachers also have additional concerns about how to address the complexity of religion. One teacher asked how one can address religion when it is so diverse and complex.

> Il faut comprendre que quand on est pas spécialiste là-dedans, aller dans les détails des religions… Les enseignants on est un peu débordé. Quand on nous remet en plus un cours qu'on est pas spécialiste, qu'on veut plus ou moins. (Sebastien)

For the teachers, professional development has two tiers: approach and content. Here content refers to religious literacy. The participants underscored that teacher training should examine what it means to be a religiously literate person. One participant also mentions that religious literacy allows the teachers to take their own bias and perspectives into account. In the following excerpts from the follow-up interview, reflect on their understanding of religious literacy.

> There are a lot of things I don't know. And what I've come to realize is that at some point have had certain exposure to religions from my parents. And it's, again, from their point of view. And then when you go and learn about it yourself or you meet different people there's all different stories. There's different interpretations. There's different ways that people connect with religion and it's interesting to hear that from different people's perspective. Not just this is how my dad thinks of God or my mom… I… need more guidance. (Chantal)

> It's really beneficial to understand that person's viewpoint from a religious perspective. And I think that and I'm talking, I guess, it's more of a less, it's a formal, it's a less formal kind of religious literacy. (Evan)

> On paper, this is a perfectly designed course… The problem lies with teachers teaching behind their own biases, particularly when it comes to the big existential questions. (Gaetano)

During the follow up interview, two of the participants contend that teachers should fulfill basic requirements in order to qualify to teach ERC. Why there is no formal qualification requirement to teach ERC, as is the case for other subjects?

> Basically more, like you should, you should not be allowed to teach this course if you have not taken at least one university level course in each of the world's major religious … Like I, I can't imagine someone teaching this who doesn't have a strong foundation in that. (Robert)

> At minimum, completing some theology or religious study courses during my undergrad and some interaction with people of the different faiths and different places of worship. (Gaetano)

> The rules have changed for art… and before anybody could teach art, and now you cannot teach art unless you have an art certificate or art training from university. You're

not allowed to teach art anymore, so they have made that change. And I don't know if that's possible… (Chantal)

Theme Four: The Professional Posture of Teachers (and the question of neutrality)

This last theme uncovers how the participants view their professional teaching posture in relation to the ERC program's preferred posture. As was seen earlier, ERC program takes the following position: "teachers should show professional judgment imbued with objectivity and impartiality in order to foster students' reflection on ethical questions or understanding of the phenomenon of religion. Thus, to ensure against influencing students in developing their point of view, teachers abstain from sharing theirs. Teachers intervene, and emphasize the aims of the program, in the event that an opinion that is expressed in class attacks a person's dignity or that actions that are suggested compromise the common good,"(MEERS, 2013 and 15).

As I mentioned in chapter 3, I will use Kelly's (1986) typology of professional postures as a way of organizing the teachers' views. What Kelly refers to as "neutral impartiality" is very close to the programs position. Here again is a synopsis of this typology.

Exclusive Neutrality	**Exclusive Partiality**
- Teachers should not introduce into the curriculum any topics that are controversial in the broader community. - Why? It is challenging to give a fair and impartial hearing to all points of view - Genuine classroom discussions of provocative values leads to volatile and under-predictability - Preserves the non-partisan or neutral status of the school. - Value Free Teaching	- It is the deliberate attempt to induce students to accept a preferable and particular position on a controversial issue through the means of consciously or unconsciously precluding an adequate presentation of competing points of views. - Two types of exclusive partiality: authoritative and subtle. - Authoritative: teachers assert or assume the "correct" point of view while competing views are ignored or dismissed. - Subtle: The teacher appears to allow genuine dialogue and dissent yet attempts to stack the deck for one side.
Neutral Impartiality (ERC Stance)	**Committed Impartiality**
- Teachers believe that students should be actively involved in discussion of controversial issues as part of their citizenship. - Teachers are impartial - giving a fair hearing and engaging in critical dialogue. Students should be able to consider all relevant positions on an issue. - Teachers should present their views under the cover of devil's advocate in the interest of impartiality. Here impartiality is a norm guiding teaching and discussion.	- Entails two beliefs: 1) Teachers should state their position rather than conceal; and 2) they should foster the pursuit of truth by ensuing competing perspectives receive a fair hearing through critical discourse. - Disclosure: Teacher discloses their views if they are clearly owned by the teachers and not disguised as devil's advocate. The view can be initiated or a response to a direct student inquiry and it may be passionate or understated. Disclosure also includes an understanding of the impact of timing and tone. - Committed Impartiality does not mean claiming superiority; otherwise it is propaganda. - Conveys personal witness: the power of personal modelling and integrity. Here a different kind of impartiality is the norm. -

Overall, the teachers expressed a range of perspectives, from what they see as the impracticality of the program's position to a hybrid of position which combines elements from

Kelly's last two perspectives. When faced with the concept of neutral impartiality, as prescribed in the program, some teachers agree in theory, but note that it is difficult to apply in practice. The teachers value impartiality but tend to prefer the posture of committed impartiality over neutral impartiality. During the group interview, one teacher in particular explains how he goes about making a decision about his professional posture.

> Well, yeah, because it all comes down to how you feel in terms of your own competency. You know, when I'm teaching younger grades I don't feel concern and I have no religious background. I mean I could be very mechanical, I suppose, in a certain way, or very factual and just kind of go through things. I can look that up and so on. But there's a sense in me that I'm not doing that justice, so I imagine that if I teach grade ten and grade 11 I have to do that, or if I was in a position to do that, one, I wouldn't be comfortable; two, some of the students know a lot more about the religions than I do, right, and so on, so put pressure on you. My view is that occasionally, if I miss-step or miss-say or whatever the case is, misrepresent something, now. Then again I'm not a teacher to hide the fact that I'm not an expert in something, so I will say well, I'm going to teach this, those of you who know this, live this religion, if I don't say something right please put your hand up and correct me. I've done that in the past, you know, because it's really super important that I represent it as, well, neutrally as possible, I suppose in that sense, or as factually as possible. So that's where my frustration or my fears would arise. (Evan)

Some teachers see the position of neutral impartiality as a potential hiding place for less experienced teachers. The position appears safer for these teachers. The participants with more

experience tend to lean towards committed impartiality, apparently because they feel more confident in their abilities, knowledge, and skills. Those participants who affirm that they are willing to share their own views, within reason, will do so depending on the competency, ethics or religious culture. Nonetheless, given their commitment to student learning, they agree that it is important not to fall into an authoritarian posture. In the focus group, one teacher clearly expresses that his choice to share depends on whether he is teaching ethics or religion.

> But you raise a really good point because what happens when it's you, your own opinions are positive or negative, right. Sometimes the more positive opinion you may have, you might want to share more easily, as opposed to a negative thing. You know, it really depends and sometimes there is a difference between when I'm teaching the ethics portion and I'm teaching the religious part, you know. That, there is a difference there. (Evan)

The teachers believe that being an impartial teacher is hard work. One participant argued that being neutral is "absurd" because it does not take into account the teacher's body language and non-verbal cues. However, others argue for a mixed approach, which, for them, requires a great deal of skill. The teachers agree that the question of the professional posture of teachers is relevant for teaching both ethics and religion. One participant is especially worried about accusations of indoctrination from parents.

When presented with the positions of neutral impartiality and committed impartiality the teachers interviewed had mixed views about the program's stance of neutrality. The quotes below express the participants' perspectives in the follow up interview. In the first two excerpts,

the participants refer to the practical impossibility of achieving neutrality. The third participant is adamantly opposed to neutrality, even in theory.

