Marino Institute of Education

Title:

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Multi-Belief Learning: Exploring Students' Experiences of and Perspectives on the Family Project in the GMGY Curriculum.

Thesis

By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly. This work has not been submitted previously at this or any other educational institution. The work was done under the guidance of Dr. Barbara O'Toole and Dr. Aiveen Mullally at the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. I agree that the Library may lend or copy this dissertation upon request.

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Tara Malone

Abstract

Irish classrooms are increasingly diverse in terms of cultures, languages, ethnicities and religions. Educators can engage with meaningful and relevant cultural elements from their students' lives, and this can increase student engagement and academic achievement (Gay, 2002). This is referred to as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Community National Schools (CNS) are multi-denominational primary schools which can facilitate culturally relevant pedagogy through their multi-belief programme entitled Goodness Me Goodness You. A feature of this curriculum is the Family Project, which encourages students to discuss their beliefs with their families, and then present these beliefs to their classmates. In this way, aspects of students' cultures are brought into the classroom. The purpose of this research is to investigate students' experiences of and perspectives on the Family Project.

A mixed-methods research design and an interpretivist paradigm was adopted for this thesis. The main findings reveal that multi-belief learning through listening to one another's Family Projects was a positive experience for most students. Participants found value in sharing beliefs, particularly for developing religious literacy and intercultural competence, as well as strengthening inter-religious friendships. Many students experienced increased self-esteem as they shared their expertise and were able to "teach the teacher". However, the majority of students disliked or felt ambivalent towards presenting their own beliefs. Some pupils from minority belief systems experienced a sense of exclusion during multi-belief learning and some felt that the Family Project emphasised differences amongst friendship groups. The thesis concludes by offering recommendations to educators and policymakers for future planning to facilitate multi-belief learning.

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Acronyms

CNS	Community National School
CRP	Culturally relevant pedagogy
GMGY	Goodness Me, Goodness You
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
RE	Religious Education
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs

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Glossary of Terms

Multi-belief Learning:	Also referred to as multi-denominational religious education. It involves learning *about* and *from* religious and secular beliefs. It is a feature of patron's programmes in multi-denominational schools in Ireland. Multi-belief education does not endorse one single religion or worldview.
Community National School:	State-run primary schools in Ireland. At the time of writing there are 12 CNS in Ireland.
Goodness Me Goodness You:	Referred to as GMGY, this is the patron's programme for all CNS and was written by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:	Sometimes referred to as culturally responsive pedagogy, this theory promotes teachers engaging with their students' cultural backgrounds in classroom practices with the aim of increasing academic achievement and student self-esteem.
Parent:	For ease of writing, all mention of parent(s) is inclusive of parents *and* legal guardians.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the past two decades, Ireland has become an increasingly diverse society. Many Irish classrooms have a range of languages, cultures and religions. 2016 census figures reveal that although Ireland is still a predominantly Catholic country, the number of people identifying as Catholic has decreased from 84.2 per cent in 2011 to 78.3 per cent in 2016 (CSO, 2017). The number of people identifying as having no religious affiliation has risen by 74% since 2011. Furthermore, those identifying as part of a minority religion has grown significantly: Muslim by 29%, Orthodox by 38% and Hindu by 34% (CSO, 2017). According to Darmody and Smyth (2017) "considering these trends, the issue of religion and belief identity is of growing political and educational importance" (p. 17).

This introduction gives a brief outline of the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). The contextual background for this thesis is then discussed. An overview of the current patronage of the Irish primary school system and the evolution of the Community National School (CNS) are outlined. The development of the GMGY curriculum and details of the Family Project as a child-centred pedagogy are discussed. My positionality as an educational researcher within the context of the CNS is explained. Finally, a description of the aims of the research and an outline of the thesis concludes the chapter.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Given the diversity of religious and secular beliefs now prevalent in many Irish classrooms, educators have the opportunity to engage with the cultural and religious knowledge of their students. It is within this context that CRP is used as a theoretical framework for this research. CRP is defined by Gay (2002) as "using the cultural

characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). The term originated from Ladson-Billings' (1995a) seminal three-year study of eight culturally responsive teachers working with African-American students in the USA. The study found that when teachers engaged with their students' culture in the classroom, academic success and school engagement increased, particularly for students whose culture had been regarded as deficit within the education system (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Therefore, by engaging with CRP in classroom practice, educators can positively impact upon students' self-esteem (Gay, 2002).

Context of the Study

Patronage of Irish primary schools. In the Irish primary school system, the patron body has the legal responsibility to design and implement a patron's programme to promote the "cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions" of the school (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 19). Smyth, Lyons and Darmody (2013) found that children's personal beliefs about religion can be constrained because of the school they attend. This is unsurprising considering that 96% of Irish primary schools are under the patronage of religious denominations (O'Brien, 2016). Enrolment figures for September 2018 show that 90.3% of pupils in Ireland attend a Catholic school (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2018b). This "monopoly position" occupied by the Catholic Church (Mawhinney, 2009, p. 403) is at odds with the increasing diversity of beliefs and world-views which are a feature of contemporary Irish society.

Patrons' programmes taught in denominational schools are often inequitable for students whose beliefs differ from that of the dominant majority. This is due to the

confessional nature of their school's ethos. Such programmes can disadvantage students from minority-belief backgrounds who often experience exclusion and marginalisation (Devine, 2011). These pupils frequently "opt in" to religious lessons to avoid feeling different or "Other" to their peers (Smyth & Darmody, 2011). This is "inappropriate and inadequate on human rights grounds" (Coolahan, Hussey & Kilfeather, 2012, p. 88). To address this issue, in 2011 the government established the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector. This forum was conducted by an independent advisory group whose main aim was to ensure that "the education system can provide a sufficiently diverse number and range of primary schools catering for all religions and none" (Coolahan et al., 2012, p. 3). The advisory group recommended a more diverse range of school patronage, as well as the divestment of a number of denominational schools. The government plans to deliver 400 multi-denominational schools in the next decade by providing choice for parents whether to reconfigure Catholic schools into multi-denominational schools (O'Brien, 2019).

The evolution of the Community National School. The first CNS opened in 2007 in Dublin 15. There are now 12 such schools in the country. The first school was established in response to increased demand for school places in the Dublin 15 area, particularly from migrant families who were unable to secure a place in local Catholic schools (Edwards, 2007). CNSs are publicly managed schools under the patronage of the Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI), a statutory authority which manages and operates all CNSs (ETBI, 2018). The ethos or "characteristic spirit" of the CNS is based on four core values: excellence in education, multi-denominational, equality based and community focused (CNS, 2018).

Multi-denominational schools such as the CNS and Educate Together have more pupils from migrant backgrounds and higher numbers of pupils from diverse belief systems than denominational schools (Darmody, Smyth & McCoy, 2012). They are the fastest-growing primary school sectors in the country (DES, 2018a). In September 2018, 32,060 students, or 5.7% of the total primary school student population attended multi-denominational schools. This was an increase of 7.7% from the previous year (DES, 2018b). Minority faith and multi-denominational schools are "twice as likely as Catholic schools to have too few places to accommodate all applicants" (Darmody & Smyth, 2018, p. 5). According to Darmody, Lyons and Smyth (2016), the increased demand for school places in multi-denominational schools reflects parental demand for non-confessional RE during school time.

The GMGY programme. GMGY is the patron's programme for all CNSs. It is a multi-belief curriculum which provides students with "identity education, values education, philosophy and multi-denominational religious education" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2018a, p. 4). As the only state-developed patron's programme in Irish primary schools, the NCCA (2018b) states that GMGY represents the views of the state in relation to teaching and learning about religions and beliefs.

The original GMGY junior programme from Junior Infants to Second Class began development in 2008. County Dublin Vocational Education Committee was responsible for implementing the curriculum (NCCA, 2018b). Whole-class multi-belief learning occurred through the use of a child-centred narrative approach. Students learned through stories, songs, reflection time and discussions around common experiences (Nelson, 2018). Also, for two weeks every year belief-specific teaching took place. This involved the separation

of children according to their different beliefs in order to facilitate belief-specific lessons (NCCA, 2018b). This practice received negative publicity because students were "segregated" according to their beliefs (Faas, Smith & Darmody, 2018b, p. 462). Other problematic aspects of the junior programme were that teachers often lacked the religious expertise to teach students from various faiths (NCCA, 2018b), and some content in the junior curriculum was seen to have bias towards Christianity (Mullally, 2018; Nelson, 2018). A review of the programme took place in 2017 in which teachers, principals and parents recommended that it be re-written (NCCA, 2018b). The NCCA re-designed the junior programme in 2018.

In 2012, the NCCA began developing the GMGY senior programme for Third to Sixth Class. This was completed in 2016 and did not feature belief-specific teaching. Instead, children were taught about religions and beliefs together as a whole class. In October 2018, this programme was combined with the re-written GMGY junior programme to form the completed GMGY curriculum from Junior Infants to Sixth Class.

GMGY enables students to learn about various religious and secular beliefs in an objective, non-confessional manner (NCCA, 2018a). As a form of multi-denominational religious education, the programme:

> may expose children to a diversity of religious and non-religious views but does not impose any particular view or seek to conform or convert students to any specific religion or belief. In this way, teaching about beliefs and religions is delivered in a fair, accurate and objective manner without undermining or ignoring the role of families and religious or belief communities in transmitting beliefs to successive generations. (NCCA, 2018a, p. 14)

As all religious traditions and secular belief systems are valued and respected, GMGY aims to be equitable for all students regardless of their belief background, meaning that students do not have to "opt out" of any lessons.

The Family Project. There are two approaches to multi-belief education in GMGY. First, students learn about various belief systems through a thematic approach presented by the teacher using a PowerPoint made by the NCCA. Themes may include celebrations or special places. Facts about religions are presented to students in a comparative manner, known as the phenomenological approach (Smart, 1968) to Religious Education (RE). Based on the theme, students then engage in dialogue with their families and complete their Family Projects (Appendix A). Students present their projects to their peers, educating one another about their particular beliefs. The Family Project therefore brings students' beliefs from the private sphere into the public sphere. The intention is that as active listeners, students not only learn *about* religion, but also *from* religion (Grimmitt, 1987). This relates to Jackson's interpretive approach to RE which has three aspects; *representation* which explores the diverse aspects of religion, *interpretation* which involves students comparing and contrasting their own beliefs to those they are studying, and *reflexivity* where students reflect on their own understanding after new learning (Jackson, 1997). The interpretive approach "builds upon a genuinely positive attitude towards diversity [. . .] seeing individual identity as being developed through meeting 'the other'" (Jackson, 2006, p. 34). The interpretive approach is contingent on teachers creating a 'safe space' or classroom environment in which students feel comfortable, safe and respected when expressing their beliefs (Erricker & Erricker, 2000; Jackson, 2012).

Rather than using textbooks, the Family Project aims to provide students with an opportunity to take control of the curricular content. Pupils used their own words to communicate their authentic lived experience as an 'insider' in their belief system. Erricker and Erricker (2000) argue that textbooks often present subjective, pre-packaged information about religious traditions rather than providing opportunities for children to construct their own knowledge. Rather, Erricker and Erricker (2000) adopt a relativist approach to RE in which they maintain that no knowledge is absolute or objective, but rather relative to the person. Without the use of textbooks, students are given opportunities to think for themselves, and can construct this knowledge through personal narratives when they discuss their beliefs and experiences (Erricker & Erricker, 2000). Therefore, it can be argued that the Family Project is a type of personal narrative.

Researcher Positionality

I identify as a WHISC – White, heterosexual, Irish, settled and Catholic (Tracy, 2000). Therefore, I am cognisant that I am conducting research from a privileged position as a member of the dominant culture. I have worked as an educator in a CNS for several years and I have also collaborated with the NCCA in the development of the GMGY curriculum. In my educational setting, I have been involved in the implementation of the programme as a GMGY co-ordinator. Furthermore, I have direct experience of facilitating peer-learning through the Family Project in my classroom practice. I am aware of my potential bias due to this involvement in GMGY and I have endeavoured to reduce this bias by conducting a mixed-methods research design. This is explained further in Chapter 3.

Aims of the Thesis

In Ireland there has been much debate as to which approach to multi-belief learning is most equitable (Faas, Darmody & Sokolowska, 2015). The purpose of this study is to contribute towards this discussion, particularly in the context of inclusive practices in the CNS. The goal of this research is to use CRP as a framework to explore students' attitudes towards the Family Project. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the implementation and improvement of pedagogical practices which engage with minority students' cultural expertise, not only in multi-belief learning, but across various subjects. The research aims to explore the roles of the school, teacher and family in education about beliefs and religions from pupils' perspectives. By including the voice of students in the research, educators' understanding of CRP in classroom practices can be enhanced.

The aim of this research is to answer the following over-arching question: what are students' experiences of and perspectives on the Family Project in the GMGY curriculum? From this, several sub-questions emerge:

- How do students feel about sharing their personal religious or secular beliefs *with* their peers and learning *from* their peers?
- Does the Family Project, as culturally relevant pedagogy, affect a child's sense of self-identity, self-esteem and sense of belonging?
- Does the Family Project have an influence on a student's affective, cognitive or attitudinal relationship with other religions and their own beliefs?
- What are students' understanding of the role of parents, teachers and the school in learning about beliefs and religions?

This thesis is framed around the experiences of students from diverse religious and secular backgrounds in the CNS setting. Academic literature focusing on the experiences of migrant children in Irish classrooms tends to focus on "linguistic and cultural issues, with relatively little attention paid to the implications of religious diversity" (Darmody, Tyrell & Long, 2011, p. 126). In terms of CRP, the theory has been applied to numeracy (Austin, 2017), literacy (Ford, 2017) and science (Yerrick & Ridgeway, 2017) but studies linking religious education with CRP are limited (Aronson, Amatullah & Laughter, 2016; Dallavis, 2011). No research exists on CRP and religion in an Irish context. Therefore, this study is attempting to fill gaps in the research by analysing the voices, attitudes and lived experiences of students in their learning *about* and *from* religions and beliefs. Furthermore, it is timely to conduct research on the Family Project as GMGY is a relatively new curriculum.

Outline of the Thesis

This chapter has outlined the background of school patronage, the development of the CNS, the evolution of GMGY and the aims of the thesis. Chapter 2 details the literature review, critically analysing the theory of CRP and drawing on relevant research conducted both nationally and internationally. In Chapter 3, the research design is explained, as well as procedures, ethical considerations, data analysis and limitations. Research findings are analysed and interpreted in Chapter 4. The final chapter discusses recommendations and concludes the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter begins with a critical discussion of CRP. This includes a critique of the theory, the role of CRP in 'celebrating' cultural diversity and CRP and multi-belief learning. Academic literature based on the CNS and GMGY is then discussed. Methodologies in which CRP is used in the Family Project are explained, namely inter-belief dialogue and peer-learning. The chapter outlines the theory of 'funds of knowledge' and subsequently the role of parents in education about beliefs and religions. The chapter concludes with an analysis of child agency in multi-belief learning.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

In diverse school settings, students from minority backgrounds bring a wealth of cultural knowledge to the classroom. Culture is defined by Parekh (2006) as "a system of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of human beings understand, regulate and structure their individual and collective lives" (p.143). CRP evolved from Ladson-Billings' study of culturally responsive educators who successfully engaged with their students' cultures, expertise and skills rather than insisting these students assimilate into the dominant group's cultural norms and values (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). High expectations were placed on these students, who were encouraged to be themselves "in dress, language style, and interaction styles" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 476). Educators "encouraged students to act as teachers and they, themselves, often functioned as learners in the classroom" (1995a, p. 163). By affirming students' cultural identities, Ladson-Billings found that students' self-esteem and academic abilities increased. Therefore, educators can invite students' "knowledge, their languages, and their particular skills and abilities to school to share in expert/apprentice roles" (Goodman & Hooks, 2016, p. 36). According to

Villegas and Lucas (2007), this pedagogical approach demands that culturally responsive practitioners understand how learners construct knowledge and hold affirming views about diversity.

CRP: a critique. In 2014, nearly two decades since her research study, Ladson-Billings renamed her theory from 'culturally relevant pedagogy' to 'culturally sustaining pedagogy' because she believed her original theory of CRP had become a "distortion and corruption" of the original meaning (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 82). She observed how educational practitioners often held a "static conception of what it means to be culturally relevant" and often perpetuated hegemonic discourses by exotisising minority cultures (p. 77). It is insufficient for teachers to adopt CRP by "adding some books about people of colour [...] or posting 'diverse' images" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 82). Instead, culturally *sustaining* pedagogy enables minority students to "sustain" their cultural and linguistic identities whilst still maintaining access to the dominant group's culture (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to develop the socio-political consciousness of students by debating school practices and policies as well as connecting their learning to real-life applications.

