Summary
The main objectives of this PhD research are twofold. The first is to give a precise analysis of the concept “worldview” in education to gain clarity on how the educational debate about religious and worldview education can profit from its use, especially in light of the ceased participation in traditional, institutionalized religious practices on a regular basis. The second aim is to reflect on the relationship between worldview education and moral education. Both domains aim to stimulate students to reflect on more than cognitive school subjects like math and grammar. They both aim to contribute to personal identity formation. However, it is unclear how they are precisely related and what this means for education.

Five research questions are formulated:

• How is worldview discussed in educational literature? What description of worldview can be given based on this literature?
• What is the advantage of using “worldview” instead of “religion” in educational theory? How can the educational debate benefit from the use of “worldview”?
• Is the use of the concept “worldview” a necessary condition for the use of the concept “morality”? In other words, can we speak about morality without speaking about worldview? What are the implications for education?
• Do moral claims need to refer to worldview for their justification? What are the implications for education?
• Does moral education always aim to influence the worldview of students? If so, what exactly does this aim entail?

The questions are answered by conducting a theoretical inquiry into these concepts and the relationship between these concepts.

The introductory chapter explains the key concept of the research. It sketches how the concept “worldview” has been used in various research contexts in various manners and analyses whether it is an essentially contested concept. This term refers to concepts whose proper use is being disputed and for which no clear consensus exists about the general or “standard” use of the term. Although authors have provided different definitions of the concept, they have the same linguistic intuitions about the appropriate use of the concept.
They agree about a basic description in terms of a view on life, the world, and humanity. This means that the analysis of worldview in this dissertation does not suffer from the possibility that it is an essentially contested concept.

The chapter explains that “worldview” and “worldview education” are used in education, but that an overall view on what “worldview education” means, is lacking in the theory of education.

“Morality” can be conceptualized more specifically as the acts that are right or good for other people. Morality deals with the questions of what is beneficial to others and what harms other people. It focuses on what we “owe to each other” (Scanlon, 1998) and includes actions intended to serve the welfare of others. Moral education is described as the manner in which schools aim to stimulate the sensitivity, analysis, judgment, motivation, and actions of students that contribute to the welfare of others.

2 The second chapter contains a conceptual clarification of the concept “worldview” in education based on the theoretical and empirical literature. A distinction is introduced between organized worldviews and personal worldviews. An organized worldview is a more or less coherent and established system that has developed over time with certain (written and unwritten) sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals or dogmas. It constitutes a group of believers who adhere to this view on life. An organised worldview prescribes answers to existential questions; they also contain moral values and aim to answer the question about the meaning of life. In this way, it aims to influence people’s thinking and actions. A personal worldview is someone’s personal meaning giving outlook on the world, life and humanity. A personal worldview can be, but is not necessarily, based on or inspired by an organised worldview. A personal worldview consists of (sometimes tentative) answers to existential questions. Someone’s personal worldview influences his thinking and acting and gives meaning in life.

The chapter investigates the implications of the distinction between organized and personal worldviews for reflecting on educational practice and policy. The role of worldview in education is investigated, and questions that need reflection when schools want to pay attention to both organized and personal worldviews are clarified.
Chapter 3 argues that worldview is a useful concept in thinking about religious education because of the concept's encompassing character. It argues that worldview should be used instead of religion in some religious educational discourses. Three essential characteristics of worldview are distinguished: (1) worldview includes religious and secular views, (2) a distinction between organized and personal worldviews should be made, and (3) existential questions are a necessary part of worldview.

The chapter demonstrates how two articles about Grimmitt's distinction between “learning about” and “learning from” religion benefit from using the concept “worldview”. It describes how using the concept “worldview” is helpful for thinking about worldview and religious education, educational theory, and practice in three points. First, worldview as encompassing both religious and non-religious views is in some situations more adequate than speaking about “religion.” It might stimulate students to reflect on or relate it to their life worlds that consist out of many non-religious worldview elements. Second, the distinction between organized and personal worldviews makes clear that, even when people seem to adhere to the same organized worldview, their personal worldviews can differ. Therefore, students differ in how they give personal meaning to topics that they learn about. A sophisticated theory of RE should pay attention to learning about people’s organized worldviews and personal worldviews. It should also pay attention to the development of students’ personal worldviews. Third, the article explains that taking existential questions as a starting point for worldview education makes it possible to link “learning about” worldview to “learning from” worldview.

The central question in Chapter 4 is whether teaching morality necessarily means paying attention to worldview. Some schools want to avoid influencing the students’ views based on organised worldviews students adhere to. This is not always possible. The chapter explains why.

A distinction is made between narrow morality (the basic rules and principles that make it possible for human beings to live and work together) and broad morality (the body of ideals, principles, and values that determine a person’s acts designed to realize his or her most important aims and give meaning to life).
The conceptual relationship and the justificatory relationship between “worldview” and “morality” are investigated. The chapter describes how broad morality and personal worldview are closely related. A person’s personal worldview contains his or her (sometimes tentative) answers to existential questions. The chapter distinguishes between ontological, cosmological, theological, teleological, eschatological and ethical questions. A person’s broad morality contains the (sometimes tentative) answers to ethical and teleological questions. Thus, broad morality is conceptually part of personal worldview because of overlapping existential questions.

The chapter makes clear that broad morality and personal worldview are also related in terms of justification. People justify their broad moral views by referring to ideas and beliefs from their personal worldviews. This means that when schools choose to teach a broad morality, they cannot avoid influencing the personal worldviews of pupils.

Chapter 5 examines whether approaches to moral education aim to influence the development of the students’ personal worldviews. A Dutch moral education program is presented as an example of how the relationship between worldview education and moral education works in educational practice. The chapter continues by discussing two moral (educational) theories: (1) moral education related to virtue ethics, commonly called character education, and (2) moral education based on deontological ethics. The chapter demonstrates that every approach to moral education (broad or narrow) aims to influence students’ personal worldviews because of the (normative and anthropological) ontological beliefs that underlie moral theories: A particular conceptualization of the nature of human beings is presumed.

Sometimes approaches to moral education go further than this inevitable and minimal influence. The chapter demonstrates how broad moral education aims to influence students’ personal worldview formation by analyzing moral education related to virtue ethics and moral education related to deontological ethics. It makes clear that students’ personal worldview formation is not only dependent on worldview education but can also happen through moral education.

The chapter makes clear how broad moral education and narrow moral education may also influence the organized (religious) views that are part of students’ personal worldviews. When pupils learn about or discuss certain
broad or narrow moral views, they might agree with new ideas, which might have an impact on their perception of the views in the organized worldview to which they adhere. Although some schools want to or have to avoid influencing the organized (religious) worldviews that their students agree with, this might not always be possible due to the justificatory relationship between organized worldview and broad or narrow morality.

The final chapter reflects on the main findings of the research and their implications for educational theory, policy, and practice. It demonstrates that the research does not only have implications for educational theory, but is relevant for educational policy and practice as well. When speaking of educational policy, for example, personhood formation has been reintroduced as one of the core concerns of schools in the Netherlands (for instance, “OnsOnderwijs 2032”). Personhood formation focuses on the development of students’ personal identity, of which personal worldview is an important part. Since personhood formation is a concern in education, attention should be given to personal worldview development. And when speaking of educational practice, the close relationship between worldview education and moral education makes clear that teachers at non-denominational schools who believe that paying attention to this development contributes to the flourishing of students can, through moral education in a broad sense, stimulate their students’ personal worldview development. Thus, schools can contribute more to students’ personhood formation/personal worldviews than they might think. The chapter ends with suggestions for further research.