> I cannot be neutral. That's impossible. That is a myth of education…The problem with that viewpoint is that it assumes that we can teach from an unbiased perspective and that impossible. Your upbringing, your beliefs and so on, inform directly; not indirectly, but directly what you do in front of a class as a teacher. (Evan)

> Ben en théorie oui…Je pense qu'être 100% neutre, jamais donné ton opinion, je pense que c'est pratiquement impossible… Ils essaient de tout rendre neutre. Mais la réalité n'est pas toujours neutre…Je pense qu'être 100% neutre, jamais donné ton opinion, je pense que c'est pratiquement impossible. Même si tu ne dis pas ton opinion directement, tsé comme moi je suis pour ou contre ça. Y a des sujets que tu vas le dire peut-être, mais y en a d'autres que. (Sebastien)

> Neutrality is...I think it's hogwash. I think, I think to hide from the students who you are, is disingenuous and in some way… almost sort of dishonest. I think, my own approach is, I'm open with the students where I'm coming from, what my background is. I think that even if you don't say it, you give away…your values become clear to the students over the course of the year, whether you say it or not…And even in your like the subtle sayings, like your body language, the way you react to things that are said in class, gives it away… Another reason why I believe that the committed impartiality is like a lot better or more advantageous is that it actually allows you to model so your students, re their values or tolerance ahead of the course. You're saying listen, I am someone with an opinion in this life but that does not stop me from dialoguing with, with respecting others

> and seeking to understand others…And so to me if you take the impartial neutrality stance, you're foregoing that possibility of that sort of model…So I think again I think that's a strong pedagogical reason why I think the committed impartiality stance is a better one. (Robert)

> I think it is almost impossible to refrain from teaching with your own biases in mind. (Gaetano)

Some of the participants have reservations about neutrality because they feel it could undermine the way they connect to the students. One of the participants noted that the students directly ask for their point of view. Refusing to answer could sever the connection and relationship of trust between a teacher and student.

> You have to know your clientele and sometimes certain clientele that you have, depending on their age group as well, level, might be more influenced by you, for sure, because the kids do look to us for that value center, that principle center…I have to develop a relationship with those students. They have to be able to trust me that I know what I'm doing. And this why I take a stance of I am the teacher in the room. (Evan)

> I would say personally I'm neutral impartialist and I think the key to teaching well in any subject is that you have to have a connection with students with whatever they teach you about in school and we've all experienced that ourselves, right. So the interpersonal connection that you have with kids allows the kids to be more open in all these things in classes, no matter what subject… At the same time, when you do give your own opinion,

> the kids can therefore identify with that too, or that's somebody I know who has that experience. So it's like there's positives and cons on both side. (Chantal)

The participants believe that it is important to remain impartial and not coerce students. However, they do not agree that neutrality is necessarily the best or the only way to achieve this. They seem to agree that being neutral is good if it allows student to think for themselves, as the program suggests. They have doubts, however, about whether neutrality is possible in practice. As such, they tend to lean toward Kelly's position of committed impartiality. The idea of commitment speaks to their deep concern for student growth and learning.

Teacher Authority

Another angle to consider is the authority of the teacher. One participant points out that neutrality, no matter the type, is important in any classroom setting because of the inherent nature of the teacher-student relationship. Power-wise, students and teachers are not on an equal footing. The teacher as authority figure can intimidate students and make them hesitant to offer their opinions in class. This can be particularly true in the ERC program. The participants see the point of the program's preference for neutrality. However, they not believe that the authority of the teacher necessarily compromises the objectives of the program. The following passages gathered in the follow up discussion, speak to this tension.

> … kids do look to us for as a value center, that principle center. They see how we behave in the hallways, right. They listen to us talking, they talk amongst themselves and so on,

> we have a reputation… here's the thing, is that there are certain givens in the teaching and learning process. Look, I'm in a position of authority obviously, right.
>
> I'm in a position of authority. Why? Well, I'm an adult. I've earned my position in my job. I'm trained. I'm a professional. I'm a teacher. And I don't make apologies for that. I tend to, I come from a position of I know a lot about the world through my own personal perspective, of course, and it's not the perspective of my students. And I also acknowledge that…And so when I speak to them about my values I say, look, there are some bottom line things. As your teacher I have a certain job. As a student you have a certain job. So I'm very categorical in that sense… So when it comes to that kind of hierarchy idea I suppose, I don't have a problem with being in control or being an authority figure…as opposed to the whole recent phenomenon in education about being a facilitator… when I see indications that I need to step back from my position as a teacher…provide the space for them to explore their beliefs, their feelings on a matter and so on. And it's a tricky position sometimes…I am here to guide you and mentor you and facilitate your learning and so on. But I'm mostly here to establish your own guidelines in regards to your behavior. (Evan)

For the participants remaining professional does not necessarily imply a posture of neutrality. They believe that the key is becoming aware of your values and avoiding a heavy handed approach. For them, teachers who share their values provide models for reflection and discussion.

> Your upbringing, your beliefs and so on, inform directly; not indirectly, but directly what you do in front of a class as a teacher…That, that does not preclude professionalism

> though. Being aware of that process. Having that little check and balance in your head to make sure that you're not speaking in a way that will be influential to the point of where the child, as any student would, give you the answer that you expect so that they can get a good mark. (Evan)

> I believe that there is nothing wrong with admitting your own beliefs on an ethical issue so long as you clearly identify other possible points of view. It's almost as if you're modelling for your students how to properly formulate a strong opinion. (Gaetano)

As noted above, the teachers interviewed lean toward the position of committed impartiality. The common aspects of their approach include openness, showing students that there are multiple sides to an argument, and asking questions as opposed to providing answers. The teachers don't want to impose their views but they do want to be able to share their personal perspectives at their own discretion. However, as we see in the quotes below, this is a source of tension for the participants. They want to share their position but not at the expense of the students, or at the expense of a balanced approach where all positions are given a fair hearing… as in Kelly's position of committed impartiality.

> That's right, exactly, so how far you go with being as open with your opinions… ask directly and so on, often I find myself returning questions to them, you know. . . I think to give the kids permission to speak freely on their own behalf in regards to what they truly believe…kay, because it's always about the right answer for the kids. Because we come from this kind of market-based society where it's not the quality of the knowledge that you've gained but the mark that you've shown so you can get into college and

university and stuff like that. And to me that is diametrically opposed to what I'm doing as a teacher…My goal as a teacher is to provide knowledge to the child or give them the opportunity to explore knowledge to improve them as a person…And so when I speak to them about my values I say, look, there are some bottom line things. As your teacher I have a certain job. As a student you have a certain job…Now, that being said, I also believe that there, everybody has the right to a choice. Whether that choice is right or wrong, they have their right to their belief whether that belief is right or wrong. Okay. They have the right to determine their destiny. Whether they're right or wrong. It doesn't mean, it doesn't preclude a conversation. It doesn't preclude difference in opinion. Okay. That I have the right to my opinion and you have the absolute right to your opinion and so on. (Evan)

I try to challenge them and say like there's this side of things to this, and there's that side and there's that side, what do you guys think and let's try to look at…What is your view of this now? And they write down their view and think this is what I think. I think that this is right. That's wrong. These people are right or wrong whatever. And then afterwards they have to go back and say, well, has your view changed or why is it you thought that? Or what were your biases that you may not realize?...When I did the religion unit I had the kids watch sounds infantile but I think it was good. It was cartoons of different religious leaders, right? The story of Mohammad. The story of Jesus. The story of Krishna. And I asked the kids what is the person talking about? What are they trying to say? What's their message? What are they trying to say? (Chantal)

> When you introduce a controversial question and present all sides, more often than not your own opinion about the question or issue is obvious. I always make sure to emphasize that my position is not the only one. (Gaetano)

It is important to highlight two interesting findings from the interview and the focus group. One participant changed her perspective. Originally, the participant stated that she was in favor of neutral impartiality. The focus group discussion allowed her to see that, in actuality, she was also had leanings toward committed impartiality. She realized that there were times when she did share her own perspective and did not see the harm in doing so.