Gay (1997) describes how a further challenge of CRP is that very often the cultural disparity between educators and their students is too great. She writes that "when the cultures of students and teachers are not synchronized, someone loses out. Invariably it is the students" (p. 223). To overcome this, teachers who belong to the dominant group in society must "critique the very basis of their privilege and advantage" (Ladson-Billings, 2014). This is further developed by Martin, Pirbhai-Illich and Pete (2017), who use critical-race theory to critique CRP. The authors describe how CRP is limited in its capacity to

empower minority students because although white educators may be responsive to the cultures of others, they often ignore how their own culture is "bound up with white privilege and superiority" (p. 245). CRP therefore is flawed because power still rests with white educators, whose focus is on "narrow understandings of culture [and] on deficit dispositions towards difference" (Martin et al., 2017, p. 235). This can have detrimental effects on minority students' self-identity, self-esteem and sense of belonging. Therefore, Martin et al. (2017) argue that CRP can only be successful if teachers critique and transform the relationship between themselves and the 'Other', and if they address their "white privilege".

In an Irish context, the majority of primary school teachers are white, Irish and settled (Keane & Heinz, 2018), therefore they are members of the dominant culture. Tracy (2000) describes this as WHISC – White, heterosexual, Irish, settled and Catholic. This results in a wide cultural disparity between Irish teachers and migrant students in their classes. Devine (2005) found that teachers often bring to the classroom "a series of discourses on ethnicity, immigration and identity that both reflect and are influenced by the norms and values prevalent in society at large" (p. 52). In her study of Irish primary schools, teachers were often found to have pre-conceived, racially stereotyped views of migrant children (Devine, 2005). This was echoed in Parker-Jenkins and Masterson's (2013) study of how teachers working in post-primary Irish denominational schools responded to cultural diversity. The research found that these schools had few culturally inclusive practices, and teachers promulgated an often racist discourse of "doing things the way we do things in Ireland" (p. 481).

As well as the need for teachers to address their "white privilege" a further critique of Ladson-Billings' theory is her over-emphasis on the role of the individual teacher to instigate change. For Martin et al., the teacher cannot be the only "agent of change" (2017, p. 235). Rather, the authors call for systemic change in the power structures evident in school settings in order to challenge the "pedagogical violence" against marginalised students (p. 244). This term refers to the colonial legacy inherent in school structures such as "the way in which classrooms are set up, how the days are structured, [and] who is seen to be the holder of knowledge" (2017, p. 244). Although CRP promotes the voice and cultural expertise of minority students, it is limited because traditional, westernised versions of education prevail in the Irish school system.

A further obstacle for implementing CRP in classrooms is the lack of pre-service and in-service education for teachers to learn how to engage with their students' cultural expertise (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Specifically, in relation to GMGY, this need for further education for teachers is echoed in Irish research (Conboy, 2015; Faas et al., 2018b; Mullally, 2018; NCCA, 2018b; Nelson, 2017).

CRP and "celebrating cultural diversity". CRP calls for teachers to engage with minority students' cultural backgrounds and knowledge to enhance their academic achievement. However, the typical approach to recognising cultural diversity seen in many schools is "static, normative and exclusive" because it "ignores and devalues the everyday experiences of many minoritized and immigrant students" (Amanti, 2005, p. 132). This often results in stereotyping of other cultures. Therefore, schools must be mindful to avoid organising intercultural initiatives that are tokenistic because they may re-enforce minority students' beliefs that they are different (Bryan & Bracken, 2011). Furthermore,

'celebrating' religious diversity may "overlook or avoid potentially controversial subjects such as the existence of power relations and inequalities within cultures" (Fischer, 2016, pg. 87). This was evidenced in Devine's study (2013) of students from migrant backgrounds in Irish primary schools. Devine argues that for migrant students, "being valued differently can involve reproducing 'recognised' negative patterns [which] undermines children's rights and well-being …[this] sets the seeds for wider inequalities and injustices" for minority students' future lives (2013, p. 292). As members of the dominant group in society, teachers can be regarded as the "'valuers' or celebrators of difference" who define "minorities in terms of how they benefit or enrich the 'host' culture" (Bryan, 2010, p. 255). This can be regarded as a form of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 139) which occurs when those whose "habitus" is assigned a lesser value tacitly accept the hierarchical relations of power as naturally occurring (May, 2008). Therefore, using CRP to 'celebrate diversity' as part of GMGY may have detrimental effects on minority students' sense of belonging.

CRP and multi-belief learning. Religion is a manifestation of one's culture (Barnes, 2014). Therefore, a child's religious identity can be regarded as an extension of their cultural identity. Culturally responsive teachers can engage with a student's own worldviews, narratives and personal experiences as a teaching resource during multi-belief learning (Dallavis, 2011).

In contemporary educational practice, multi-belief learning has many advantages for students (Jackson, 2012). Sharing and discussing beliefs facilitates knowledge of and respect between cultural groups because students are enabled to have "an open, informed, respectful, critical and tolerant attitude toward those whose beliefs are different to theirs"

(Byrne & Kieran, 2013, p. 24). Learning of this kind contributes towards the aims of intercultural education, which is an "understanding of, respect for and dialogue between the different cultural groups" (UNESCO, 2006, p. 18). By learning about various belief systems, religious literacy amongst students has been shown to increase (O'Grady, 2005). Furthermore, negative stereotyping, discrimination and intolerance can potentially be reduced through the study of religions and worldviews (Hull, 2001). Students can also increase their "intercultural competence" which involves "developing a tolerant attitude and respect for the right to hold a particular belief" (Jackson, 2014, p. 34).

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) published the *Toledo Guiding Principles* in 2007, a document which describes best practice in relation to teaching about beliefs and religions. The principles outline how such learning can contribute to the fostering of democratic citizenship, promote understanding of social diversity and enhance social cohesion (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2007). This was evidenced in the REDCO project, a European study of religious education in post-primary schools conducted by the European Council. This research found that "for students, peaceful co-existence depends on knowledge about each other's religions and world views" (Jackson, 2014, p. 52). Multi-belief learning also encourages students to develop tolerant attitudes and sensitivities towards religious diversity, and is consistent with human rights and citizenship education (Jackson, 2014). Oduntan (2012) explains that:

> non-confessional multi-faith RE – given its focus on conveying the body of knowledge to children in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner, without

> indoctrination – is the pedagogical model which best conforms to the principles of international human rights law. (p. 337)

Providing opportunities for pupils to express their religious beliefs can affect students' self-esteem and well-being (Ipgrave, 2001). Devine (2013) also found that migrants' educational well-being increased when these students were "'seen', 'heard' and valued in the classroom" (p. 288).

On the other hand, some critics believe that learning about beliefs and religions, whether in a confessional or multi-denominational setting, should be kept in the private sphere. This is the case with public schools in France and the USA (White, 2009). Oduntan comments that parents of children with secular beliefs can view multi-belief programmes as "an imposition of the religious beliefs, values and ethos of the 'other' on non-religious children [. . .] therefore conflicts potentially arise between some parents and the state" (2012, p. 338). A secular approach to schooling is advocated by Nugent and Donnelly (2013) because it would be "neutral on the question of religion and non-religion" (p. 187). Similarly, O'Toole (2015) believes that a non-denominational, secular setting which positions faith formation in the private sphere is the most inclusive and egalitarian form of education. This can be achieved through the establishment of the common state school or non-denominational school. Here, parental choice of school patronage would be replaced with the "common good" in which children from all belief backgrounds would be educated under the same patronage (O'Toole, 2015). Irish research has also shown that some parents and teachers believe RE should be taught in the home (Conboy, 2015; Mullally, 2018). However, other writers believe that if religious identity is not brought into the classroom and discussed in a respectful way, this can lead to "attitudes about it to run rampant,

leading to marginalisation and discrimination" (James, Schweber, Kunzman, Barton & Logan, 2015, p. 13).

Aronson et al. (2016) researched religious education and culturally relevant education in the USA. They found that by approaching religious studies from a CRP perspective, students can gain "a critical awareness and appreciation of our differences" at a time when religious discrimination is causing segregation and exclusion (p. 140). These researchers commented on the lack of studies directly linking CRP to religious diversity in the classroom. However, the authors found examples of small-scale teacher interactions which engaged with students' religious backgrounds in daily school interactions. These positively affected students' abilities to learn and also increased their wellbeing (Aronson et al., 2016).

Teaching about beliefs and religions can be challenging for teachers, particularly if their students have greater knowledge about the subject than they do (Conboy, 2015; Ipgrave, 1999; Ipgrave, 2001). In a study across six European countries, teachers felt inadequately prepared to deal with the ethnic and religious diversity in their classrooms due to a lack of resources, insufficient professional development and inadequate support from management (Fine-Davis & Faas, 2014). Furthermore, Ipgrave (1999) describes how teachers in religiously diverse classrooms are "engaged in a balancing act: on one hand educating pupils in openness towards diversity as a preparation for a harmonious society, on the other trying to satisfy faith communities which see such openness as fraught with dangers" (p. 146). These studies highlight the challenges involved in teaching a multi-belief curriculum which can cater to the needs of all students and their families.

CRP and the CNS. Schools play a vital role in the successful implementation of CRP because schools can either affirm or ignore a migrant child's cultural identity. This in turn affects the student's level of engagement and subsequent academic performance (St. Amour, 2003). The GMGY curriculum document envisions the CNS as a "culturally responsive school" which involves "understanding differences within their diverse populations, understanding the norms and values of these diverse populations and [. . .] adapting the communication with parents to be responsive to cultural norms" (NCCA, 2018a, p. 39). These practices take place through the hidden curriculum or "characteristic spirit" of a school. This refers to "informal aspects of school life, and is implicit in everyday issues, practices and behaviours within a school" (Liddy, O'Flaherty & McCormack, 2019, pp. 105-106). Faas, Smyth and Darmody (2018a) conducted research which found that many CNS principals supported inclusive practices through the hidden curriculum, such as the promotion of home-languages and anti-racism policies. This research also revealed that half of principals thought that GMGY was an important part of promoting the school's ethos.

Schools can be considered an "Ideological State Apparatus" or a tool used by the state to transmit specific ideologies and beliefs in a hidden way (Althusser, 1971). This reflects Gramsci's theory of "hegemony", defined as the way in which society's dominant group maintains control through consent (Strinati, 1995). In Ireland, the dominant group is Christian and denominational schools often struggle to promote inclusive practices for students from diverse religious or secular backgrounds (Devine, 2005; Parker-Jenkins et al., 2013). Multi-denominational primary schools may unintentionally promote Christian privilege. This is defined by Blumenfeld as "a seemingly invisible, unearned, and largely

unacknowledged array of benefits accorded to Christians . . . [which] confers dominance on Christians while subordinating members of other faith communities as well as non-believers" (2006, p. 195). In Ireland, this can include the school calendar, which is based on Christian holidays, as well as curriculum content such as studying St. Patrick, and sacramental preparation for Communion and Confirmation, even if facilitated outside school hours. Therefore, although multi-denominational schools strive to be equitable and inclusive, Christian privilege can ultimately curtail this.

Interrogating GMGY

One of the four strands of the GMGY curriculum, entitled 'Beliefs and Religions' encourages students to learn *about* and *from* religions and beliefs (Grimmit, 1987). Learning *about* religions involves the factual and objective teaching about religions to develop religious literacy (NCCA, 2018a). Learning *from* religions encourages students to share their own personal beliefs with their peers, and in turn to use their new learning to reflect upon their beliefs (NCCA, 2018a). The Family Project could be viewed as a form of CRP because students are invited to share their beliefs with their classmates. In some cases, this results in students educating their peers and teachers about their religious traditions, experiences and worldviews.

Teachers who are culturally responsive establish relationships with students that are "equitable and reciprocal" by facilitating students to act as teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 480). This approach is advocated in the GMGY curriculum, as "pupils are viewed as experts in their own belief experiences. The teacher is the facilitator of the child's voice" (NCCA, 2018c, p.4). In this context, traditional hierarchical power structures inherent in most teacher-student interactions are challenged because the student becomes

the holder of knowledge (Martin et al., 2017). Using an intercultural lens, this can have positive results for migrant students (Cummins, 2014). The participatory nature of the Family Project integrates the migrant child's valuable cultural capital into classroom activities thereby giving them equal status to the dominant group. Therefore, CRP can be instrumental in challenging societal inequities which marginalise minority cultures and languages (Cummins, 2014; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

GMGY aims to contribute to the holistic development of the child by valuing their culture and voice. Therefore, the onus is on the teacher to create a safe environment in which students' beliefs are shared in a respectful manner without exoticising minority students' beliefs (Jackson, 1997). In diverse classrooms, this "safe space" can accommodate non-Eurocentric learning as well as challenging traditional notions of what constitutes valuable knowledge (Martin et al. 2017).

Faas et al. (2018a; 2018b; 2018c) conducted three studies on the CNS and found that the:

> emphasis on peer learning and inter-belief dialogue goes some way to increasing the integration of migrant children and Irish children [. . .] students demonstrated a good level of knowledge of other religions and cultures as well as strong inter-ethnic and inter-religious friendships." (Faas et al., 2018b, p. 465).

This suggests that GMGY has the potential to increase students' religious literacy, understanding of and respect for different beliefs, as well as impacting positively on migrant students' wellbeing. Faas et al. (2018c) also examined the role of child-agency in the formation of religious beliefs. Findings reveal that inter-belief dialogue was one way in

which students exert agency. GMGY empowered students to "take an active role in shaping their religious identity by providing a safe space in which children can engage in learning about religion and learning from their peers" (p. 497). However, Conboy's (2015) research on multi-denominational schools in Ireland illustrated that many teachers and principals "found inter-religious dialogue challenging to manage, especially when children began to critically examine their own identities and the identities of others" (2015, p. 69).

The challenges faced by teachers delivering GMGY were also evidenced by Mullally (2018). Part of this research focused on the original GMGY junior programme which has now been reviewed. Mullally found that 51% of parents did not engage with GMGY material at home. Furthermore, young children lacked the religious literacy to engage competently in inter-belief dialogue due to lack of parental involvement. The failure to complete this preparatory work caused frustration amongst some teachers who consequently struggled to facilitate inter-belief conversations during GMGY lessons.

Two other significant pieces of research were carried out on the previous GMGY junior programme (NCCA 2018b; Nelson, 2017). Through documentary analysis of lessons, principles and pedagogies of the curriculum, Nelson explores how the programme was problematic because it segregated students based on their religious beliefs for part of the school year. Students were often taught by a teacher from outside their particular faith, which resulted in some parents feeling that the school was "trivialising their beliefs" (Nelson, 2017, p. 21). Furthermore, the underlying Christian theology visible in the programme was inequitable for students from minority belief backgrounds, and there was insufficient content to develop students' religious literacy (Nelson, 2017). In a review of this programme, Nelson recommended the discontinuation of belief-specific teaching, and

more frequent use of inter-belief pedagogy where students exchange their beliefs. These recommendations are in-line with the re-designed GMGY programme from Junior Infants to Sixth Class, which was launched in October 2018.

The NCCA also conducted a review of the original junior programme using narrative enquiry and data collection from parents, teachers and students (NCCA, 2018b). Similar difficulties with the now discontinued GMGY programme were outlined in the research. Pupils showed an interest in learning about other beliefs and religions and felt comfortable and respected when sharing their beliefs (NCCA, 2018b). Students enjoyed lessons which were "dialogical in nature", and which were child-led rather than teacher-led (NCCA, 2018b, p. 45). This echoes Faas et al.'s research (2018c) in which students of GMGY preferred learning about various religious traditions from their peers rather than textbooks.

Methodologies of CRP in GMGY

Certain methodologies employed in the Family Project could be interpreted as CRP in action in the classroom. These methodologies are inter-belief dialogue and peer-learning.

Inter-belief dialogue. Parekh explains how dialogue requires:

> mutual respect and concern, tolerance, self-restraint, willingness to enter into unfamiliar worlds of thought, love of diversity, a mind open to new ideas and a heart open to others' needs, and the ability to persuade and live with unresolved differences. (2006, p. 340)

According to the GMGY curriculum, students are required to learn a set of skills to enable them to engage successfully in dialogue in a multicultural, inclusive classroom.

Teachers can model this, which in turn can be communicated to their students. Inter-belief dialogue is defined in the GMGY programme as "cooperative, constructive and positive interactions between children of different belief backgrounds, both religious and non-religious" (NCCA, 2018a, p. 38). This is a component of the "dialogical religious education" that asks students to engage in respectful inter-belief dialogue, to explore differences and commonalities across belief systems and to develop their own views in light of new learning (NCCA, 2018a). This type of religious education "seeks not to mirror the separation and division in society, let alone increase it, but aims at a mutual understanding which treats differences with respect" (NCCA, 2018a, p. 37). Teachers are encouraged to establish ground rules with their students to help create a safe space in which this dialogue can occur (NCCA, 2018c). The starting point for inter-belief dialogue in GMGY is the Family Project (NCCA, 2018c).

Ipgrave's (2001) ethno-graphic research in an urban English primary school found that the methodology of inter-belief dialogue raised children's self-esteem, helped them to develop critical-thinking skills, and provided opportunities for academically weak children to gain confidence. Also, students became more interested in discussing religious topics and were empowered to answer religious questions rather than accepting the answers of authority figures. Irish research has also been conducted on inter-belief dialogue. Mullally's (2018) research found that lack of parental involvement with the GMGY homework impacted negatively on teachers' abilities to facilitate inter-belief dialogue. Students reported that they enjoyed inter-belief dialogue and peer-learning as it is a break from traditional learning in which they are passive recipients (Faas et al., 2018c; NCCA, 2018b).

Peer-learning. Students' religious beliefs are inevitably influenced by a number of social factors such as family, peers, the school and teachers (Hemming & Madge, 2012; Jackson, 2004). This was also illustrated in the research of Faas et al. as "children actively constructed knowledge from the information they received from family, school (particularly in RE), and their multicultural school environment, especially from friends sharing their own experiences and family traditions" (2018c, p. 497). Peers are very important in influencing adolescent religious belief (King, Furrow & Roth, 2002; Tratner, Sela, Lopes, Ehrke, Weekes-Shackelford & Shackerford, 2017). Primary school children and adolescents are at important developmental stages for the formation of religious beliefs and becoming affected by peer influences (Erickson, 1992). This can be because adolescents gain more independence from their parents (Desrosiers et al., 2011). Faith dialogue with friends was found to have a greater impact on adolescent religious faith than dialogue with parents (Schwartz, Bukowski & Aokie, 2006). The GMGY programme highlights how students can feel "emotionally secure, self-assured, and able to deal with challenges and difficulties" when they feel a sense of pride in their peers (NCCA, 2018a, p. 11). In the Family Project, the aim is that students learn *about* their friends' beliefs and *from* their friends' beliefs.

Using a quantitative approach with undergraduates, Tratner et al. (2017) found that peers exert influence on individuals' religious beliefs in different ways. These include participating in religious activities, engaging in religious dialogue, and peer proselytization, which is the criticism of an individual's belief and attempting to persuade them to join their religion. This study is limited because the distinction between peer, friend and acquaintance is not made. Furthermore, the participants were college-aged students, and the

majority of participants were Christian (Tratner et al., 2017). Previous studies have not assessed the specific ways in which peers influence childhood religious beliefs (Tratner et al., 2017). Research is also limited in relation to how students from diverse religious backgrounds influence one another's beliefs.

It is important to recognise that peer-learning and the sharing of religious beliefs can also be harmful. Dillon (2013) offers a critique of peer-learning with students from minority backgrounds because these students can be viewed as "objects of curiosity, about whom it is interesting to learn and from whom we can learn our own superiorities … [therefore] 'learning from' can be exclusive rather than inclusive" (pp. 72-73). This is echoed in Moulin's (2011) research, which found that many post-primary students felt they needed to be spokespersons for their religion and their fear of religious discrimination made them feel too uncomfortable to discuss their religious identity during class-time. This was also a finding in Harmon's (2018) research of primary school children in an Irish denominational school. The study found that in terms of religious identity, some students felt "uncomfortable talking about this aspect of their lives" (p. 71). As is evident, the experience of students sharing their beliefs and interpreting the beliefs of others can vary hugely according to a variety of factors such as personal engagement, age, home beliefs and level of comfort speaking in the classroom.

Funds of Knowledge

For Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005), the term 'culture' is problematic because it is fragmented and difficult to define. Also, the "culture-sensitive curriculum" often used in schools is too reliant on "folkloric displays such as story-telling, arts, crafts, and dance performance" (p. 85). Rather, Gonzalez et al. use the term 'funds of knowledge' to describe

individuals' expertise that are rooted in their family histories and household practices. Funds of knowledge are defined as "culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (2005, p. 72). Funds of knowledge can include language, literature, religion or cultural events, and are essential for providing families with "a sense of belonging, solidarity and ethnic identity" (Gonzalez et al. 2005, p. 72).

In their ethnographic study of funds of knowledge with US/Mexican families, Gonzalez et al. (2005) employed Vygotsky's theory of socio-cultural development, which posits that individuals are socialised into specific cultural practices which determines how they interact with others. In the study, teachers were asked to become researchers and learn about their students' everyday lives by conducting interviews with their students' families in their homes. The interviews centred on family histories and regular household activities. The cultural knowledge gathered by the teacher-researcher was then used as resources in their classroom practices. Linking students' school, home and community lives is seen also in Ladson-Billings research of culturally competent teachers (1995b), as family members of African-American students were invited into the classroom to teach students skills such as carpentry, cooking and music.

Engaging with a student's household knowledge and lived experience in the classroom legitimates the student's experiences as valid (Gonzalez et al. 2005, p. 43). It can also disrupt the power dynamics because the boundary of what constitutes the 'classroom' changes when the teacher visits her students' homes (Gonzalez et al. 2005, p. 72). The knowledge gained from students' families' was applied to many curricular areas. Teachers

noticed an increase in both parents' and students' self-esteem and confidence through this parental participation in school events (Hensley, 2005).

Children learn in different ways at home and in school. This can have "emotive implications for the self-esteem of children, and there are possible sources of cultural conflict in the schools" (Gonzalez et al. 2005, p. 61). An example of this conflict is that in the home setting, the child learns in a "zone of comfort that is familiar yet experimental, where error is not dealt with punitively and where self-esteem is not endangered" (Gonzalez et al. 2005, p. 62). This allows for self-evaluation and self-judgement, and is often very different to how a child learns in school.

Funds of knowledge and religious beliefs. Funds of knowledge are not only the cultural or linguistic knowledge of minority students; they can also include household funds of knowledge and religion (Gonzalez et al., 2005). In one case-study involving immigrant Mexican families in the USA, Gonzalez et al. found that religion was an important cultural factor for many migrant families because it provided a sense of belonging, commonality and connection. Religious activities "contribute to a sense of security and play a deciding role in family customs, priorities, decision-making, interactions, lifestyles and sense of safety. Retaining customs, religion and language is a conscious effort" (Tenery, 2005, p. 126). This is mirrored in a review of transnational migration (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007) which found that some children of immigrants turn to their "inherited religion" as their primary source of identity (p. 141). This can help with integration into a new society as religious networks and celebrations can "build social capital" (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007, p. 141). This was also evidenced in an Irish study of ten migrant families by McGovern and Devine (2016). The research found that parental

nurturing of children's religious identities was core to migrant children's self-identity. Many children in the study established friendships within their communities which "sustained them and strengthened their religions, language and ethnic identities" (p. 45).

The role of parents in multi-belief learning. Parents play a vital role in shaping their children's cultural and religious beliefs (Erickson, 1992). Despite this, an Irish study revealed that 95% of parents surveyed felt that the religious and moral development of their children was not their responsibility (Darmody & Smyth, 2017). Further Irish studies have revealed that many parents have little knowledge of the religious or moral education their children are receiving (Darmody, et al. 2016; Smyth, 2010). Darmody et al. (2016) found that parents from minority religious backgrounds took a very active role in communicating their religious identity to their children. Desrosiers, Kelley and Miller (2011) researched the ways in which parents and peers contribute to adolescents' sense of Relational Spirituality, defined by the authors as one's relationship with God or the universe. 615 young adults from diverse religious backgrounds participated in this quantitative study, which found that parental involvement occurred primarily through "maternal openness to discussion about spirituality/religiosity and through paternal affection" (Desrosiers et al., 2011, p. 39). Showing interest, engaging in discussions about religious issues and establishing loving relationships were seen as factors in parental transmission of religious beliefs. Although parents influence children's beliefs, children can in turn influence their parents' beliefs. This was evidenced in a study by Boyatzis and Danicki (2003). Parents and children influenced one another's beliefs in "a bi-directional reciprocal style of communication" (p. 266). In a European study of RE, Irish students from multi-denominational schools shared their learning about religions with their parents and asked

questions at home pertaining to religious issues (Smyth, 2010). Therefore, the home as well as the school are places in which children develop their beliefs, and the Family Project is a methodology which traverses both these spheres.

Child-Agency and Multi-Belief Learning

For Foucault (1995), the school is a site which "compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes" (pp. 182-3). Foucault sees students as "docile bodies", passively and obediently accepting the identity assigned to them by those in power (p. 136). However, when teachers engage with their students' cultures and funds of knowledge, students rather than teachers become the expert, and so traditional structures of power shift. Therefore, CRP and funds of knowledge facilitate child-agency, which involves children having their voices heard, making decisions and being empowered to construct their own meaning (Leonard, 2016).

Although parents, peers, the school and teachers exert an influence on the child's formation of beliefs, Hemming and Madge (2012) point out that children themselves "play an active role in shaping their own identities through relationships with other people and their environments" (p. 48). Similarly, Jackson (2004) notes how "the autonomy of children is seen as relative; they are both part of the family culture yet can exercise some independence from it" (p. 113). This was echoed in Faas et al.'s research of CNS students (2018c) in which students may belong to the same faith as their parents, but "they negotiated this belonging and understood it in their own ways" (p. 494). The research found that "one way children express their agency is through discussing their own and their classmates' beliefs . . . recognition and acceptance that not all children come from the same background . . . is presented unproblematically" (Faas et al., 2018c, p. 494). Similarly,

Smyth (2010) found that children who participated in her study were "active agents in their own belief formation. Children tend to have complex and fluid religious identities which respond to and act upon their environment" (p. 49). Harmon's (2018) study of 36 11-13 year olds in an Irish primary school also found that children had beliefs different to those of their parents.

The research points out that although children are influenced by their parents, peers, teachers and school, children are also active agents in constructing their own beliefs and identities. However, if students' beliefs are different to that of their parents, will their participation in the Family Project lead to conflict, and if so, how do students negotiate this?

Conclusion

This literature review has explored the theory of CRP from various angles. It examined how CRP has the potential to increase students' academic performance, self-esteem and sense of belonging. This is particularly important for migrant students who can often experience a sense of marginalisation in primary school settings. The literature review highlights the benefits of learning about and from religions and beliefs from both international and Irish research. The literature review also problematizes the complex interplay of social factors such as the school, teacher and parents on the formation of a child's self-identity. Although parents and peers exert strong influences on their child's beliefs, this is often in conflict with the child's own agency in constructing their beliefs.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research paradigm and revisits researcher positionality. The rationale behind the research design is explained, followed by a description of methodology, context and participants. Research procedures are explained in chronological order. This is followed by a discussion of the various ethical considerations involved in the study. The chapter concludes with a description of the data analysis, reliability and validity and an outline of the research limitations.

Research Paradigm

A social constructivist or interpretivist paradigm has been chosen for this study. Social constructivist researchers view individuals' positions as being shaped by their backgrounds and experiences (Denscombe, 2014). Interpretivism acknowledges that people exert agency as to whether they conform or not to societal norms and values (Clark, Flewitt, Hammersley & Robb, 2014). The role of the researcher when working with children is to understand and interpret their experiences, rather than attempting to explain their behaviour (Clark et al., 2014). In seeking to answer the research question, the interpretivist researcher can use "cultural knowledge and capacities" to interpret what is happening (Clark et al., 2014, p. 179). However, this can be challenging because an understanding of the participants' actions may not become clear. This is of particular relevance to my research because the children participating are from diverse linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds and therefore it may not be possible to correctly interpret their actions.

Researcher positionality. Researchers of educational practice bring to the research their own set of assumptions, values and experiences and are "unable to retain a 'value

free' position" because they are influenced by their gender, class, ethnicity, age and status (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 44). This can impact upon the interpretation of the findings because the researcher's own personal values can lead to bias. As previously stated, I am cognisant of conducting this research from the position of white privilege as I am a white, heterosexual Irish settled person from a Christian background, which Tracy (2000) refers to as WHISC. Furthermore, I have been teaching in a CNS for six years and have first-hand experience of facilitating the Family Project. My role as a GMGY co-coordinator in my educational setting has involved working directly with the NCCA and parents to review, amend and implement GMGY lessons. Therefore, I am heavily involved in the programme, which may affect my bias in this research. I have endeavored to reduce this potential bias by using a mixed-methods approach and conducting research in two schools. This is elaborated upon in the following section.

Research Design

Mixed-methods is the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Questionnaires were chosen to gather quantitative data and focus groups to gather qualitative data. Mixed-methods was chosen for several reasons. If the researcher relies on just one method, it may "bias or distort the researcher's picture of the particular slice of reality she is investigating" (Cohen & Mannion, 1994, p. 233). By comparing data generated from the questionnaires to data from the focus groups, it is less likely that the findings will be influenced by my background involvement with GMGY. This triangulation of data increases validity and accuracy (Creswell, 2008).

Mixed-methods also allows for more flexibility for the researcher to choose their investigation techniques and enables him/her to answer a wide range of research questions

(Robson, 2007). Furthermore, many researchers exploring religious identity have also used a mixed-method approach as it extends and deepens the researcher's knowledge of the topic, enabling him/her to "make far-reaching conclusions about children and young people's life views and religious identities" (Hemming & Madge, 2012, p. 47).

Although mixed-methods are advantageous, there are also complexities associated with the design. Robson (2007) discusses how the researcher's skills are often limited to either quantitative or qualitative data gathering. Furthermore, mixed-methods can be more time-consuming when analysing data (Denscombe, 2014) and data from both sources may not match one another (Robson, 2007). Discrepancies between the qualitative and quantitative data can be addressed by "gaining new insight from the disparity of the data, or developing a new project that addresses the discrepancy" (Creswell, 2009, p. 214). However, for the purpose of this research, mixed-methods was chosen to gain a deeper insight into the perspectives of the participants, as well as reducing potential researcher bias.

Research Methodology

Surveys. Surveys in the form of questionnaires were selected to gather quantitative data pertaining to students' experiences of the Family Project. Questionnaires are advantageous because they enable the researcher to gather a large amount of up-to-date information from a group of expert people in a short amount of time (Denscombe, 2014). Also, questionnaires can gather both factual information *and* opinions by asking respondents to explain their answers (Greig, Taylor & MacKay, 2007). They can reduce bias as they are "free from the influence of the interviewer so that a more objective view of the social world of the respondents emerges" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 158). On the

other hand, the disadvantage of using questionnaires is that they can lack depth and detail (Denscombe, 2014). Furthermore, respondents often participate due to "politeness, boredom [or] desire to be seen in a good light [rather than showing] their true feelings, beliefs or behaviours" (Robson, 2011, p. 239). However, the questionnaire was chosen in this research because it provides a large quantity of statistical data as well as anonymity for participants.

Focus groups with children. Choosing to use focus groups as opposed to one-on-one interviews with children can be advantageous because qualitative data can be gathered from several people at the same time (Robson, 2011). Also, group discussions are beneficial for "generating ideas, for finding key areas to follow up individually and for increasing confidence – and they can be more fun" (Greig et al., 2007, p. 93). They are useful for participants who may feel uncomfortable being interviewed on their own (Robson, 2011). Furthermore, the researcher can gather richer details of the participants' experience by asking students to elaborate on certain points (Bell, 2010).

The disadvantage of using focus groups is that the data is "affected by the characteristics of the interviewers (e.g. their motivation, personality, skills and expertise)" (Robson, 2011, p. 241). Focus groups with children can be particularly challenging because "adults typically have authority over children and children often find it difficult to dissent, disagree or say things which they think may be unacceptable" (Hill, 2011, p. 10). This is discussed further in the ethics section below. A further disadvantage of the focus group is that the questions can be more meaningful to some and not to others, and certain participants can dominate the group (Greig et al., 2007). However, focus groups were chosen for this research for several reasons. Firstly, group discussions provide

opportunities for students to discuss their attitudes towards the Family Project in detail. Secondly, unplanned questions or topics may arise from the group discussions and can be elaborated upon by the participants. Thirdly, by inviting students from diverse backgrounds and belief systems to participate, it is likely that there may be alternative views on aspects of the Family Project. These views can be explored to a greater extent than using solely questionnaires.