> I think I agree that you should have professional neutrality. I think whether it's for the ethics program or for something else, if I'm teaching history…I'm not going to say his or her point of view is great and this is the wrong way to do it. Yes. You should have neutrality. I think there's definitely occasions where you can share a story…I think now I'm probably a mix of the two, because it does depend on…Well, once I went to a Sikh wedding… I'm not saying it's good or it's bad, I'm just sharing I had the experience and it was lovely and whatever. (Chantal)

Another participant offered a different perspective on neutrality in the classroom. For this teacher, offering one's opinion depends on the sequencing of the lesson. Here being neutral requires professional judgment and pedagogical acuity. This teacher is thinking about how timing and context affects the lesson for the students.

> It also depends on where you're putting the opinion. Are you going to give it at the beginning? Are you giving it at the end and then they're left with your opinion to walk away with? But at the same time, maybe sometimes students ask as well what do you think or what are your views on this, and, you know, sometimes it's nice to state your opinion. But I think also it depends when you do it and how you go about doing it, and then keeping it to yourself. (Salome)

It is clear from these interview excerpts that the teachers recognize the value of neutrality as a professional posture. They understand what the ERC program is trying to achieve. However, they deviate from the program when the context justifies it. In the end, the professional posture of the teacher should always serve the best interest of students.

Religion and the Professional Posture of Teachers

Two of the respondents confessed that it is quite alluring to be neutral when they are faced with a topic or theme in the religion section that makes them uncertain of the material. They revert to the program's neutral impartiality as a posture of prudence, as a way of avoiding issues with parents or students. In the passages from the follow up interviews the participants express the issues they face.

> Sometimes the more positive opinion you may have, you might want to share more easily, as opposed to a negative thing…. I think it's a complex… and I think it is what you're teaching at that moment. (Evan)

> And I think the challenge of doing that in ERC in the religions course is indoctrination, right. There's a fine line… Fear of indoctrination or the fear of are the kids going to say something, cause they're going to say it because they know that's what I like and they want to please me, or is it really what they believe. So I think that's always a challenge to do. (Chantal)

> Il faut comprendre que quand on est pas spécialiste là-dedans, aller dans les détails des religions. Y a aussi un truc organisationnel, moi j'avais 4 cours de français et on m'avait mis éthique. On m'avait imposé éthique. Moi je l'ai fait par ce que je suis professionnel, mais c'était pas mon premier choix… Je veux simplement dire que je faisais quand même comme ils m'ont demandé. Ils m'ont demandé: est-ce que vous êtes catholique, j'ai dit oui, mais je suis pas catholique pratiquant, il faut quand même être honnête avec eux. Je me suis pas laissé influencer…on doit être neutre, mais il faut aussi utiliser son jugement professionnel. (Sebastien)

The other participants with more experience still favored committed impartiality when it comes to teaching about religion. One participant sees value in sharing his point of view on the beauty of religion. Another participant states that teaching about religion is both enjoyable (hence has a personal dimension) and objective. In this passage the teacher believes that it is important to have a personal connection to the material while remaining objective about the content.

> I put it right out front that I, you know, have certainly leanings towards Buddhism but that I see beauty in all the world's religious traditions. And I say to them straight out, you know, my job here is not, I'm not trying to convert you to one thing or another, but could we talk about what we're doing this year… Yeah, I can be a Buddhist and think that Christians are really cool people, with very interesting beliefs, and the same thing, And I tell them right away is what we're doing this year is learning about the diversity. (Robert)

> I specifically enjoy exploring the similarities between different belief systems and rites of passage. It helps the student to relate to and understand someone else's religion… I try to address the religion component of the program with complete objectivity. I always assign a presentation where a group is assigned a specific religion (or alternative faith) and presents their findings as if they're explaining the religion to extraterrestrial life. In doing this, the class is able to remain completely objective and often able to see the similarities among faiths after every group has presented. (Gaetano)

> I like the program and find the content fascinating… I have gotten used to the program over the years and I enjoy teaching it… I wanted to say two things. I really like the material and I think the teachers were more comfortable with the material and have a passion for it the kids will pick up on your enthusiasm or your expertise… (Salome)

I end this theme and chapter with a comment seen earlier, which speaks well to the teachers' sense of commitment to the goals of the ERC program.

> I enjoy it for the same reason why I enjoy teaching every class I do is that it's important. I think that what we're doing is actually working towards creating a more tolerant and open society and so, for that reason, which isn't just having them like learn something out of a textbook, for the sake of the provincial curriculum or something like that, it's work that will actually make our society a better place. (Robert)

Chapter Six Summary

In Chapter 6, I presented the third and fourth themes: 3) The Need for Professional Development and 4) The Professional Posture of teachers. The teachers interviewed value the program. They agree with its objectives and enjoy teaching it. They are especially partial to the religion competency. At the same time, they feel ill prepared to teach the religion component of the ERC course. The teachers are very critical of the way in which they have been left to fend for themselves, with almost no training or pedagogical support.

The second theme examines the complexities and tensions around the professional posture of teachers. The teachers understand the program's preference for neutrality. Some abide by this posture as a safety net, as a way to avoid negative reactions from students and parents. Less experienced teachers are more inclined to take this position. However, for the most part, the teachers interviewed find the posture of neutrality impractical. Some teachers have a natural affinity with what Kelly refers to as the posture of committed impartiality. Still others suggest that the appropriate posture will depend on the context. Overall, this theme underscores the importance and complexity of issues around professional posture. Left to themselves, teachers negotiate their own stances in light of their own beliefs and their own sense

of what it means to be professional. The interviews and discussion gave them, perhaps for the first time, an opportunity to discuss these issues and to reflect on their own positions.

Chapter Seven: Analysis and Discussion of the Findings

In this chapter, I present a discussion and analysis of the findings. I construct an account the challenges facing teachers from the categories and themes identified. I also include my own perspective and experiences as an ERC secondary school teacher and as a Department Head for ERC. The discussion will focus primarily on teachers' commitment to the program, their frustrations, what I refer to as the "illusion" that there is such a thing as an ERC teacher, the vital need for professional development, and, lastly, my own experience and reflection on the question of neutrality and professional postures of teachers.

Discussion of the Findings

This study sought to examine the challenges presented by the Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program, and particularly the religion component, for secondary school teachers. The study was situated in the Montreal region. It was designed to investigate and answer the following questions: 1) how do teachers understand their role and responsibilities as teachers of religion in secondary public schools?; 2) what challenges does teaching the religion competency pose for the secondary school ERC teachers?; 3) how do teachers view the program's commitment to neutral teaching as the preferred professional posture?; and 4) what types of professional support would assist teachers in addressing the challenges they face?

Teachers' Perspectives on the Role and Value of the Program

The findings clearly indicate that all the teachers interviewed positively embrace the ERC program. Unlike the elementary school teachers surveyed in another study (Morris, Bouchard, De Silva, 2011c), the teachers in this study are especially positive and enthusiastic about the religion component of the program. They view this component as a way to prepare Quebec students for living in a diverse world. At the same time, these teachers are frustrated by the absence of a concrete commitment to the program, on the part of both the Ministry of Education and School Boards. They abhor the fact that this program is often a filler course and, as such, assigned to teachers who have no background, or even worse, no interest in the program. In spite of being enthusiastic about the program, they also wish the Ministry and School boards would provide teacher formation, particularly on the religion component so that they can feel more confident in their teaching. This findings bear out concerns expressed in the scholarly literature over the lack professional training offered during the expedited implementation of the program (Bouchard, Haeck, Plante, Venditti, 2016). It is particularly striking, and even disconcerting, to see that committed and passionate teachers feel abandoned by the institutional authorities that should support them. It is as if these authorities have offloaded their responsibility for the success of the program entirely onto the shoulder of teachers.