Research Context

This research took place in two urban CNSs (School A and School B). I have chosen these particular schools for three reasons. Firstly, both schools teach the GMGY programme and their students have knowledge and experience of the Family Project. Secondly, both schools are co-educational with students from diverse socio-economic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, the sample size selected is representative of the wider diverse Irish population. Thirdly, both schools have been open long enough to have at least two Fifth Classes. School A was also chosen because it is my place of employment which guarantees increased levels of co-operation amongst teachers and students, as well as ease of access. However, this presents ethical considerations as I adopted the role of an insider researcher. This will be explored in greater detail below.

Research participants. Research was conducted with two Fifth Classes from School A and three Fifth Classes from School B. Students in Fifth Class are aged between 10 and 12 years, and this year group was selected for several reasons. As well as having two years' experience of the Family Project, this age group can also manage the demands of the research (Greig et al., 2007). These involve understanding the topic, returning consent forms from parents, completing the questionnaires accurately and voluntarily

agreeing to participate in the research. Also, as mentioned in the literature review, this is deemed an important age in which children's beliefs are influenced by various social factors (King et al., 2002; Tratner et al., 2017).

"Opportunity sampling" was employed because every student in each class was invited to participate in the questionnaire (Greig et al., 2007, p. 91). Two focus groups from each school participated in the study. Class teachers were asked to compile a list of 8-10 students consisting of boys and girls from religiously diverse backgrounds (including students from families with secular beliefs) to participate in the focus groups. There were two sets of criteria for selection. Firstly, students required in-depth experience of the Family Project, and secondly students would have to be confident in expressing their views about same. Students were informed that given the small scale of the research, only 8-10 students from each class would be able to participate in the focus groups. This enabled me to "obtain data which are typical and representative of the groups, individuals, and situations in question" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 108). The demographics of both data sets are outlined in Chapter 4.

Research Procedures

Contacting schools. It is essential that researchers in schools obtain permission from principals and managers and clearly establish the activities that will be carried out in the school (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Letters of permission outlining the rationale and proposed sequence of events for the research were distributed to the principals of both schools (Appendix B). Consent to conduct the research was granted by both principals. A separate letter describing the research was then given to the participating teachers in the schools (Appendix C). Two Fifth Class teachers from School A and three Fifth Class

teachers from School B agreed to facilitate the research with students in their classes. Each teacher compiled a list of students for participation in the focus groups according to the criteria explained above.

Pilot questionnaire. A pilot questionnaire enables a researcher to encounter "inevitable problems" before converting the design into reality (Robson, 2011, p. 405). A self-completion questionnaire was designed to measure students' attitudes towards the Family Project. The pilot survey featured clear wording, a simple layout (Bell, 2010) and short questions that directly related to students' experience of GMGY (Appendix D). This design assisted children who may not understand the questions due to a variety of factors, such as English language acquisition or literacy skills. A three-point Likert scale was used to assess students' attitudes because it is simple and interesting for respondents, and also because the scale is exhaustive – all possible options are covered (Robson, 2011). A combination of open and closed questions was also used. Some questions were followed by a space for students to elaborate upon or explain their answers. This allowed for qualitative data to be generated alongside quantitative data (Creswell, 2009). At the end of the questionnaire, a blank space was included for students to describe or draw their thoughts on the Family Project. Participants were also asked to critically evaluate the questionnaire by completing an additional page (Appendix D).

Sixth Class in School A was chosen to participate in the pilot because of their experience of the Family Project and because their literacy levels were closely aligned to the Fifth Class participants. Prior to administering the pilot questionnaire, parental consent and student assent was sought with letters (Appendix E). Students were given the pilot questionnaire by me in their classroom setting. This enabled me to gauge how long the

survey took to complete, to seek clarification as to which questions were unclear and to check the quality of the data (Bell, 2010).

The results of this piloting influenced the finalised instrument (Appendix F). Children found the words “influence” and “somewhat” difficult to understand, therefore I clarified these words when distributing the finalised questionnaires. Students also read the instructions to one question incorrectly. Therefore, this question was amended and an image was added for extra clarity. One student suggested adding images and another student recommended adding the question “what is your religion?” This question and images were added to the final draft (Appendix F).

Conducting the research. I visited two Fifth Classes in School A and three Fifth Classes in School B twice to conduct the research. On my first visit I introduced myself and the research to students using a PowerPoint presentation as a plain language statement (Appendix G). This ensured that each class received the same information. Child-friendly language and images were used to outline the rationale and methodologies of the research. This provided extra clarification for students who speak English as an additional language. The PowerPoint also explained how parental consent and student assent were a pre-requisite for participating in the research. Confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw from the research was also included. Students were informed that the research would take place during school time, and if they chose not to participate, their class teacher would provide alternative work.

After the PowerPoint, parental consent forms (Appendix H) and student assent forms (Appendix I) were distributed to students depending on whether they were participating in the survey or the focus group or both. Parental consent forms were

translated from English into several languages: Romanian, Chinese, Arabic, Urdu and Polish (Appendix H). These languages were chosen based on the linguistic backgrounds of the participants and provided a clearer picture about the research to minority-language parents. Students were given four days to return the student assent and parental consent forms to their class teachers, providing time for them to assess their possible involvement in the research (Bell, 2010). 125 students were given consent/assent forms for participation in the questionnaires. 32 students were given the forms to participate in both the focus group and questionnaires.

During my second visit I collected and checked the parental consent and student assent forms. 72 students returned the questionnaire consent and assent forms with appropriate signatures. Therefore, 72 questionnaires were distributed and 72 questionnaires were returned. Serial numbers were used to help trace the location and date of the research, but not the respondent's identity (Denscombe, 2014). Prior to distributing the survey, I read through the questionnaire with students, clarified language and modelled how to complete the survey.

After the questionnaires were completed, I conducted two focus groups in each school. 28 students (14 girls and 14 boys) participated and they were approximately 30 minutes in duration. A set of questions was drawn up prior to the focus groups (Appendix J). Open-ended questions were used because they are flexible, the researcher can go into more depth, and they can produce unexpected answers (Robson, 2011).

I began the focus groups by reminding students about the purpose of the research and outlining the format of discussion (Greig et al., 2007). Students assisted in drawing up rules in order to help the focus group: listen respectfully, only one voice at a time and each

student has a chance to express their opinion or remain silent if they wish. A speaking object was passed around the group to facilitate one voice speaking at a time. The focus group ended by providing students with the opportunity to discuss any other issue pertaining to the Family Project that had yet to be addressed, as recommended by Hemming (2011).

Ethical Considerations

Research with children. The researcher must prioritise the children's best interests by appropriately evaluating the "ethics, consent, the legal system, power relations, methodology and the dissemination process" of the research (Lewis, 2004, p.1). Ensuring students fully understand both their rights and their involvement in the research was paramount. I delivered a simple plain-language statement (Appendix G) with images to help increase students' understanding (Alderson, 2004). As many participants and their parents have English as an additional language, letters of consent were translated into several languages. *The National Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children* was referred to (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012). These guidelines foreground the safeguarding of children as a vulnerable group in research projects. Therefore, prior to beginning the focus group, I informed the students that if they revealed information that might lead me to think their safety is at risk, I would inform the designated liaison officer in the school (DCYA, 2012).

I was aware that the topic of religious beliefs is sensitive. However, the questions were framed in such a way as to reduce any potential harm to students in either the focus groups or questionnaires. Ethical approval for this research was sought and approved by Marino Institute of Education.

Parental consent and child assent. Principals, teachers and students were fully informed about the aims, methodologies, procedures and distribution pertaining to the research. This was carried out through plain-language statements and letters of consent/assent. Informed consent from each participant's parent or guardian was sought prior to beginning the research. According to UNICEF (2002) guidelines on research with children, guaranteeing only parental consent "is not an adequate standard in light of the rights of the child" (p. 5). Therefore, informed assent was sought for all students, which involves the children having the ability to make the correct decision, freely choosing to take part and being fully informed (Diener & Crandall, 1978). There were two choices on the consent/assent forms whether to opt in or opt out, the aim being that students and parents would not be swayed into agreeing to participate in the research. Several students chose not to be involved by explicitly selecting "I do not consent to participate" on the forms.

Participants were also informed that they could withdraw at any stage without giving a reason (Shier, 2001). However, Alderson comments that "sometimes people are afraid to refuse" (p. 107). I was aware that once students submitted their parental consent forms and their own assent forms to their teacher that they were unlikely to withdraw due to issues of power, as Robinson and Kellet (2009) explain "in schools the balance of power is heavily skewed towards adults, and children are least able to exercise participation rights" (p. 91). The following section examines these matters in greater depth.

Issues of power. Robinson and Kellett (2009) point out that "power relations in child research are reinforced by more general cultural notions that exist between children and adults in society at large" (p. 84). This power imbalance between the teacher as

researcher and the interviewees may result in participant bias as students seek to please or help the researcher (Robson, 2011). Therefore, I informed the students that I was an objective researcher and as such, I was not in the position of promoting GMGY. Instead, I was seeking their honest perspectives on the Family Project. Participants were told that there is no right or wrong answer. However, children as research participants are likely to interpret which answers "show themselves in a better light than others" (Robson, 2011, p. 95).

Insider researcher. My position as insider researcher has ethical implications because the teacher as researcher is attempting to be removed and neutral, yet her employment in the school curtails this objectivity (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). This may impact upon the analysis of the findings, particularly if the results are critical of pedagogical practices in the school. I attempted to reduce the impact of insider researcher by using a mixed-methods approach; two sets of data were collated from two different schools. Also, the questionnaires provided students with more freedom to be honest in their responses compared to the focus groups.

On the other hand, my position as insider researcher was advantageous because School A provided me with easy access to participants, as well as co-operation from class teachers. Furthermore, it is beneficial for a researcher to have good knowledge of participants' backgrounds, cultures and outlook in order to build rapport during interviews (Lofland, 1971). I have spent six years working with students from diverse cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds in a CNS setting, and have a very good understanding of the ethos and value of the CNS model.

Interviewer effect. Interviewer effect occurs when research is affected by the personal identity of the researcher (Denscombe, 2010). As School A is my place of employment, I pre-empted that these students would regard me as an authority figure rather than an objective researcher. This may have limited their freedom to opt out as well as their level of comfort during the group discussions because children are accustomed to answering teachers in a specific way (Greig et al., 2007). I endeavoured to mitigate these issues of power by setting up the focus group as informally as possible. I sat amongst the children in a circle (Gibson, 2007) and used the school library. This is a comfortable space for students as they are "insiders" which may reduce the power imbalance (Hill, 2011). Furthermore, I used a mixed-methods approach allowing me to compare the quantitative and qualitative data from School A with data from School B. These "similar patterns of findings from very different methods of gathering data increase confidence in the validity of the findings" (Robson, 2011, p. 87).

Confidentiality and anonymity. The identity of each participant in the questionnaire was anonymous, and the identities of the focus group participants was confidential as only I could identify the participants (Sapsford & Abbot, 1996). Numerical codes were used to safeguard the privacy of participants during the transcribing and analysing processes: QP1 was questionnaire participant 1, and FGP1 was focus group participant 1. Data protection was guaranteed as the participants were informed that the data will be stored on an encrypted computer in a locked cabinet until July 2020 after which it will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

In mixed-methods research, the "mixing" of data can occur in any of three stages: the data collection, the data analysis, and the data interpretation (Creswell, 2009). In this research, the data was "mixed" during analysis and interpretation, and equal weight was given to both data sets. Creswell's (2009) concurrent triangulation design was adopted which allows the researcher to collect "quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and then compares the two databases to determine if there is any convergence, differences or some combination" (p. 213). This is outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Concurrent Triangulation Design (adapted from Creswell, 2009).

Based on this model, five steps to analysing the data were developed.

Step 1: Analysing Qualitative Data. Voice recordings from the four focus groups were transcribed. Double-spacing and a wide margin on the right were chosen as formatting to allow for notes to be written on the page. Field notes were taken after the focus groups ended. I read through the transcript to gather an overall impression (Creswell, 2009). I then began coding, which is taking data "gathered during data collection,

segmenting sentences and labelling those categories with a term" (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). I chose to hand code qualitative transcripts using coloured pens (Greig et al., 2007). The codes were collapsed into twenty-three categories. Each category was then assigned a different colour (Appendix K). From these categories, four themes emerged (Appendix L).

Step 2: Analysing Quantitative Data. A 3-point Likert scale was used for the majority of questions to ascertain students' attitudes towards the Family Projects. Each answer on the questionnaire was analysed and counted out of the total number of participants and then converted into percentages. Graphs were created to display the results of the quantitative data. An overview of the results of the questionnaire are displayed in Appendix M.

Step 3: Data Transformation: Quantifying the Qualitative Data. Data transformation is when the researcher creates codes or themes "qualitatively then count(s) the number of times they occur in the text data [. . .] this quantification of qualitative data then enables a researcher to compare quantitative results with the qualitative data" (Creswell, 2009, p. 213). Data from the four focus groups was quantified by counting the number of times particular themes and codes appeared. This was then added to a matrix (Step 4).

Step 4: Create a Matrix to Represent both Qualitative and Quantitative Data. Themes and categories from both data sets were compared using a matrix (Appendix N). Four themes emerged that were pertinent to both the quantitative and qualitative data. Additional categories evident in only the quantitative data were also added to the matrix.

Step 5: Present Data by Integrating Findings. The data was integrated and compared using "side-by-side integration" in which "a discussion section first provides quantitative statistical results followed by qualitative quotes that support or disconfirm the quantitative results" (Creswell, 2009, p. 213). This was chosen because it "can result in well-validated and substantiated findings" (Creswell, 2009, p. 214). However, discrepancies may arise and it may be difficult to compare different data sets (Creswell, 2009). Data analysis and interpretation is discussed in Chapter 4.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability is "the extent to which a particular technique will produce the same kind of results, however, whenever and by whomever it is carried out" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 107). For increased reliability, mixed-methods was used. Furthermore, transcripts were analysed several times before aligning the results with the quantitative data. Reliability was increased because the questionnaires were open to all students in the five selected classes. However, as I could not randomly select participants for the focus groups, those chosen had "certain characteristics that predispose them to have certain outcomes" (Creswell, 2009, p. 163). Therefore, only the students who were selected by the teacher could express their views in the focus groups.

Validity relates to "the extent to which the material collected by the researcher presents a true and accurate picture of what is claimed is being described" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 105). Using mixed-methods provides a validity check as both data sets are compared. Furthermore, all students participated in at least one Family Project during GMGY which increases the validity of the research. External validity is also evident in the

research because the sample of participants is representative of the wider population (Robson, 2011).