In my positions as a secondary school ERC teacher and Head of Department for the ERC program at my school, I more than identify with the frustrations of teachers. It is maddening to see how most teachers are "selected" to teach a course with little support and guidance. Estivalèzes' (2016) contends that teachers are specialists in theory. However, the reality is as I have witnessed that often teachers of other subjects find themselves having to teach the course. Furthermore, I too have concerns about the way teachers are selected. And, I see the problem from a different angle. As the Head of Department, one of the impediments is the limited input I

have in the selection of teachers. I see teachers who are clearly better suited for the ERC program. Those teachers, however, cannot be assigned the course because managerial imperatives take precedence. I do not place the blame the administration because, in most cases, they are doing their best to juggle a number of complicated administrative decisions. However, as someone who is committed to ERC, it is very frustrated to see such wasted opportunities. Teachers are deprived of the opportunity to teach an area they value, and students are deprived of highly motivated teachers who could provide meaningful learning experiences for them. Seen from the perspective of the wider society, the predominance of managerial imperatives undermines the goal of learning to live together in a diverse society.

Given this situation, I am often in a position of unpleasantness with some of the teachers who are clearly unhappy and irritated with having to teach ERC. Being in this position, I often find myself reverting to Kelly's (1986) posture of neutral impartiality. When the teacher is less than happy to teach ERC, as the Head of Department I am more than hesitant to offer my opinion about the situation. Like the teachers in the study, I seek the safe place of neutrality as a way of not having to deal with my conflicting loyalties and commitments. I remain loyal to the administrators because I recognize their efforts and I see that they value the course. They also solicit my input. At same time, I want to remain loyal to my teacher colleagues because I recognize their concerns and I am committed to the program. So I hesitate to take sides. In this case, the posture of neutrality is my attempt to maintain a professional and amicable relationship with both teachers and administrators.

It is ironic that the ERC program continues to be marginalized in schools given recent court battles. Since 2008, the Quebec government has gone through a number of court challenges from both parents and, more recently, with Loyola High School. In 2015, after a six-

year battle, seven years after the course's implementation, Loyola High School won the right to teach their version of the ERC course. The MEERS' commitment to the lengthy court battles seems to signal the importance of the program. However, in reality the program has been without any investment since 2009. It is ironic to see that MEERS does not hesitate to take on these costly court battles, yet it does not invest the same time and financial resources needed for the success of the program.

The Illusion of the ERC Teacher

One of the concerns expressed in the ERC academic literature relates to the rapid implementation phase and how this exerted a great deal of pressure on teachers. In this study, the burden placed on teachers involves the pressure of planning for a secondary subject, one that is outside the teacher's subject specialty. In the Montreal region, specifically in the English school boards, the specialized ERC secondary teacher is almost non-existent. An ERC teacher is someone who teaches only secondary ERC. This is a teacher, like myself, who has background in ethics and religion. Undoubtedly, the rarity of the specialized ERC teacher is one of the major challenges to the successful implementation of the ERC program. Cherblanc (2011) adds another concern – the quality of teaching and in turn the quality of instructions received by the students. He argues that the issues with specialized ERC teachers versus a non-specialized teacher could mean that the program is being taught vastly different across the province and deviant from the aim and curriculum of the program. In the findings we see this as a major concern for one of the participants. For Cherblanc, teachers are not automatically ERC specialist

if they taught the old Moral Education program. This is especially a problem when the implementation period is very short.

Currently, I am aware of handful teachers who are full-time ERC teachers. This situation begs the question as to why such an important course, a course the Ministry of Education is willing to go to court over, has so few specialists trained specifically for the program. Is this situation the consequence of Ministerial guidelines, requirements or financial investments in teacher education programs? To what extent are universities committed to the creation of teacher education programs for ERC? Does this situation exist because the few hours attributed to ERC renders the specialty unattractive to future teachers?

It's helpful to look at this situation through my auto ethnographical lens, as both researcher and member of the group culture. The findings of this study suggest that the community of ERC teachers is both fragmented and disjointed. It is even difficult to identify an actual group, even more so to identify what binds it. This difficulty is most likely the result of the marginalization of the subject, the absence of a subject specialty and the fact that teachers are left to fend for themselves. If there is a binding element for the teachers interviewed, something that could resemble a community of ERC teachers, it is their commitment and enthusiasm for the subject and their shared concern for students.

Moreover, the teachers all share the experience of working in the margins. This is probably one reason why they were so eager to participate in the study, why they cherished the opportunity to voice their concerns, and why they especially enjoyed the group discussion. I would also add that these teachers are all bound by their shared experience of fear, fear of having to teach a subject that is not their specialty, and this with limited resources and support, and in a context where they perceive themselves to be susceptible to parental attacks. I clearly recognize

these concerns. The ERC program is often seen as the "parental sweet spot" due to its sensitive content and the history of public legal challenges brought forth by parents. Because of the sensitive nature of the topics, ERC teachers are more vulnerable and more at risk than teachers in other subjects. This is exacerbated by the fact that they may not have the knowledge required for the program, and by the absence of adequate resources. ERC is the course where parents are more than likely to question, debate, or criticize teachers. The teachers in the study, however, work hard to overcome these challenges.

As an ERC teacher and department head, the problems discussed above challenge me to achieve three interrelated goals: 1) attempt to teach my own classes as effectively as possible; 2) support other teachers in their efforts to teach the program well; and 3) work at reducing the anxiety of my colleagues. The void left by ineffective or absent resources puts me in a position of having to create resources specifically for non-specialized teachers. I need to create resources that are accessible, clear, and exciting for the teachers and their students. However, it is especially challenging to provide in-serve training and support to teachers who view and teach the program with disdain, and, as a result, do not use the resources available in the class. Although this situation is especially frustrating, I understand the lack of enthusiasm for ERC when the course is a secondary or additional subject, and hence not a priority. It is an illusion to think that because the course is required, and because it is taught on a daily basis, that the ERC program will necessarily be taught by competent well prepared teachers.

The Urgent Need for Professional Development

The pressing need for professional development was clearly identified by all the participants. Three of the participants interviewed felt overwhelmingly ill-equipped to teach the program, a state of affairs that is clearly one of the major roadblocks for the success of the program. As noted previously, the Ministry offered professional development workshops in the initial implementation phase. Over a two-year period, some Quebec elementary and secondary school teachers were provided with professional development that included an array of knowledge and pedagogical approaches in the form of McGill workshops and courses, visits to holy places, and conferences. These selected teachers were to train other teachers. Other teachers were offered professional development ranging from practical in-class teaching, school board workshops spanning over twelve hours, a McGill initiated workshop to in-school training from a colleague. However, since then the Ministry of Education has failed to offer any professional development (Bouchard, Haeck, Plante, Venditti, 2016). For the Ministry this program was to mark a turning point in the history of Quebec education. As was seen above, Estivalèzes (2016) states that the program represented an important paradigm shift. Yet, in its seventh year of implementation, the Ministry still refuses to take responsibility for teacher formation. This is another chapter in the ongoing paradox of the ERC program.

The Religion Component

One of the aims of this study is to specifically uncover how teachers fair with the religion component of the course. The findings indicate that the absence of professional academic formation contributes to the fear of teaching about religion. As Bouchard and her colleagues observe, this fear is exacerbated by the fact that the program was implemented in controversy

and the religion component continues to raises strong concerns and resistance from the teachers and university teacher educators (Bouchard, Haeck, Plante, Venditti, 2016).

In my view teachers do not necessarily need a Master's degree in theology or even, as one participant suggested, a Bachelor in Religious Studies. However, they do need at least elemental professional training given the demands of the program on teachers' knowledge. The ERC program describes teaching about religion in the following way: "Instruction in religious culture promotes an understanding of the main components of religions that is built on the exploration of the sociocultural contexts in which they take root and continue to develop. Sacred texts, beliefs, teachings, rituals, ceremonies, rules of conduct, places of worship, works of art, practices, institutions, and types of organization are some of the aspects on which it focuses" (MEERS, 2013, p. 461). ERC teachers have a responsibility to engage with specialized knowledge. They must teach about religious traditions and focus on the religious heritage of Quebec. And they must do this by situating religion in its cultural context. In the scholarly literature on the ERC program several authors emphasize that teachers have the demanding task of conveying the theoretical and cultural knowledge required to understand the various religious representations in Quebec, and this in order to promote togetherness (Gravel, 2015). In the religious education literature, Moore (2007) argues that religion cannot be studied effectively without addressing its political and cultural contexts. This adds another layer to teacher preparation. It is unrealistic to expect that teachers will achieve this kind of religious literacy competency on their own.