Limitations

This research is limited because it involved only two urban CNSs out of twelve. As the research only took into account the perspectives of students, the voices of teachers, parents, principals and policy-makers are absent. The involvement of only Fifth Class students meant that this age-range yielded specific results which may differ if the research was carried out with younger or older students. Furthermore, the GMGY curriculum is relatively new and the amount of experience with the Family Project varied greatly amongst School A and School B. Using focus groups was a further limitation because some participants dominated the discussions. Another limitation is my potential bias due to my role as a GMGY co-ordinator and the involvement of School A as my place of employment in this research.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter presents and interprets the data based on four themes that emerged from the data analysis. The chapter shows connections and disparities between this research and previous research discussed in the literature review. The four themes and sub-themes are as follows:

Theme 1: Sharing personal beliefs

- 1.1 Positive attitudes towards sharing beliefs
- 1.2 Students' self-consciousness
- 1.3 Public versus private spheres
- 1.4 Safe space for sharing beliefs

Theme 2: Development of Religious Literacy

Theme 3: Students from Minority-Belief Backgrounds

Theme 4: The Value of Child Agency

- 4.1 Child as Expert
- 4.2 Mutual teaching and learning
- 4.3 Teaching the teacher
- 4.4 The role of the school in multi-belief learning
- 4.5 Child agency versus familial influence

Other sub-themes emerged from the data, such as students' preference for methodologies and students' views on multi-denominational education. These, however, are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Demographic of Research Participants

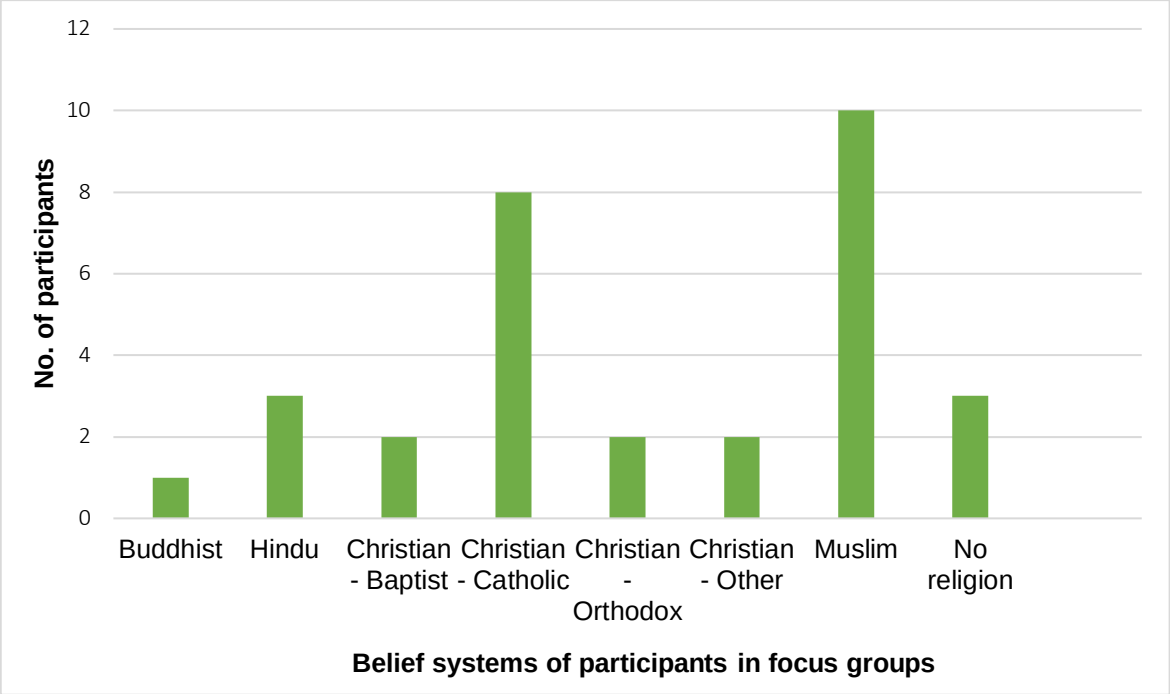

Figure 2. Focus Group Participants' Religion/Belief System

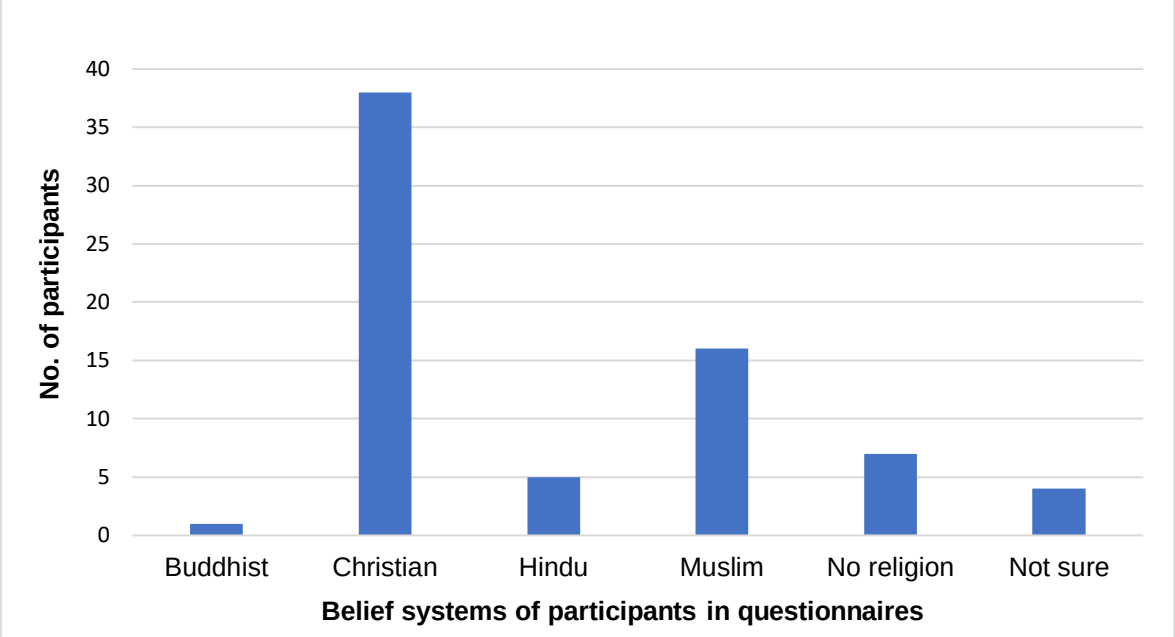

Figure 3. Questionnaire Participants' Religion/Belief System

Figure 2 (above) shows the religion or belief system of the participants in the focus groups. During transcription, each participant was assigned a number beginning with FGP1 (Focus Group Participant 1) and ending with FGP28. Similarly, each returned questionnaire was assigned a number beginning with QP1 (Questionnaire Participant 1) and ending with QP72. Students were asked to write their religion or belief system at the beginning of the questionnaire. This is represented in Figure 3 (above). As all students were in Fifth Class, the age range of participants was 10–12 years old.

Theme 1: Sharing Personal Beliefs

Positive attitudes towards sharing beliefs. Using a three-point Likert scale, questionnaire participants were invited to select the option which best describes how they feel about listening to their peers' Family Projects. This is represented in Figure 4 below.

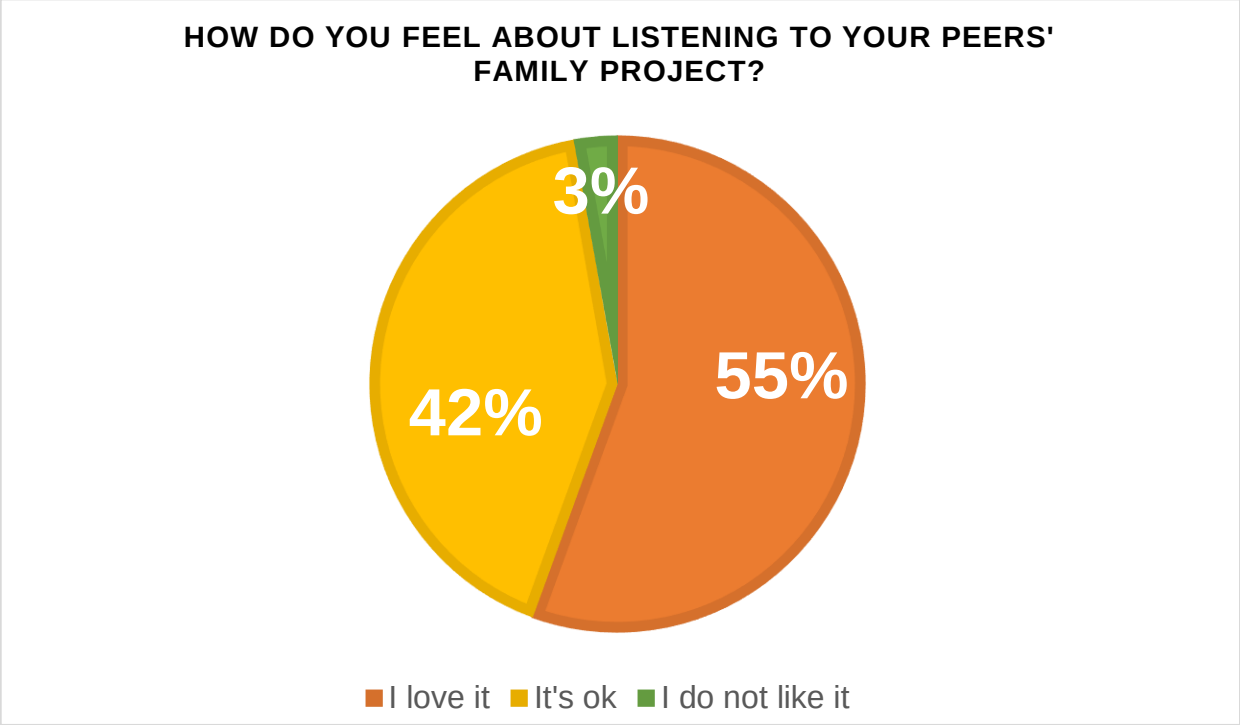

Figure 4. Students' feelings about listening to their peers' Family Projects

55% of students "loved" listening to their peers' Family Projects. Many participants used words such as "fun", "interesting" and "educational" to describe this learning activity. This is exemplified by QP39's comment: "it's fascinating and fun it is educational [sic]". Other positive comments about sharing beliefs include:

"I think it is important because you can learn about culture and how other people live their lives" (FGP21).
"it teaches people how to respect others' beliefs" (QP20).
"it teaches us that we are all unique and different in special ways" (QP39).
"it shows like diversity and you learn about other peoples' cultures [. . .] everybody is not like you and everybody's not the same and they have different beliefs and different cultures" (FGP19).
"it's important to know what people believe in coz [sic] they have the right to believe it" (FGP25).

Students' positive views on learning about religious diversity from their peers' beliefs corroborates previous Irish research (NCCA, 2018b). This is also evident from a respondent's drawing in Figure 5 (below). A Muslim respondent explained that expressing their beliefs to their classmates helped others "understand me, how I act differently sometimes" (QP21). FGP5 explained that the Family Project was important because it "helps lots of people understand from different perspectives [. . .] you might find out new things about your own religion or something you didn't know about someone else's religion".

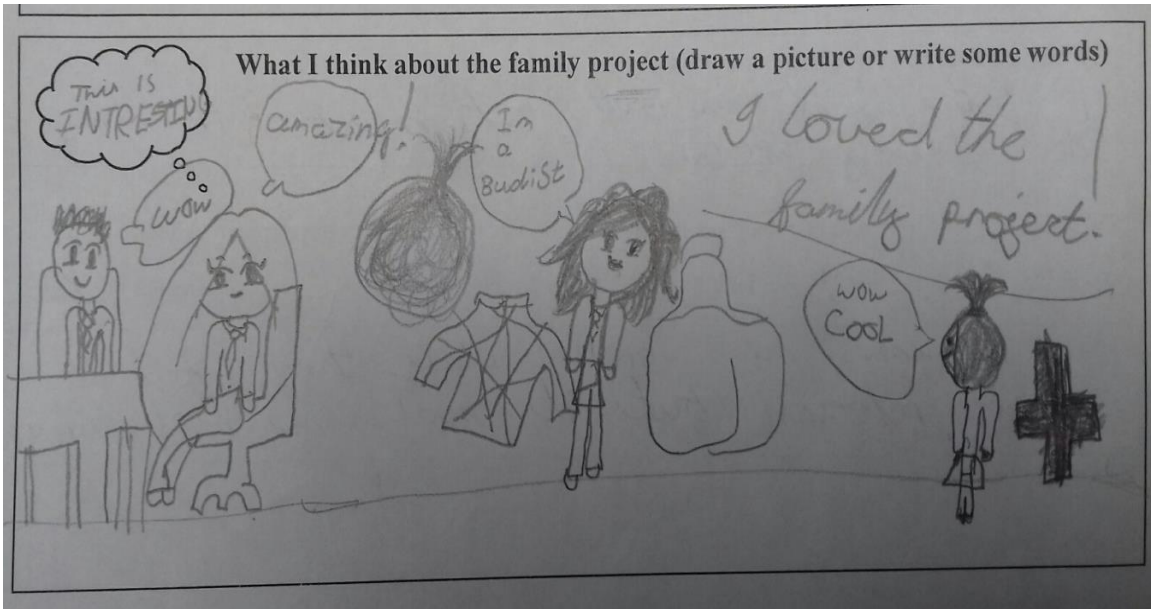

Figure 5. QP25's perspective on the Family Project.

Students also recognised that they can maintain their own beliefs even if those beliefs differ from their peers. A student with no religious affiliation wrote "I have my own belief and they have their own beliefs. We all have our own beliefs" (QP12). Similarly, a Christian student wrote that when listening to their peers "I don't really believe in what they believe in, but I still respect them" (QP65).

Many students made a connection between their peers' religion and their culture. QP59 was able to "learn new stuff about other people's culture." As well as cultural characteristics, some focus group participants made connections between religious and linguistic commonalities during the Family Project presentations:

FGP1: my friend is saying something and the language that she speaks in was the same as mine so I was thinking in my mind I could speak to her in that language at lunch.

FGP4: Yeah like I agree with FGP1 because sometimes languages can be connected even if they're from different religions or the same religion.

FGP2 elaborated: "having to know someone that has the same language as you and has the same religion as you is just a nice feeling to have". The Family Project therefore can enable children to recognise that language, culture *and* religion can be connected and teachers can engage with this as CRP in practice. The data also illustrates how the Family Project can facilitate students' development of intercultural competence (Council of Europe, 2014) which is "a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one … to understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself" (p. 16).

Sharing beliefs through the Family Projects enables students to increase religious understanding, which can strengthen friendships between students from diverse belief backgrounds. FGP24 explains "I feel good because then I know what my friends believe in and then they know what I believe in". A Muslim student explained "if I have a Christian friend I'll know that if I learn about being Christian [. . .] what to say if you offend them or something I'll be able to be like 'don't say that' to them" (FGP19). Sharing beliefs can help communication amongst peers: "some people might be feeling upset and you know what you *could* say to them and shouldn't say to them" (FGP23). Furthermore, when students bring their household funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al. 2005) to school, peer relationships can be strengthened. FGP17 remarked "I think it's fun because you like learn about your friend's culture and like what they do at home." This is also evident from a student's sketch in Figure 6 (below) who wrote about the Family Project "I think it has

brought people together". The data are consistent with research by Faas et al. (2018b) which found that "students demonstrated a good level of knowledge of other religions and cultures as well as strong inter-ethnic and inter-religious friendships" (p. 465).

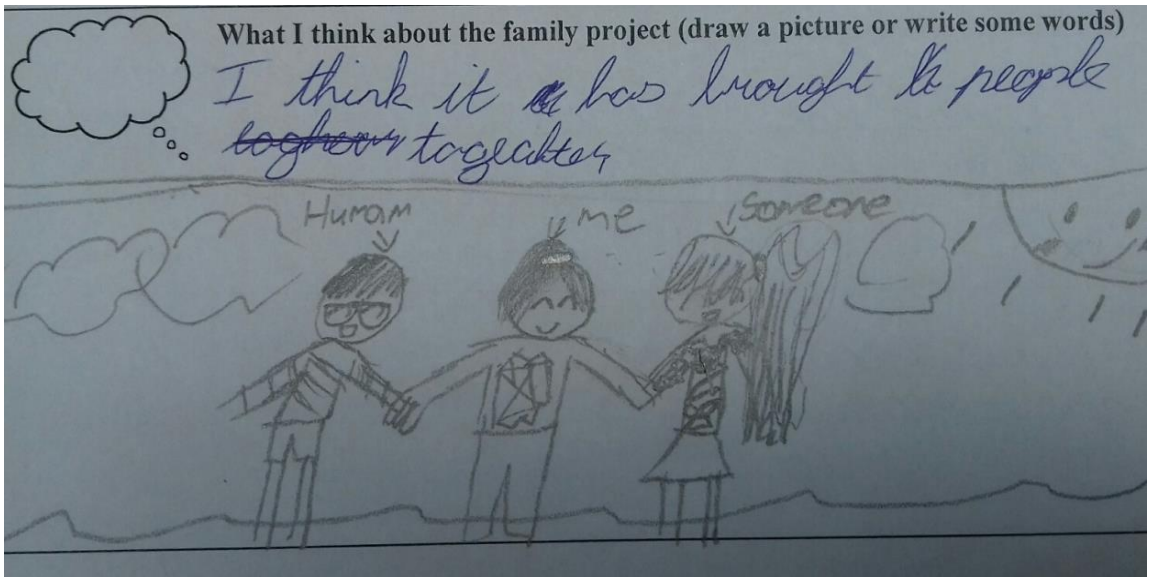

Figure 6. QP26's perspective on the Family Project.

Three focus group participants recognised that the Family Projects enabled them to learn about beliefs from an "insider's" perspective and told through students' own lived experiences (Barnes, 2014; Erricker & Erricker, 2000; Jackson, 1997). FGP3 explained:

> if one of your peers or classmates who might actually *experience* that, tell you about that, it feels like it has a lot more meaning behind it than it actually does because it's your friend or a classmate who's telling about it because they actually experience it for themselves.

This has an advantage because "you can ask more detailed questions because they actually *are* that religion so they know more" (FGP 22). Some participants felt a sense of pride when sharing their beliefs. QP27 expressed "everybody can know my religion and I feel proud". For QP72, sharing their beliefs can "boost" their confidence and knowledge.

These statements can be interpreted as CRP in action, and are consistent with previous research linking students' increased self-esteem with their cultural recognition (Devine, 2013; Gay, 2002; Ipgrave, 2001). Some students enjoyed presenting their projects because they wanted their peers to learn more about them. FGP2 commented "it's pretty fun telling it to your classmates because they get to learn more about you". Several students enjoyed sharing their beliefs due to proselytism: "even if they don't exactly believe in it, it's still nice to even like spread it, spread the word" (FGP5). Similarly, from the quantitative data, a Christian student wrote "I want to tell other people to know about the true living Jesus" (QP59) and a Muslim student said "I want people to know my religion and maybe even join it" (QP10).

Although some participants commented positively on the Family Project, 75% of students were either ambivalent or disliked presenting their projects. This is represented in Figure 7 below.

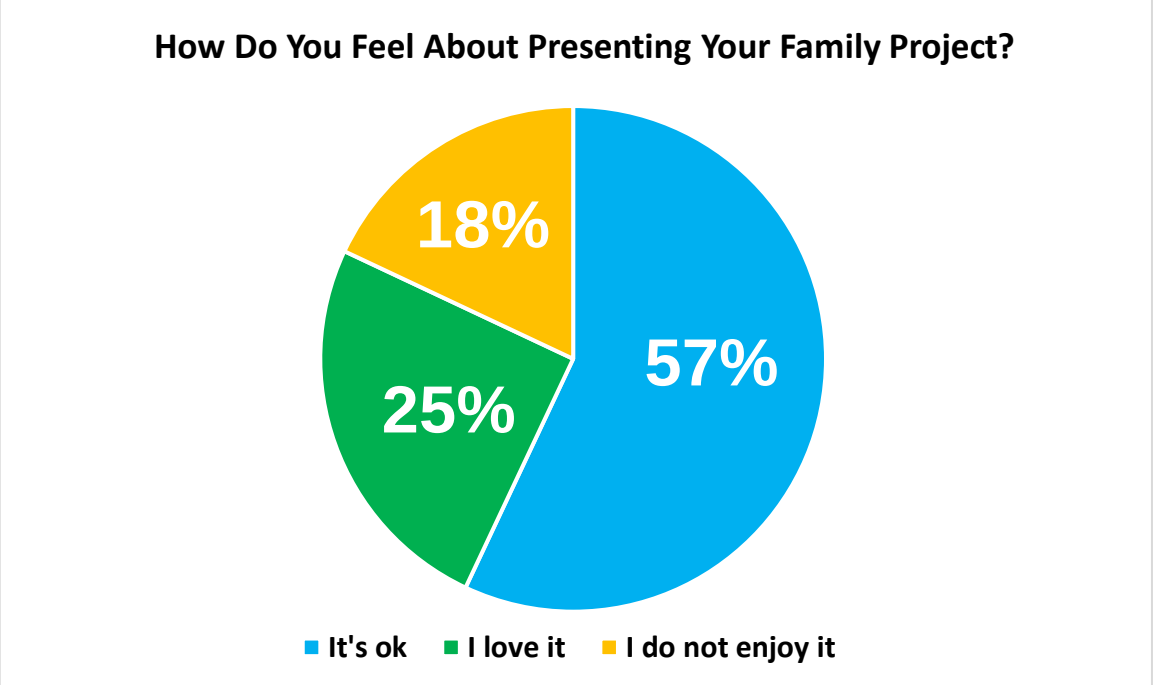

Figure 7. Students' feelings on presenting their Family Projects.

Students' self-consciousness. The majority of questionnaire participants explained how they felt "shy", "timid", "nervous", "embarrassed" or "uncomfortable" when presenting their beliefs through the Family Project. This was corroborated during the focus group discussions as many participants felt self-conscious publicly expressing their beliefs. Comments include "I'm not really that confident" (QP8), "I'm an introvert and I'm not good at public speaking" (FGP7), and "I'm not that social" (FGP12). FGP1 was worried about their peers' opinions during presenting the project: "in my mind I think would my classmates like it or not?" For some students, any subject where they had to speak aloud made them feel uncomfortable. QP66 wrote that they were "afraid if people judge me and then I'll get embarrassed. It's like that for every subject". For other students, there was a reluctance to specifically discuss their beliefs. This corroborates previous research (Harmon, 2018; Moulin, 2011; Smyth & Darmody, 2011) which also found that students often feel uncomfortable sharing their religious beliefs.

Three participants felt self-conscious about their perceived lack of religious knowledge. QP65 wrote "I'm a bit shy and I have a few friends who are Catholic and I'm still learning about my religion and I'm worried if I miss anything". QP45 remarked "I don't really know a lot about my religion, I only know a bit". All participants who referenced a lack of knowledge about their religious beliefs and traditions were Catholic. This corroborates research by Darmody et al., (2016), Mullally (2018) and the NCCA (2018b), which found that Catholic parents struggled to pass on their religious beliefs compared to parents from other belief systems.

Public versus private sphere. Eight questionnaire participants and two focus group participants felt that their religion was private and personal to them, and they did not

want their beliefs discussed publicly. QP3 wrote “I don’t really enjoy sharing my personal info [sic]”. QP36 explained “I’m not really happy about sharing like stuff us as a family do [sic]”. FGP21 remarked “I just generally don’t like talking about my beliefs”. This was echoed in the same focus group by another student:

FGP25: I don’t really like talking about my religion that much but like it’s good to learn what people believe.

Interviewer: And why do you not like to talk about it?

FGP25: I don’t really feel comfortable.

Interviewer: And is it because it’s your religion or is it because it’s in front of the class or any subject?

FGP25: My religion.

These data suggest that as well as a reluctance to engage in public speaking, some students preferred to keep their beliefs private. This raises the question as to whether students *want* teachers to engage in CRP in the form of religious beliefs or whether they would prefer to keep certain aspects of their lives private.

Safe space for sharing beliefs. As well as feeling “shy” and “nervous”, some students explained that a classroom climate of respect is needed before they feel comfortable sharing their beliefs. FGP20 was reluctant to present their project because “some people might not respect your beliefs and then I would be a bit shy maybe going up”. This reflects Jackson’s research (2012) which found that teachers must facilitate a “safe space” for students to engage in inter-belief dialogue. A Muslim student felt uncomfortable expressing their beliefs because their classmates “might get a bit offended and we don’t want to start World War 3” (QP27). This correlates with Jackson’s research

which found that "students wish to avoid conflict: some of the religiously committed students feel vulnerable" (2014, p. 49). FGP18 discussed how "there might be some people in the class that might not respect them, my beliefs, like the way I'm Muslim people might say like call me a terrorist and stuff like that". These students are aware of the potentially controversial nature of multi-belief learning and the conflict that may arise from inter-belief dialogue. This negates what Fischer (2016) describes as the assumption that "cultural traditions may only be accepted and praised" (p. 87). As a classroom can be regarded as a "miniature community, an embryonic society" (Dewey, 1907, p. 32), these comments show students' awareness of an Islamaphobic discourse that is prevalent in western society. Therefore, the role of the teacher is imperative in creating a classroom atmosphere conducive to inter-belief dialogue that fosters respect and understanding of all beliefs. FGP6 emphasises the positive role their teacher plays: "teacher talks about not only one religion all the time, she talks about all different types of religions … and like she makes you think positive about every religion".

Overall, the data illustrates that the majority of students showed a much greater preference for listening to their peers' beliefs rather than sharing their own beliefs. This is represented in a comparative chart below (Figure 8).

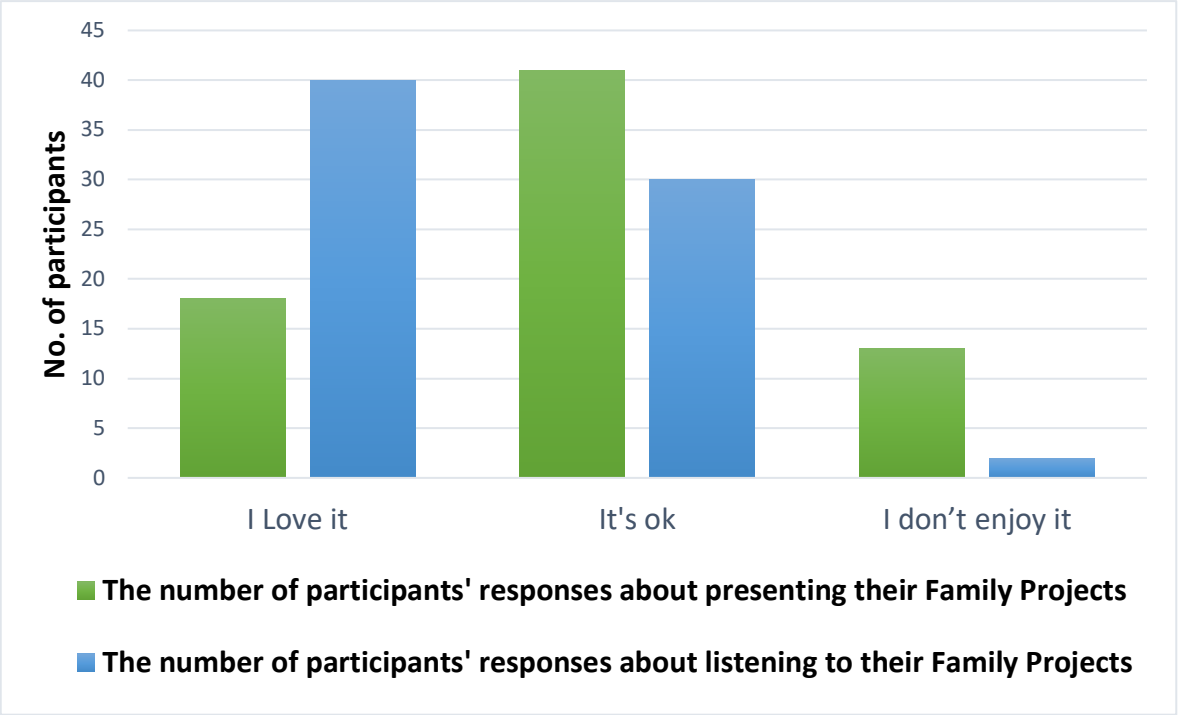

Figure 8. Students' feelings towards presenting their projects compared to listening to their peers' projects

Theme 2: Development of Religious Literacy

Despite students' ambivalence towards presenting their Family Projects, data indicated that 90% of participants learned new information through their engagement with the Family Project. This is represented in Figure 9. Findings illustrate that new learning in the form of CRP included religious symbols, signs, holy books, sacred foods, sacred animals, clothes and religious pilgrimages. The Family Project enabled students to develop religious literacy about practices from other religious traditions, and this was consistent across both quantitative and qualitative data.

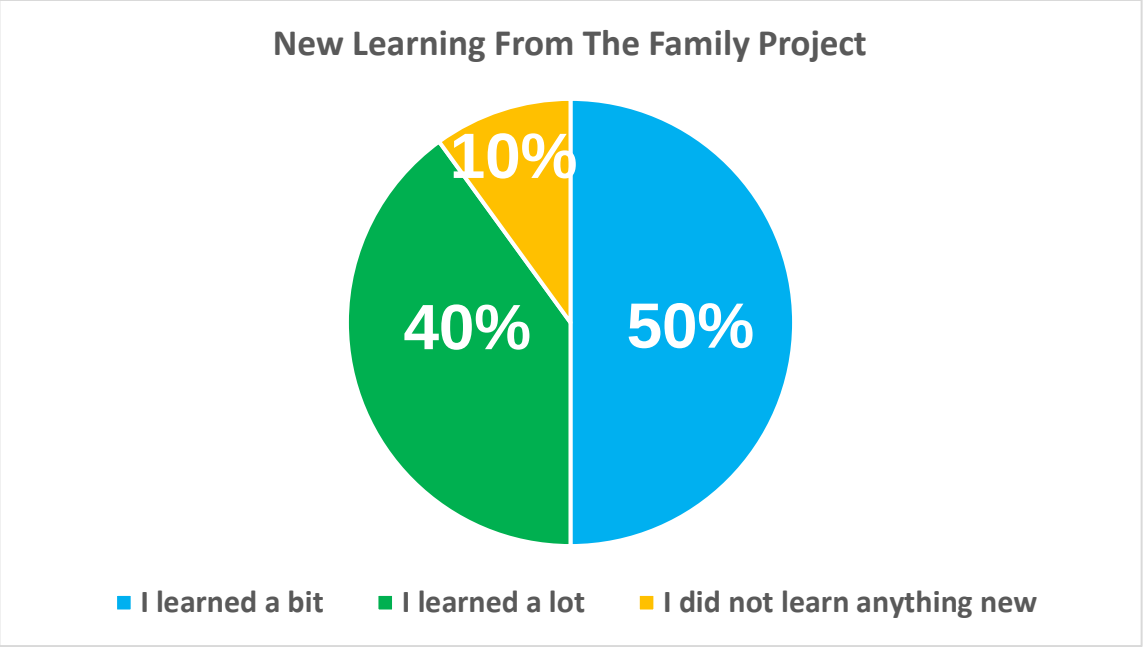

Figure 9. Proportion of new learning from listening to peers' Family Projects

FGP28 explained "I didn't know that you couldn't have a religion. I thought that everyone had to have a religion". FGP2 remarked "when I came to learning about religion in school, I learned that there are more Gods, about other religions and the God that you believe in is not the only God". FGP18 commented:

> I used to think that when people are doing meditation that they would go like "om". I just thought that they were just saying that to calm their mind or something like but it's actually like a Hindu God.

Similarly, FGP12 explained that "you get to know what they follow, what are their rules and their beliefs". This is also apparent in a student's sketch in Figure 10 below. Developing religious literacy in this way is consistent with research from O'Grady (2005).

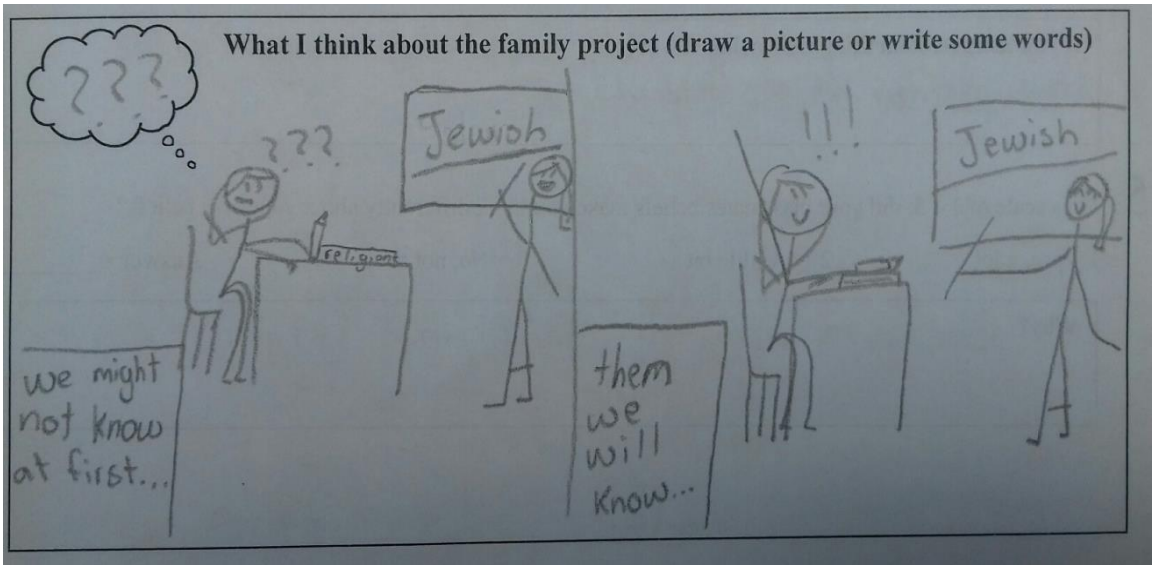

Figure 10. QP27's perspectives on the Family Project

Students applied their new learning to practical situations: "if you go to a different country and they have a different religion there, you'd know more about that religion" (FGP13). Another student added "say that you have a party and … some religion don't eat pork and let's say that you have all the foods like pork and they are not allowed to eat and you just don't know" (FGP9). This shows the potential of the Family Project as CRP to develop students' citizenship skills (Council of Europe, 2014). On the other hand, new learning is dependent on how the beliefs are interpreted by the student. For example, a Christian participant explained that "some religion [sic] beliefs are quite extreme" (QP66). This comment highlights the sensitivity at which the topic must be addressed in classroom practice, and was also found in previous research (Darmody et al., 2016; Smyth & Darmody, 2011).

In both data sets, participants were able to see commonalities across religions such as praying, fasting, drinking alcohol, celebrations and fasting. FGP19 explained:

> my friends were talking about religion I never knew it was kind of similar to my religion. Like it said in my religion that it might be the end of the world and it says that in their religion but like in a different way.