And even though teachers yearn for more support, the still enjoy teaching about religion. The participants agree that the religion competency is particularly important. However, considering the importance of learning to live together in a diverse world, and the role religious

knowledge can play in this process, they are frustrated by the lack of pedagogical support. They do their best to find first-rate material to assist them with the religious content. At the same time, however, they all recognize that teaching the religious content requires a great deal of background in the area. In addition, they believe that teachers need to understand what is most appropriate pedagogically for different age levels. In other words, good professional intentions are vital but insufficient.

As was seen above, the teachers consider the religion component important. They enjoy teaching it. However, at times they shy away from teaching about religion. This appears contradictory. However, seen holistically the findings suggest that this is not a contradiction. Teachers shy away at times because they feel that they are not in a position to do the job they need to do or would like to do. In other words, they prefer to avoid it rather than do a bad job. Again, this is an indication of professionalism, of their commitment and respect for the subject matter and the students.

The Ministry is missing the point on this matter. The most difficult part of educational reform is to get the support or interest of teachers for the new programs. The MEERS and, indirectly, school boards and schools, have created a situation where the teachers are underprepared and overworked. As a result, students are missing out on the full potential of the ERC program. Not only are teachers being asked to go above and beyond in a subject that is not their specialty, they are also being asked to learn a specialized knowledge. As such, there are times when some teachers reduce their instruction to the transmission mere comparative facts, as opposed to exploring the rich history of religious diversity.

The Professional Posture of Teachers and the Question of Neutrality

As was seen in chapter one, the ERC program's position on the professional posture of teachers is one of the most discussed and debated aspects of the program in the scholarly literature. Some argue that teacher neutrality is an appropriate goal given the objectives of the program. Others argue that teachers need to be more fully engaged if students are to perceive their teachers as authentic (Morris, 2011, b). In this study I used Kelly's (1986) typology of professional postures as a heuristic. I found that most teachers argue against the posture of "neutral impartiality." The teachers really don't like the idea of being neutral. They suggest that neutrality is neither practical nor possible. They react much more positively to what Kelly describes as the posture of "committed impartiality." However, the findings show that teacher stances are not fixed. Their posture tends to be circumstantial. In deciding which posture to adopt, they factor in a number of variables, such as the nature of the topic, their own level of knowledge, how they feel about that topic and the classroom dynamics at work in a given discussion. Bouchard's (2015) would not be surprised by this finding. She argues that given the limited implementation time, teachers are prudent and will opt to maintain a discreet stance. As we see one participant noted that he would rather avoid a topic entirely if he does not feel comfortable addressing it in class. This applies especially to the teaching of religion. Some teachers emphasize that when faced with highly controversial or sensitive topics, they do not "stick" with one posture. They choose the posture that best suits the situation.

Gagnon (2012) would support teachers choosing their stance. For him, one's professional stance depends on the way in which teachers present their ideas. One of the teachers who favor committed impartiality emphasized that it is important to know when to divulge one's point of view in the class. When pressed, even the teacher who sees neutrality as

"hogwash" recognizes that the tensions that pull them in different directions are not always so straightforward. These tensions are apparent in teaching ethics and religion.

The findings on the professional posture of teachers have important implications for teacher training. Teachers need opportunities to engage with these kinds of issues in a formal training context. Bouchard (2015) points out that if teachers are might change their stance on neutrality if they have time to self-reflect, to think about their ideas and their beliefs. The complexity of the issues became apparent for the participants as they engaged in conversations with their colleagues. The research gave the teachers the space to explore salient ideas and tensions.

The teachers' focus on timing and context struck a particular chord with me. In fact, it pushed me to reconsider my own position on the appropriate professional posture. Prior to the interviews, I fully subscribed to Kelly's (1986) position of committed impartiality. This position, where the teacher does not shy away from sharing his or her own positions with the students, is the one that I utilize most in my teaching. Subsequent to these interviews, I realized that my positions are not always so clear cut. I began to see that it is possible to move between positions, depending on what I perceive to be best for my students, and depending on the goals of the lesson. In what follows I describe a teaching situation to illustrate this. The context was an ERC lesson on social justice.

Over a year ago, Quebec's political climate was intense as a debate ensued over the Charter of Values, bill 60. The Charter of Values was a failed bill that proposed prohibiting public sector employees from wearing or displaying "conspicuous" religious symbols (Publication of Quebec, 2009). Bill 60 infuriated me. I was deeply offended by the proposal of this bill. Personally, I saw this bill as an attack on my freedom of expression, my religion, and

my identity as a Quebecer and Canadian. The prospect that a so-called democratic government proposes a law that infringes and restricts on my rights and the rights of others infuriated me.

Bill 60 also further irritated me because of its judgments of teachers. The bill insinuated that as a religious teacher will not be able to remain professional in his or her teaching. The Bill seemed to suggest that a teacher who wears a cross or a hijab is more likely to proselytize. I chose to discuss the Charter in the theme of Justice. At my current school, the teachers took a public stand against the Charter. I realized, however, that as a teacher my role was different. In this role I have a responsibility to present fair and balanced perspectives on the issue raised by the Charter. In the end, I choose, uncharacteristically, to remain neutral. This posture was a challenge since my position was visible to the students. Some would argue that following Kelly's reasoning I could still take the posture of committed impartiality as long as I encouraged critical dialogue and allowed students to challenge my position. However, I was so incensed and emotionally invested in the issues that I could not see how I could avoid steering the students in my direction. My biases may have been evident in my body language. However, in hindsight I see how a more detached posture of neutrality allowed me to step back and give the students the space to think for themselves and explore all sides of the argument. At the time, it did not occur to me that I was adopting the position of neutral impartiality, the position favored by the ERC program. However, on some level, I was conscious of the fact that I could not let my point of view color the entire discussion. In the end, I sought the position that was what was best for my students. When I look back to this particular class I realize that I tend to adopt more of a hybrid posture.

Another challenge within the same theme of Justice came with the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter campaign. This campaign was created in 2012 after the death of Trayvon

Martin and the acquittal of George Zimmerman. After a series of shootings of African-American youths, the movement organized itself as a call to action and as a response to the racism that permeates American society. This issue is another topic that disturbed me on a personal level as a member of the Afro-Canadian community. Yet, I recognized the importance of the topic and a need for discussion in the classroom. The teaching guidelines for the Justice theme calls for the teacher to assist students in exploring and examining the number of ways that society looks and applies justice. Furthermore, the ERC program connects to the wider global issues that are currently debated in our society.

The #BlackLivesMatter campaign was clearly a significant social justice issue. It raised legitimate concerns relevant for an ERC class. Given my personal feelings about the topic, I decided not to formally reveal where I stood on the issues. I took a step back from the conversation and instead allowed my students to navigate these issues without my influence. I realized that my position would appear evident as an Afro-Indo-Canadian teacher. I knew that there would be a presumption about how I might feel about the situation. However, in removing myself from the conversation, the students were given the space they needed to think and debate. Even though I am more naturally inclined to the posture of "committed impartiality," I once again adopted a more detached posture in this case because I believed that this would be best for student learning.

In another ERC Cycle II theme on *Religious Experience*, I planned lessons that focused on people and their religious narratives. In this lesson I made a conscious decision to not discuss any topics revolving around *Daesh*[12] or ISIS. The choice to exclude this particular subject

[12] In a recent article, it discusses the term *Daesh* as oppose to ISIS. It is acronym for the Arabic phrase al-Dawla al Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). Essentially, it's another word for ISIS - but apparently one that ISIS militants do not favour. They find it offensive since it is similar to the Arabic words 'Daes', 'one who crushes something underfoot' and 'Dahes', translated as 'one who sows

echoes Kelly's (1986) position of "exclusive neutrality", wherein the teacher decides not to introduce into the curriculum any topic that is controversial in the broader community.