Similarly, QP22 found similarities between their religion and Christianity: "Jesus has a fasting day like Muslims". Therefore, the Family Project enabled these students to make connections to their friends' beliefs, which is a feature of Jackson's (1997) interpretive approach. These data are also consistent with previous studies which highlight how sharing beliefs can educate students about the diversity of beliefs in contemporary society (Council of Europe, 2014; Grimmit, 2000). This can enable students to develop respect for different religions (Hull, 2001) and an appreciation of various beliefs (Aronson et al., 2016), which are consistent themes in the data. This is evident in comments such as "I learned that if someone believes in something, you don't criticise them" (QP51) and "I learned that many people have different beliefs and it's just cool" (QP27). This corroborates Faas et al.'s research (2018c) of CNSs where students' different beliefs were regarded as unproblematic.

Although students showed a dislike or ambivalence towards presenting their Family Project, 62% of participants felt the Family Project was "very important". This is represented in Figure 11. Most students attributed the importance of the Family Project to learning about one another's beliefs and strengthening inter-religious friendships.

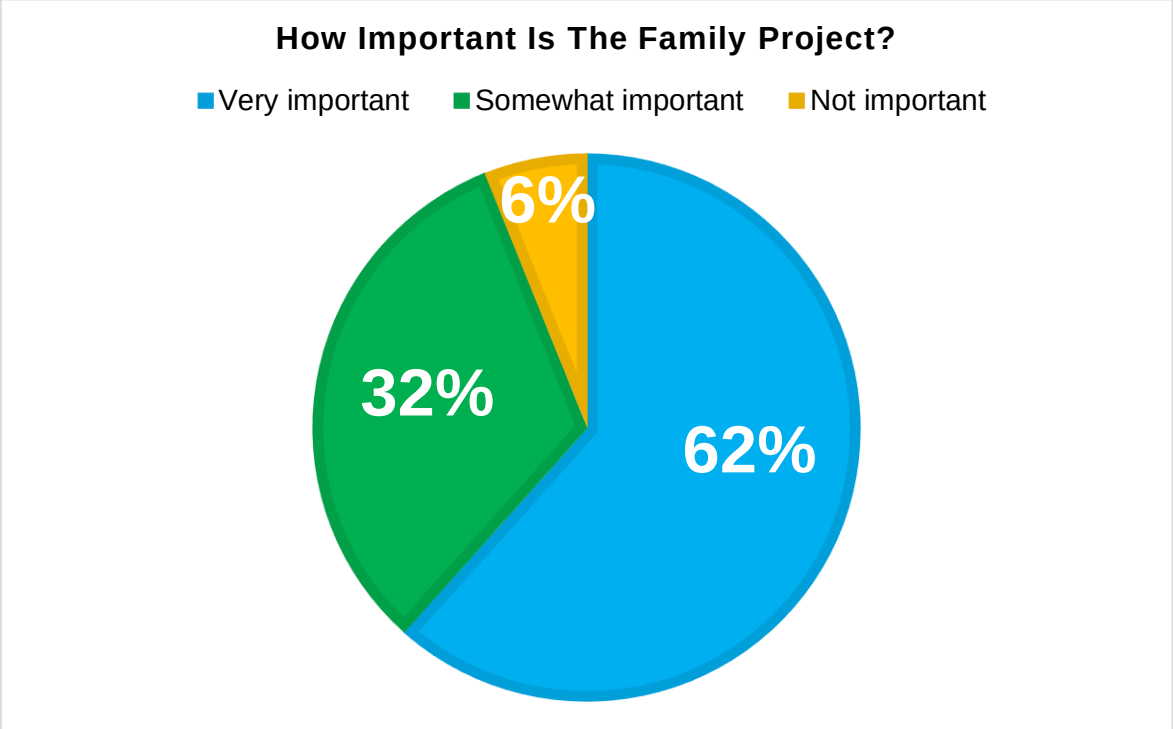

Figure 11. Students' perspectives on the importance of the Family Project.

On the other hand, a minority of students from both data sets felt the Family Project was unimportant or boring. QP43 explained "you have to learn and respect different people's beliefs but I don't think it's really important". This is also evident from a student's sketch in Figure 12. FGP10 commented that listening to many Family Projects was repetitive and boring because "there are lots of people in our class that are Muslim so maybe there could be like four people talking about the same thing". Therefore, CRP can be repetitive if there are many students from the same cultural group. This finding does not correlate with any existing research on CRP.

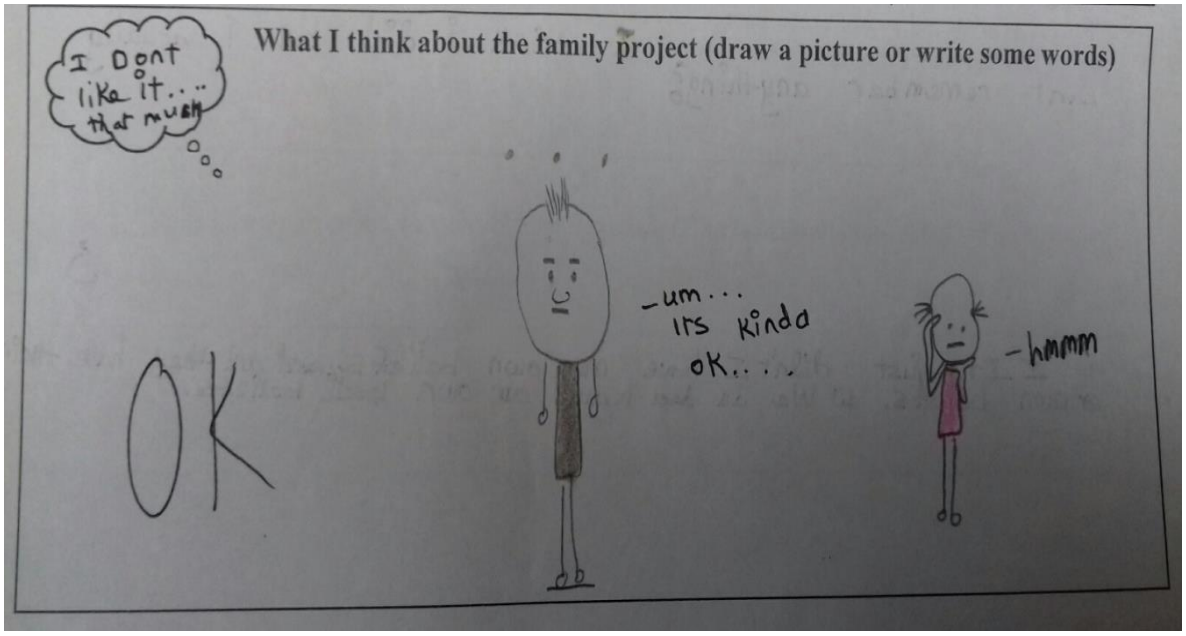

Figure 12. QP12's perspective on the Family Project.

Most students (67%) believed that new learning from their peers did *not* make them think differently about their own beliefs:

"someone else's belief is their belief and when I learn about them, I don't think differently about my belief" (QP43).
"I strongly believe in Jesus and nothing can change my mind" (QP59).
"I learn stuff from them but it doesn't make me want to change my religion" (QP24).
"my beliefs are strong and nothing will change it" (QP50).
"my beliefs are *my* beliefs" (QP19).

This is consistent with data from McGovern and Devine (2016) which found that "strong religious identity enmeshed in family habitus is central to both the Muslim and Christian children's identity and sense of themselves" (p. 45).

Theme 3: Students from Minority-Belief Backgrounds

Christianity and Islam were the majority religions in each participating class. Most students from minority belief systems (in this context Hindu, atheists and Buddhists) discussed how sharing their beliefs highlighted their difference. QP23 wrote that presenting the project "makes me feel bad because I am the only one in the class". A Hindu student wrote "I sometimes feel a bit nervous since I'm a different religion to others" (QP62). QP12 felt uncomfortable talking about their beliefs "because I have a different religion" and "I'd be afraid if people judge me and then I'll get embarrassed." Similarly, QP67 wrote "I don't feel comfortable because I feel people will start laughing when they hear what I believe in". Therefore, during multi-belief learning, the Family Project can emphasise students' differences in a negative way, causing some pupils to feel self-conscious and marginalised.

Some students with no religious affiliation felt that they lack funds of knowledge compared to their peers. An atheist student explained "I don't really like talking about my religion, I don't have a religion so it's kind of nervous to talk in front of the class" (FGP22). Another atheist student disliked the Family Project "because I don't know what to write on it". This raises the question as to whether the Family Project is suitable for students' from secular backgrounds.

As well as the Family Project, the PowerPoint used to teach about beliefs and religions through the phenomenological approach can also be exclusionary for students with no religious affiliation:

Interviewer: Do you like the PowerPoint?

[…]

FGP23: I like it- I like it because I get to know my friends a bit more but, I just like I still haven't seen one from my religion coz [sic] I'm non-religious and like I-I don't really think there should be one, it's just like nobody can really learn about what I think.

Interviewer: yeah and how does that make you feel?

FGP23: not upset but like a bit coz [sic] everyone else is getting to know each other and I'm coz [sic] I'm the only one in the class so I feel a bit upset.

These comments illustrate how the Family Project can cause exclusion rather than promote diversity. Therefore, is right to encourage minority belief students to publicly articulate their beliefs when it can cause feelings of discomfort, or are the needs of the majority group being served by learning from the minority 'Other'?

These data do not resonate with existing Irish research as none has been carried out on the views of students' from secular or other minority beliefs in a multi-denominational setting. However, Devine's research (2011) found that students from minority beliefs felt excluded in denominational schools during the delivery of patron's programmes. Mullally (2018) found that some atheist parents whose children attend a CNS would prefer religious education to remain in the private sphere. A parent participant explained "there is a perception in the school that religion is part of everyday life. A message that a religion, no matter what it is, is good. However, this does not support the children who are being raised in a non-religious environment. We automatically are lacking and different" (p. 83). This

raises the question as to whether a curriculum in a state-funded school can deliver a patron's programme in which "the rights of children and the interdependent parental rights are respected, protected and fulfilled" (Oduntan, 2012, p. 339).

Although the Family Project strives to be inclusive and equitable for all students, the data also suggests that it can exclude some students who do not belong to the main religions in the class, which are Christianity and Islam.

Interviewer: do you feel like your classroom is a comfortable place for you to talk about your beliefs?

FGP25: yeah because I think you know that there's someone else in the class that has the same belief as you do so don't feel – you feel more comfortable learning with them than learning let's say by yourself or at home.

Interviewer: ok

FGP26: It's not as comfortable as-as talking as with my family because there's no-one in the class really that has the exact same religion as me.

[. . .]

FGP27: I feel a bit comfortable because there are some people in the class that are in the same religion as me.

Interviewer: ok yeah.

FGP24: I feel comfortable, I agree with FGP27 because there's a couple of people the same religion as me too.

These findings are similar to Knauth's research in which there is an "intra-religious barrier" between different groups during inter-belief conversations (2009). These "invisible" groupings can be damaging for those who are not included, as FGP16 explains:

> they'll think it's not fair that other people have the same religion and they're not unique like the other people so like they might feel like a bit sad and let down and they'll start thinking differently about their religion.

Therefore, although on the one hand the Family Project can strengthen inter-belief friendships through learning about one another, the data also suggest that articulating beliefs in public can highlight differences amongst friendship groups, once more leading to feelings of exclusion for those who do not fit in.

The home rather than the school environment can be a place where students can share their beliefs with friends. FGP26 is the only one from their belief system in their class. The student discusses how they felt when they made friends outside of school with children from the same belief system: "I felt very happy coz [sic] I thought I was the only one". Similarly, FGP26 explained "I have this other friend outside of school that is the same religion as me [. . .] and I talk sometimes with … about the religion". This is consistent with research from McGovern and Devine (2015) which found that friendships within the same belief system "strengthened their religions, language and ethnic identities" (p. 45). This also corroborates research by Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) which found that students built social capital through friendships with children of the same religion.

Theme 4: The Value of Child Agency

Child as expert. Many students in both the questionnaires and focus groups enjoyed presenting their projects because they had an opportunity to share their religious expertise: "I get to teach my classmates" (QP39) and "I get to say how my religion works" (QP14). QP18 explained "I like when the people said like 'wow I didn't know this!'". Similarly, in the qualitative data, many children described how articulating their beliefs increased their self-esteem when they assumed the role of expert knower. FGP5 commented "I feel smarter than I usually am" and FGP25 explained "sometimes you then feel good about yourself because you taught someone something that you – they didn't know yet so you might feel good". This form of CRP can have positive effects on the students. FGP3 remarked "when I show everyone my religion and everything about it I just like sharing... It gives me a good feeling". It can strengthen some students' beliefs and encourage them to have pride in their religion: "I feel good about myself that I'm from that religion and I like sharing with the class about it and it makes me feel happy that I'm telling them." The positive effects of students sharing their funds of knowledge is consistent with previous research (Gay, 2002; Ipgrave, 2001).

Students adopt the role of expert or primary knower during multi-belief learning, and this relates to Ladson-Billings' (2014) observation that "learners can be sources and resources of knowledge and skills" (p. 79). This kind of student-centred CRP disrupts Amanti's view of "static, normative and exclusive" intercultural practices that perpetuate negative stereotypes (2005, p. 132). Furthermore, the child as expert can avoid narratives of "tokenism" (Titley & Hegarty, 2013) as students decide what information is presented about their cultures.

However, three focus group participants felt a lack of confidence during inter-belief dialogue because they perceived others as having more religious expertise than them. A Christian student did not feel like an "expert" because the teacher was the same religion as them: "I feel like the teacher might know more about my religion than me" (FGP16). Therefore, the child as "expert" is more often reserved for children from minority religions such as Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. Christian students or students with no religious affiliation felt that they could not assume this role of expert knower, thereby experiencing a sense of exclusion. Furthermore, as most teachers are white and Catholic (Keane & Heinz, 2018), the similarities between the teacher and Catholic, white Irish students can be magnified in GMGY, thereby further marginialising students who are not part of this dominant majority.

Mutual teaching and learning. When students engage in presenting their Family Projects and then listening to their peers' beliefs, a kind of mutual teaching and learning occurs. This reciprocal learning relationship is enjoyed by students: "I like to know what other peoples' beliefs are and they know what my beliefs are" (QP5). FGP28 explained that listening to one another during presentations is important because "they will be listening to what you're saying about your religion or belief and you're not listening to what they're saying so they might be a bit sad or upset".

During this process, inter-belief dialogue takes place with the intention that each student's belief is seen as equal (Ipgrave, 2001). Comments from students highlight this: "at the end of the day, we all get to learn something new about each other" (FGP24) and "I enjoy it because everyone's different and it's just good so we all know what everyone's

thinking" (FGP23). These comments illustrate the potential for the Family Project to provide inclusive opportunities for students regardless of their beliefs.

Teaching the teacher. During the Family Project presentations, mutual teaching and learning occurs not only between students, but between students and their teacher. FGP25 explains "if you're a different religion say to your teacher … and you say interesting facts about your religion that wasn't on the PowerPoint, your teacher can learn as well". This reflects Ladson-Billings research (1995a) which found that culturally responsive teachers "often functioned as learners" (p. 163). Children can use their funds of knowledge in ways that a teacher cannot, as FGP21 remarks "they're your friend and you know them for a long time and they know more about the religion than most teachers do". This has positive effects on students' self-esteem, as FGP6 remarks "I think the people that teach the teacher feel really good because like the teacher's an adult and you're a child and you're teaching her something or him". FGP4 comments that "maybe a teacher didn't know much about a religion so a student could tell her a bit about it [. . .] It's good because it's a big change." Here traditional classroom pedagogy of "chalk and talk" and well-established power structures are subverted because control of the knowledge is given to the children. Therefore, students in this context are not "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1995, pp. 182-183) passively accepting knowledge. This is evidence of the restructuring of power dynamics which is advocated by Martin et al. (2017) because teachers are repositioned as learners which can enable them to rethink their "deficit dispositions towards difference" (p. 235). As minority students become the "holders of knowledge", "westernized versions of education," which can be harmful to migrant student's self-esteem can be disrupted (Martin et al., 2017, p. 241).

This shift in classroom practice was acknowledged positively by all students in the focus groups. FGP6 explains that the teacher "already knows what she's going to teach and then if your friends go up and teaches the teacher something about their religion, it's different". FGP5 explains how presenting the Family Project subverts the traditional timetable for the teacher and can be unplanned, unstructured and more interesting in its approach:

> it's like when they have a schedule of what they're going to say but when a student comes up and says something about religion it *is* going to be related to the religion but the teacher is not going to know what he's going to say because it's not the teacher teaching, it's the student-teaching-the-teacher teaching.