Evidently, any discourse on *Daesh* would be contentious. In this case, I was especially concerned about my own personal feelings. The rise of *Daesh* illicits all kinds of emotions. It assaults, in the most radical and primal way possible, my commitment to promoting harmony between religions. It makes me particularly angry to see how it uses religion as an ideological force to conquer and divide. It is also disconcerting to see how it fuels negative portrayals of Islam in the West. Ideally, in a lesson on *Daesh*, I would want to examine issues not normally addressed in the media. I don't think it's enough to just say that Daesh is bad and then go on to the next topic. I would want to examine how Daesh came to be and why it has so many supporters. However, I felt that I could not engage in such a detached academic examination for the lesson. I was too caught up in my own feelings. I therefore removed it from my list of possible topics until I was able to navigate my way through the many feelings I was experiencing.

As I look back to this particular situation I don't think I just gave up on the topic for my own sake. It was a decision motivated by my commitment to student learning. Warnock (1996) might argue that I adopted a posture of neutrality to avoid discomfort, with the effect that I did a disservice to my students. Although I agree that this is often the case, I don't think it applies to all situations. In my view, teachers must be mindful of how their emotions affect their teaching. At times, strong emotions can ignite fire and passion into a class discussion and in the process contribute to deep learning. This is Kelly's posture of committed impartiality. At other times, the emotional attachments create biases that can undermine the objectives of the lesson. This is

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discord'. For more information on obtaining material refer to http://www. mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/what-daesh-mean-isis-threatens-6841468.

one of the primary concerns in the neutral impartiality posture. I've come to realize that good teaching involves knowing when it's time to subjectively engage with the topic and when it's time to stay detached. At times, it may even be appropriate to withdraw altogether.

On the issue of terrorism it is important to emphasize that ERC teachers carry an unusual burden. Whenever there is a terrorist attack somewhere in the world it is the ERC teacher who is called to explain what happened. As the specialist ERC teacher in my school I am the one who is called to explain terrorists' identification with religion, in particular the identification with Islam. Here, as an ERC teacher, I have the complex task of unpacking stereotypes and generalization, attenuating fears, and of situating terrorist movements in their historical, social and political contexts. Not only does this require a great deal of knowledge, it is a huge social responsibility. It is ultimately an unfair burden because the responsibility tends to fall mostly on the shoulders of the ERC teacher. Given the importance of this educational and social responsibility, and given the burden it creates for ERC teachers, it is even more disconcerting to see how ERC teachers are not provided with the professional development support they need.

Returning to the question of professional posture, I would also add that questions around one's personal identity can be especially challenging. During a lesson on religion doctrines, and the controversies over these doctrines, a student asked me which religion I practice. Usually, I answer student questions without thinking. But in this case I was surprised to see how much I hesitated before answering the question. I wasn't sure how to answer. Should I simply explain that I am a child of two faiths, Christianity and Islam? I did not want to create a negative bias through my disclosure. I especially did not want to communicate the idea that one must abide by a particular faith to be a good person. I did not want to alienate or marginalize any of the students in the class. At the same time, I knew that some students in the class were religious.

My disclosure could provide a counterpoint to the negative portrayal of religion in the media. I decided not to evade the question. I chose to be a "personal witness" and "collegial mentor" as Kelly describes in the position of committed impartiality. The student's question gave me an opportunity to be both committed and impartial. I emphasized that my religious practice was not superior to others, but that there is beauty and value in religious practice and interfaith dialogue.

I went on to tell the students that I honor my parents, and attend both the mosque and church. I shared with them the story of my baptism. At this point, as a teacher, I believe that my sharing was helping them to see the internal dialogue that religions have with each other. I showed them that religion is not stagnant but rather organic. I explained that I was baptized in a Protestant church but that an imam was present at my baptism. An Iman for most Muslims is a worship leader of a mosque. The Imam, along with my father, whispered the *Adhaan*, the Muslim call to prayer. Usually, this is done at the birth of the baby and is the first words a newborn Muslim baby hears. In my case, it was done twice, since when I was born my father whispered the prayer into my right ear. However, at my baptism, the adhaan was whispered a second time as the Reverend baptized me with water in the Holy Spirit. The students seemed genuinely interested in the story and asked a number of questions. This experience allowed to me to see how a more committed and engaged stance can contribute to learning as long as teachers work hard to create a safe and open space for all their students.

The research literature shows a similar dilemma for teachers. In her interviews with ERC teachers in the Francophone sector, Gravel (2015) discovered that there is an additional element that circumvents neutral impartiality, namely the importance of the student-teacher relationship. A number of participants interviewed contend that a posture of neutrality can have a negative impact on the realness of their relationships with students. The teachers in this study asserted

that their primary goal is to help nurture students in self-development and as they make educational choices. They believe that the program's posture of neutrality removes an element of personal engagement on the part of the teacher that contributes to this process.

As was seen above, Warnock (1996) argues against the posture of neutrality because, in her view, it does a disservice to students. The teachers in my study tend to agree with this view. My own experience, as seen above, also highlights that a more committed and engaged posture can meet the goals of the program, as long as teachers keep their students' best interest in mind. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the findings of my study show that the professional posture of teachers is not necessarily something that is fixed. It can change with respect to such things as time, place, subject matter, and the level of teacher comfort with the subject matter.

Chapter Seven Summary

In Chapter 7, I presented an analysis of the participants' views on the ERC program. The teachers in this study are especially positive and enthusiastic about the religion component of the program. They view this component as a way to prepare Quebec students for living in a diverse world. I also discussed the absence of pedagogical training and how affects the teaching about religion. My own experience underscores the tension between managerial imperatives and pedagogical needs. In the discussion on professional postures I examined how the issue requires a great deal of nuancing. My own experience teaching ERC shows how a teacher committed to one posture can resort to another posture depending on context and circumstance. In the end, I

note that the difficulty of navigating through the complexities of different professional postures should be a priority in teacher formation, along with academic and pedagogical training.

Conclusion: Overview and Implications

Overview

In the first half of chapter one, I situated the ERC program in its social and historical context. The ERC program is the result of a long process that began with the Quiet Revolution. The program clearly did arise from a vacuum. In the second half I drew out the main concerns about the ERC program found in the scholarly literature. This literature shows that scholars are primarily concerned about the religion competency, the expedited implementation of the program, and the ERC program's preference for neutral teaching. In Chapter Two, I established a theoretical framework for my research to provide further justification for the research. Moore's concept of religious literacy on her focus on the cultural study of religion has close affinities with the program. I used the ERC scholarly literature, Moore's cultural approach, and Kelly's typology of professional postures to provide a conceptual lens through which to examine the findings. I drew upon this literature in order to better understand the relationship between professional development, content development, and the current experiences of teachers.

In Chapter Three, I provided an overview of the methodology used to conduct this study, namely phenomenology and auto ethnography. I then described the methods of thematic analysis used to organize the data (chapter four). In Chapter Five, I presented two of the four emerging themes: the systemic issues of the ERC program and pedagogical resilience and support. In Chapter Six, I presented the other two emerging themes: professional development and the question of neutrality. Finally, in Chapter 7, I discussed and analyzed the themes in light of the relevant literature and in light of my own experience as an ERC teacher. This self-reflection represents the essential auto ethnographic dimension of thesis. Here I focus on some

of the challenges faced by ERC teachers, challenges that were not developed in the interviews. I considered, for example, how an ERC teacher navigates through different professional postures when discussing highly controversial subjects.

Implications

It is clear from this research that the two recurring challenges are time and training. Cherblanc (2011) and Bouchard (2015) point out the limited and inadequate training time set aside for teachers. If I were asked to develop a model of teacher formation that takes into account the teaching contexts described above, I would look to Moore's (2014) model of professional development. Moore's cultural studies approach proposes atypical training for both pre- and in-service teachers that includes learning from peers, in the model of expert-peer training. This is a model of professional development that can reduce the isolation of teachers by offering courses that are designed, developed, and taught by teachers and facilitators. This approach could be particularly effective for the kind of teachers interviewed in this study, that is, teachers who are highly motivated but long to strengthen their academic formation. These teachers are already drawing from other teachers as a survival mechanism. An approach centered on collaborative ventures could also reinforce and sustain their commitment to the program and help to foster a community of ERC teachers. For teachers who are not ERC specialists, Moore's model could also be helpful because it encourages teachers to draw on their primary subject as an access point for the teaching about religion. Drawing upon both their primary subject and on the resources of their colleagues could go a long way in reducing their uneasiness with the program.

The question on the professional posture of teachers generated a great deal of reflection. Although the academic literature reflects a common concern about this issue, I did not expect the extent to which the teacher participants would be engaged. Estivalèzes (2016) supports the idea that teachers ought to be talking about this issue. In particular, she believes that debates around the professional stance of ERC teachers must take place. These conversations have to take place in the context of a broader discussion about the freedom of conscious on one hand and on the other the freedom of religion. Estivalèzes argues that both are different yet equal. I did not expect that the issues raised by the teachers would have a significant impact on my own teaching. The interviews generated extensive self-reflection. This is an unexpected finding of the study. The professional posture teachers should adopt for ERC is not so cut and dry. The complexity of teaching highly sensitive and controversial requires a great deal of nuancing. The implication here is that teachers clearly need in-service formation that helps them navigate through these nuances and complexities. Ideally professional development for ERC teachers should incorporate three aspects: 1) content; 2) pedagogical approaches; and 3) training on professional postures.

The findings clearly indicate that ERC teachers are in need of ongoing professional development. It is disconcerting to see that highly motivated and dedicated teachers are left to figure out how to teach the program on their own. This is clearly not a recipe for success. The kind of complex and multi-layered knowledge required to teach religion from a cultural perspective cannot be found in an encyclopedia of religion. Nor can it be acquired in a two hour workshop. Moreover, the findings indicate the professional formation for ERC teachers needs to incorporate an element of self-reflection. Educators need to unpack and evaluate their personal beliefs. As Moore (2007) points out, teachers must be able to recognize their own assumptions.

This is especially important for teachers who may have preconceived or stereotypical notions about religion. This is one way in which teachers become religiously literate.

The Ministry of Education needs to take responsibility for teacher formation. It is difficult to reconcile the Ministry's willingness to go to court over the ERC program with its total disengagement from the process of professional development. If the program constitutes an important turning point in Quebec education, and if ERC teachers are expected to contribute to the larger goal of an education for co-existence in an increasingly pluralistic society, than to abdicate the responsibly to adequately prepare teachers is a violation of the moral contract between the Ministry and teachers. It represents nothing less than moral failure. Universities also need to take responsibility for in-service teacher education. At my current university, the pre-service training for ERC is minimal. In the undergraduate program, students in the elementary education program are required to take only one course in religion. The students in the secondary program, where teachers are expected to be subject area specialists, must take seven three credit courses (21 credits) out of 120 credits over a four-year program. Students applying for a Master of Teaching and Learning can only take minor in ERC minor. This minor requires only one course in religion. Suffice to say, this is far too little. It is no wonder that Morris (2011a) sees teacher formation as the Achilles Heel of the program.

School boards also have a responsibility in this process. Although administrators are often strapped by managerial constraints, to actively petition the Ministry for more support, both in terms of human and financial resources, would go a long way in recognizing the value of the ERC program and in affirming the value of the teachers who are assigned to teach it. Policy that supports teacher efforts benefits all stakeholders. This would give the ERC program a chance for success. Without a shared engagement to professional development on the part of the Ministry,

school boards and universities, it is difficult to imagine how the program can succeed in achieving its goals. The pressure presently placed on teachers is difficult to sustain in the long haul. Minimally, it is vital that policy recognize the need for a formal qualification attesting that teachers are adequately prepared to teach the program.

Looking toward the future, I would like to see those committed to ERC set up a pilot program in English universities that would be entirely dedicated to the formal qualification of ERC teachers. Setting up such a pilot program would benefit pre-service and in-service teachers. I also envision a researcher project where academics work cooperatively across groups such as community members, teachers, parents, and students. This project could work at forging international research alliances that could provide exposure to model schools in other countries. For example, countries like the Netherlands and England have successfully implemented effective models of religious education. Knowledge of these programs could guide Quebec policy.

Limitations and Benefits

While this study highlights important findings regarding how secondary school teachers are handling the ERC program, certain limitations must be noted.

Firstly, the study was conducted using two English school boards in the Montreal region. These schools were selected because they represent the majority of the Anglophones schools. However, the use of two school boards in Montreal does represent a limitation. It would be helpful to compare the findings to rural areas and to Francophone school boards. At the same time, there was a clear benefit and rationale for focusing only on Anglophone schools. Although

using both Francophone and Anglophone school boards could have produced additional and relevant data, the current literature shows that very little research has been done on any secondary school ERC teachers. It is very likely that these other avenues of research will be explored in future studies.

A second limitation is that the participants in the dissertation research included colleagues that I work with and oversee as Head of Department. In other words, the answers and data may have differed if the study focused on different schools and different participants. Since the respondent pool and participants were limited, a larger sample including less experienced ERC teachers, students, and/or parents and administrators, could have provided additional insights into the overall experience of teaching the religion component of the ERC program. At the same time, there was a benefit in focusing on experienced teachers. The fact that motivated and committed teachers feel increasingly embittered by the absence of institutional and pedagogical support accentuates the urgency of enacting teacher formation strategies. The fact that the interviewees were colleagues created a space where they clearly felt free to express themselves.

Some might see an additional limitation regarding the data collection process. The information obtained during the individual interviews and the focus groups largely relied on what the interviewee was willing to share. The nature of the information gathered was therefore limited to the perspective and lived experience of these particular teachers. It must be noted, however, that this is not necessarily a limitation in the framework of qualitative inquiry where the lived experience of teachers is vital to gaining a better understanding of experiences examined. It also important to note the teachers interviewed, prior to my study, were not given opportunities to discuss, let alone think, about their experience with the ERC program. It is my

hope that my research prompted them to think about the program and about how they can improve their own teaching. The knowledge gained in this study would be useful as a template for future research and to help improve professional development for teachers. I am hopeful that the knowledge presented and gained from the interviews will prove useful to curriculum makers, ministerial and administrative authorities, and teacher educators.

Final Thoughts

I close this study with the same quote I ended my acknowledgements with, a quote from the 13th century Sufi Mystic, Rumi:

"Respond to every call that excites your spirit. "

It is my contention that the ERC program can help teachers prevent intolerance from taking hold in the next generation. It seems timely that the induction of the ERC program in 2008 follows the rise of Islamophobia and the recurring displacement of people. In this light, the ERC program provides an opportunity to build on the open-mindedness of young people and ensure that their minds and our minds remain open. As we teachers face our students, we also face a time of social media, religious ignorance, and misinformation. We are called upon not only to teach the ERC course material, but also to help students construct their personal, social, and political realities that will allow them to become full, functioning, and valuable citizens, citizens who can and do make a difference in the world. The research conducted for this study was not merely an academic exercise. It was a call to enhance the lives of teachers and students, both of whom share the challenge of living peacefully in a complex world.

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APPENDIX A: Recruitment Letter

McGill University

Title of Research: The challenges of the religion component for secondary school ERC teachers in Montreal.

Dear;

This letter is an invitation to partake in a study I am conducting as part of my PhD in Educational Studies, in the Department of Integrated Studies at McGill University under the supervision of Dr. Ronald Morris. I would like to take this opportunity to inform you about this project and what your involvement would require if you decide to take part.

In 2008, the Ministry of Education (MELS) instituted a new program, Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC). The program is now compulsory in elementary and secondary education, in both public and private schools. Since the implementation of the ERC program, research indicates that elementary teachers continue to struggle with the religion component of the program. We know very little about the challenges of secondary school teacher with the program and the religion component.

The main purpose of this study is therefore to ask secondary school teachers, how they are dealing with the ERC program, and requirements of the program. Furthermore, this study will be used to discern how teachers view teaching religion in public schools and what types of support they require to effectively teach religion.

Participation in this interview is voluntary. Before the interview with each participant and the focus session, the researcher will make notes on the setting, and location of the interview. After each individual interview and the focus session, the researcher will also make comments about the reactions, facial cues and rapport during the interview.

There will be one (1) individual interview, which will last no longer than 60 minutes, as well as an individual follow up-up meeting in which a debriefing will take place. In addition, there will be one (1) focus session with all the participants, which will last no longer than 60 minutes. Please be advised that although the researcher will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researcher from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researcher will advise and remind all participants not to disclose anything said within the context of the discussion. By agreeing to participate, you agree to not to disclose to others outside of this event anything said within the context of the discussion.

All interviews will take place at an agreed upon location.

- You may decline to answer any of the interview questions

- You have the right to withdraw from the study at any point, without any negative consequences, by advising me, the primary researcher.
- With your permission there will be an audio recorder to document your response. This tape will be used exclusively to transcribe the interview; once transcription is complete, the audiotape will be destroyed.
- Upon transcription, you will receive a copy of the transcript to verify accuracy and to add or clarify any information that you wish.
- A copy of the transcription will be sent to a non-work related email provided by the participant. This email with the transcription should not be accessed on a work computer or a home computer connected to the participant's school system.
- Please note that the name of the participant's school will not be used in the collected data or the de-identified data.
- All information you provide to me is considered completely confidential; your name will not appear in any thesis or publication resulting if you so wish.
- Data will be stored safely on my own personal, password-protected computer in password protected files.
- Only I will have access to data associated with this study and my supervisor will have access to the de-identified data.
- There is no compensation involved in this study.
- There are no known or foreseeable risks involved in this study.

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator or involved institutions from their legal and professional obligations. As a participant you will be provided a copy of this consent form for your own records.

I have read and understood the information presented in the recruitment letter about the study being conducted by Sabrina Jafralie of the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University, under the supervision of Dr. Ronald Morris. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions and receive clarification relating to this study, as well as obtain any further information I wanted.

This project has been reviewed by, and received clearance through, Research Ethics Board at McGill University. I was informed that if I have any questions or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I have the right to contact Lynda McNeil at the Research Ethics Board at (514) 398-6831 or via email at lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Do you consent to be audio-recorded?
☐ YES ☐ NO

Do you consent to be identified in the report?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Please sign below if you agree to participate in this study, having read the above information about the study.

Date: _____

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at sabrina.jafralie@mail.mcgill. ca or via phone at (514) 815-1721. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Ronald Morris, via email at ronald.morris@mcgill.ca or via phone at (514) 398-6971.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation and assistance in this study.

Sincerely;

Ms. Sabrina N. Jafralie

APPENDIX B: Interview Guide Questions

Section I: Introduction and background

1. How long have you been teaching in secondary schools?
2. Which subjects do you usually teach?
3. How long have you been teaching ERC?
4. What type of training have you received to teach the Ethics and Religious Culture Program?
    a. If so, was the training pre-service? Or in service?
    b. If so, was the training sufficient?
5. How is ERC being implemented at your school? If so, please detail the program.

Section II: Perceptions and Impressions of the ERC program

6. What are your general impressions of the Ethics and Religious Culture program?
7. In your opinion, should ERC be taught in public secondary schools? Why or why not?
8. Some argue that the program should only focus on ethics. Others argue that it is important to teach about both ethics and religion. What is your view?
    a. Do you agree that the program should teach both the ethics and religion competency?
9. Are there specific themes or issues in the religion competency that you particularly enjoy teaching, or conversely, themes that you would prefer not to teach?
10. Overall, would you say that you enjoy teaching this program?
11. In your view what are some of the negative and positive aspects of the program?
12. How do you believe the current ERC program at your school could be improved?

Section III: Perceptions about the content of the ERC program

13. In the ERC program a section on the role of the teacher, or the professional stance, states that "Teachers show professional judgment imbued with objectivity and impartiality in order to foster students' reflection on ethical questions or understanding of the phenomenon of religion. Thus, to ensure against influencing students in developing their point of view, teachers abstain from sharing theirs. " What is your view on this? Do you agree?
    a. Do you sometimes indicate your own value preference or position in classroom discussions? Why or why not?

   b. If so, how do you do this?
   c. Is there a particular context or issue that makes this more or less acceptable?

14. Can you describe how you normally address controversial issues in classroom discussions?
    a. Can you think of a specific issue and then describe how you address it?

15. How do you address the religion component of the program?
    a. Can you think of a particular issue within the religion component and then describe how you address it?

16. How do your personal views about religion influence your current role in educating students about religious culture?
    a. If there is any conflict between your personal beliefs/assumptions and your responsibility to keep a critical distance in your classes, how do you resolve this conflict?
    b. If an ERC theme makes you uncomfortable, how do you resolve this?

17. Do you consider yourself to be religious literate?
    a. In your view, what makes a person religiously literature?
    b. What type of training would you require to religiously literate?

Section IV: Resources

18. Is there a support network for ERC teachers in your school?

    a. If so, how is this network organized?

    b. What does it consist of?

19. What resources are currently available for the religion component of ERC?

20. What are your impressions of the current resources available?

21. What types of resources (ex. material, books) would you like to see to help with the religion component?

Concluding Questions

22. Do you have anything else you like to say?

23. Is there anything I have not asked, but you think I should know?

24. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX C: Focus Group Guide

Focus Group Questions: Experiences and Challenges of Teachers with the Religion Competency in the Ethics and Religious Culture Program

Collegial Relationships

25. Throughout the interview process, did you feel or reluctant to discuss your thoughts and opinions with me as the Head of the ERC department?
26. In the interview, were they any questions that you felt that you did not share your entire view because of the collegial hierarchical? If so, which questions? And would you like to share any additional information?
27. Did you think the collegial relationship alter the interview in a negative or positive manner? Or both?

Reactions to the ERC Program

4. In the interview, you all agreed that you enjoyed teaching the program despite the frustrations and setbacks. Can you expand on the reasons why you enjoy teaching the program even though there are identified issues?
5. One clear identified issue is the need for professionalism, how do you feel that professionalism of the teacher contributes to the success of the program? And to the success of the religion competency?

Pedagogical Training Challenges

6. In the interviews, it was mentioned that most of you had limited in service training, how can this issue be rectified? What are your suggestions?
7. Another issue, was the issue of neutrality, some of you were committed neutralists, where you felt that you could discuss issues and give your perspectives without influencing the students, while others were professional neutralists as prescribed by the ERC program. As a group, what are some of the positives and negatives of being a committed neutralist and the professional neutralist? Why is neutrality important in the program and even more so when teaching the religious competency?

Content Challenges

8. What are your views on why the teaching of the religion competency is more challenging in the older grades?
9. In the interviews, most of you mentioned that you had very little to no in service training, What can be done to counteract the limited to no training for the level of knowledge required in ERC?
10. What do you think the ERC program would look like without the support of a Head of Department or a teacher in charge?
11. Let's explore some of the issues with resources, how do you find the necessary resources? And how do you know those resources are reliable?
12. Have you been in a position to create resources? And if so, which ones and why?

Wider Issues

13. What are your views on the notion of the ERC program being assigned to any teacher?
14. What preparations do you believe is necessary to prepare a teacher, who is unfamiliar with the program?
15. What can you see happening to the ERC program if it relies on the professionalism of the teacher? Should the program have other support in addition to a teacher's professionalism?
16. What can we do about increasing teachers' level of religious literacy?