Funds of knowledge can also extend beyond religion to include language: "you can also help your teacher by pronouncing like the names of people correctly and then the teacher will learn how to do it" (FGP 24). Cultural characteristics such as language and religion relate to Gay's "meaningful and relevant cultural elements" (2002) that teachers can engage with as a form of CRP.

The role of the school in multi-belief learning. Many students articulated an awareness of potentially offending others due to differences of beliefs. FGP5 explains how "some people can blame if they don't know much about the religion [. . .] if you know about different religions you'll know religions kind of connect to the way someone acts, someone does, someone re-reacts even". School was recognised as a place in which students can learn to be informed and respectful of one another's beliefs. FGP3 explains:

> school can help you learn about it and also help you to you know control your emotions like even if you heard about it, you still might hate it but you don't go

onto the streets saying like I don't know "Christianity is [inaudible] burn the church" or something, I don't know. If you do that, that's bad.

In another focus group the role of the school was again discussed:

Interviewer: Do you think in school it's *important* to talk about your own beliefs with your classmates and teacher?

FGP28: Well I don't really think it really matters but sometimes it could be important coz [sic] you may say something and someone else might get offended because that's like their belief or something like that.

Interviewer: Yeah what do you want to say, is it important to talk about it?

FGP27: I mean it's not that important but it's the exact same reason. If you say something to some person that is offensive and you should know their religion and you should know what you're talking about.

Interviewer: Yeah so school helps you not to be offensive?

FGP27: Yeah.

The school is a safe place because "you're not allowed actually to say something bad about someone what he or she believes because it's hers or his choice what to believe and what to not believe and it's not his problem or her problem what religion are you" (FGP 9). Despite this, some students mentioned that bullying occurs in school because of a student's religious identity. FGP15 explained "I think that it's a good thing that they can stop it because people get bullied for this in the world and I don't think it's fair". FGP2 commented:

> if you're going to a school and you're kind of getting hurt by other people about your religion it's a good idea to tell an adult … your teacher or anybody you trust and then it will make school try to prevent anything like that.

Similarly, FGP1 said "tell the person who said that to stop and try to get them to think that all religions are equal. They're different but in a good way". Participants view school as a safe place for learning to respect one another's beliefs and this corroborates previous research (Jackson, 2014; Ipgrave, 2004).

Students learn through the ethos of the school about events which are based on Christian traditions such as St. Patrick's Day and Christmas. Christian privilege is evident as some students from minority beliefs celebrate these Christian traditions:

> I used to think that when we had our own holiday in our own religion that it was the only holiday we should celebrate, but now that I've grown up I've seen lots of holidays that you can celebrate even if you're not in that religion … some Islamic people can celebrate St. Patrick's Day … some of my friends who are Muslim celebrate Christmas. (FGP5)

However, although Christianity is the majority religion in Irish society, this data does not correlate with previous literature on Christian privilege (Blumenfield, 2006) because the majority religion in some classes is Islam. Some students from belief systems other than Islam expressed a feeling of exclusion:

> I don't think there should be stuff that should be different about each other […] when somebody hurts you about your own religion even if its verbal it can feel really bad like for example if since I'm Christian if somebody went up to me and

> said like “haha your Christian” I’m like and they say “I have a better religion” that just makes you feel like left out. (FGP2)

Similarly, FGP6 is upset because others do not understand their religion:

> I go to Confirmation class and … when someone comes up to you and goes like “oh ha like your club gives you homework” and things it’s just like coz [sic] they don’t know like about your religion and it’s not like you have to think anything about what they say about you like you don’t have to listen to them.

These comments suggest that although the Family Project seeks to be equitable and fair to all students, children are encouraged to publicly articulate their beliefs which may create an ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy between friendship groups. Again this is problematic because the Family Project can unintentionally lead to the formation of “inter-religious barriers” (Knauth, 2009).

Child agency versus familial influence. Questionnaire participants were asked who helps them complete their Family Project. This is represented in Figure 13. 72% of respondents answered that their parents help them. This is consistent with previous literature stating that parents are the primary influence on their children’s religious beliefs (Darmody 2016; Erickson, 1992; McGovern & Devine, 2016).

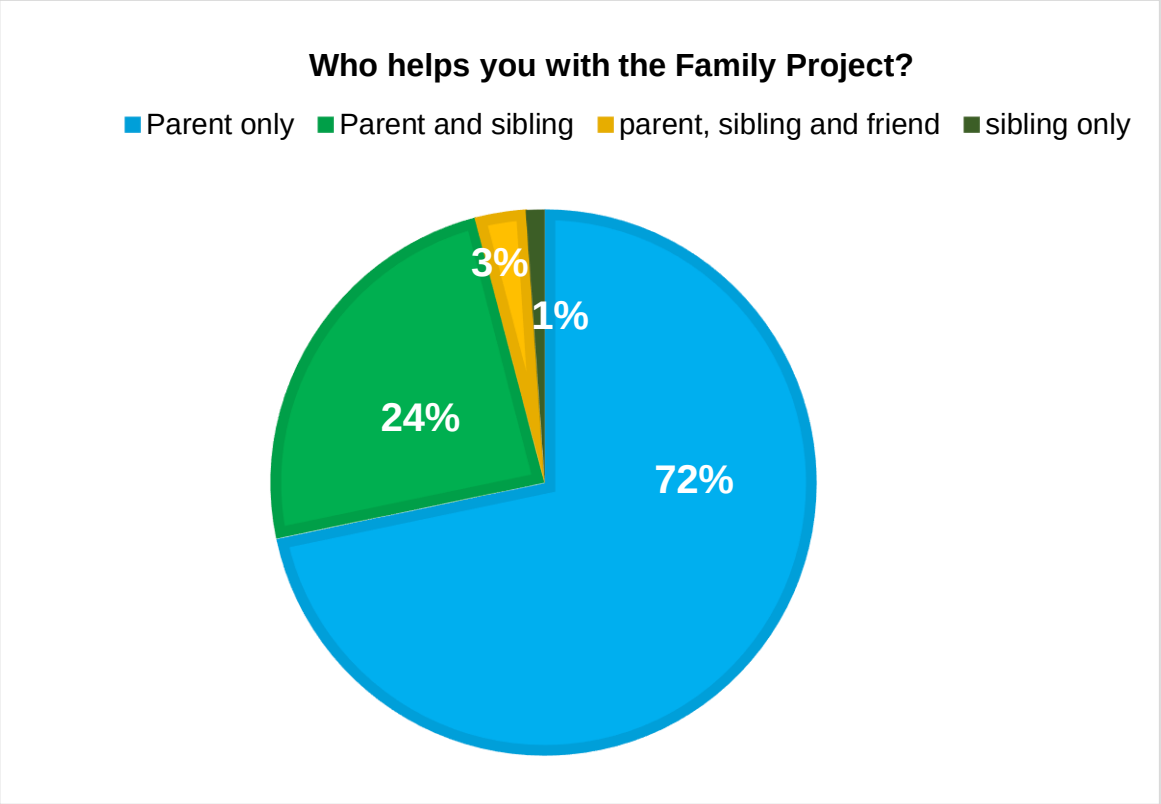

Figure 13. Assistance with the Family Project

The data also suggest that the role of a sibling is significant in communicating religious beliefs to a child. This was consistent with the focus group discussions:

FGP18: My Mum helps me with the drawing and I do the writing.

FGP19: My Dad helps me with the drawing and explains to me like what it meant.

FGP20: My Dad helped me with my project he [pause] he told me like things about the cross and stuff to write down.

FGP21: My sister and my mother helped me with the project. They helped me with the drawing and the symbol.

Questionnaire respondents were also asked to consider who influences their beliefs. 61% of students responded that their family influences their beliefs. 7% responded that just themselves influence their beliefs, and 11% responded that their family and themselves influence their beliefs. Most students answered that their families influenced them to the greatest degree because they all shared the same beliefs. For example, an Orthodox Christian student wrote "when I don't know something I ask my family and find out new things" (QP37) and QP36 wrote "Dad and Mum always explain what Christians do or how they act/behave". Family teaches some students about the moral aspects of their religion. QP14 explains that their family "help me believe in what is right and wrong in my religion" which is similar to QP41's statement that their family "teach me to go the right path [sic]". Many students wrote that they engage in religious-based activities with their parents, such as visiting places of worship, praying and reading sacred texts. This was also evident in Darmody et al.'s research (2016).

Both paternal and maternal influences were equally strong throughout the research: "I learn from my Mam and try to follow what she is doing" (QP11) and "my Dad influences me by telling me fascinating stories about Jesus" (QP47). This contradicts previous research (Desrosiers et al., 2011; Smyth, 2010) which found that maternal influence was stronger than paternal influence on the formation of religious beliefs. Furthermore, peers were not seen as an influence on the participants in this research which contradicts Schwartz et al.'s research (2006).

The Family Project can strengthen relationships between families. QP12 wrote "you get to spend more time with your family and it maybe is important to talk about these things with your family, but I don't really like it". Another child wrote "it helps you learn

and bond with your family" (QP11). A student with no religious affiliation wrote that the Family Project was very important "to know your family more" (QP33).

For some students if their family has a belief they also follow it. A Christian student (QP26) explained that "my parents believe that God is our savior and it make me [sic] believe that too". A Muslim student wrote "if I listen to my family I become better" (QP38). Another student (QP64) explained that because they were born into their family they had to share that belief: "my family gave birth to me so I have to believe as the same [sic]". The data in this research indicates that most students did not engage in agency in their formation of their beliefs, which contradicts previous research (Faas et al., 2018c; Smyth, 2010; Tenery, 2005) and there was no evidence of bi-directional influence as seen in Boyatzis and Danicki (2003).

However, child-agency was evident for a minority of students in the research. When asked who influences their beliefs, 24% of participants selected the option "myself". Students commented:

"I have no religion but I believe in karma" (QP12).
"I don't believe in anything really … I just think it's not real". (QP54 – a self-identified Buddhist student).
"well they go to church and they don't mind what I believe in" (QP66).
"I don't really believe in all the Catholic beliefs" (QP70 – A self-identified Catholic student).

These data suggest that although children self-identify with a religion that their family belongs to, they do not necessarily share these beliefs. This is consistent with

previous research (Faas et al., 2017; Harmon, 2018) which found that students had their own individualised beliefs. Furthermore, it relates to Smyth's research (2010) which concluded that children's beliefs can differ from their parents, "countering the notion that the religious/other belief messages encountered by children within the home sphere are homogenous in nature" (p. 37). The data therefore suggests that the Family Project with its emphasis on the role of the family is flawed because it rests on the assumption that students have the same religious beliefs as their families. However, encouraging students to engage in dialogue with their parents, even if their beliefs differ, may be a worthwhile experience.

The Family Project may also lead to conflicting messages between school and home due to essentialist beliefs about one's religion. For example, a Christian student explains that "in my religion we learned how to stay thinking of our religion at all times" (QP14). This points to the complexity of delivering a multi-belief curriculum which aims to cater equally to the needs of all students and their families.

Conclusion

The research has shown that the Family Project enabled students to learn about one another' beliefs, and in doing so, students' religious literacy and intercultural competence increased. Participants whose religion was an important part of their self-identity felt a sense of pride when sharing their beliefs, and for some students, family bonds and inter-religious friendships were strengthened through participating in the Family Projects. The research also shows that the Family Project promotes the child as expert "teaching the teacher", which is a form of CRP that disrupts traditional 'chalk and talk' classroom practice.

However, the data also illustrated that although the majority of students enjoyed listening to their peers, most felt uncomfortable and embarrassed sharing their own beliefs. Students with no religious affiliation felt a sense of exclusion and marginalisation during the Family Project and teacher-led PowerPoint. As the projects encourage children to publicly express their beliefs, students from minority belief backgrounds felt this negatively emphasised their different beliefs amongst peer groups, rather than promoting diversity. The research also indicates that although parents exert a profound influence on most participants' beliefs, some students' beliefs differed to those of the families. These findings highlight the potentially problematic nature of the Family Project, and raise the question as to whether any approach to multi-belief learning can be equitable for *all* students?

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusions

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate students' experiences of and perspectives on the Family Project in the GMGY curriculum. In doing so, the research endeavoured to answer the following questions:

- How do students feel about sharing their personal religious or secular beliefs *with* their peers and learning *from* their peers?
- Does the Family Project, as culturally relevant pedagogy, affect a child's sense of self-identity, self-esteem and sense of belonging?
- Does the Family Project have an influence on a student's affective, cognitive or attitudinal relationship with other religions and their own beliefs?
- What are students' understanding of the role of parents, teachers, and the school in learning about beliefs and religions?

In response to the above questions, the findings illustrated that students showed a much stronger preference for listening to one another's Family Projects rather than presenting their own beliefs. The majority of students felt self-consciousness and shy when asked to publicly express their beliefs, whilst others preferred to retain this part of their cultural identity in the private sphere. Therefore, the research illustrates that some students prefer not to engage in certain elements of CRP.

For some participants, the Family Project succeeded in increasing their self-esteem and self-confidence as they adopted the role of expert or primary knower. Participants enjoyed opportunities to use their funds of knowledge to "teach the teacher". This form of

CRP subverted traditional hierarchies of student-teacher classroom dynamics. However, Catholic students felt excluded from this practice because they felt their teacher knew more about their religion than them. For some students with beliefs other than the dominant religions (Christianity and Islam), the Family Project impacted negatively on their self-esteem and sense of belonging. Many students felt that publicly articulating their beliefs negatively highlighted their difference. Some students with no religious affiliation viewed their beliefs as a deficit, particularly when their belief system was not included on the teachers' PowerPoint.

The Family Project was seen to have an influence on students' affective, cognitive and attitudinal relationship with other religions. Students felt that peer-learning facilitated by the projects increased their religious literacy, intercultural competence and understanding of religious diversity. Furthermore, sharing beliefs enabled some students to strengthen inter-religious friendships as they learned more about their peers. However, the data also illustrated that listening to others' Family Project did not influence how they felt about their own beliefs.

The research showed that students recognised the important role of teachers and the school in promoting inclusive practices and facilitating respectful inter-belief dialogue. Despite this, some students experienced negative comments from peers' in relation to their beliefs, illustrating that continual education about beliefs and religions is required. Most students in this study commented that their parents were the main influence on their religious beliefs, yet many students expressed a fluid understanding of their own religious identity that often differed to those of their families'.

As a relatively new methodology, the Family Project is traversing new and complex territory because it has at its core complex and deep issues relating to students' personal identities. On the one hand, the data illustrates that the Family Project is an effective form of CRP for teaching students about and from religions and beliefs. However, on the other hand many students felt uncomfortable expressing their beliefs, whilst others felt marginalised because their beliefs were highlighted as different. This mixed-picture is itself reflective of the inherent complexity involved in delivering a multi-belief programme that is equitable for all students. The role of the teacher therefore cannot be underestimated in facilitating effective CRP which does not cause students to feel uncomfortable or marginalised. This requires educators to adopt a sensitive approach when inviting students to share their beliefs, particularly in relation to students from minority-belief backgrounds. This a challenging issue of which this research plays only a small part in answering.

Recommendations for Classroom Practice

1. The research has highlighted the necessity of creating a classroom environment in which students feel safe in expressing their beliefs. It is recommended that teacher education colleges provide additional modules on multi-belief learning to cater for an increasingly diverse classroom population. Furthermore, on-going support for teachers is required as the Family Project is a new pedagogy. Specifically Continued Professional Development (CPD) on how to facilitate a 'safe space' for inter-belief dialogue and how to teach 'about' and 'from' religions and beliefs in an objective manner would be beneficial.
2. The data also showed that some students felt increased self-esteem and self-confidence when they assumed the role of expert knower during the Family Project.

Therefore, CPD on culturally relevant pedagogy can encourage teachers to engage with their students' cultural expertise during various classroom activities (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). This CPD can also assist teachers in grappling with the possible discomfort of giving pedagogical licence to students as well as challenging their own assumptions and biases in order to become agents of change (Samuels, 2018). The mutual teaching and learning enjoyed by students through the Family Project can also be facilitated in other curricular areas, not just multi-belief learning.

3. The research indicated that most participants felt uncomfortable sharing their beliefs, and that the emphasis on publicly articulating one's belief can highlight differences amongst peer groups. Therefore, a recommendation is that students are invited to share their beliefs in a more informal way. Rather than asking each student to complete the Family Project, students who feel comfortable can contribute their own lived experiences informally during multi-belief lessons. This would be particularly beneficial for students who are the only members of their belief system in the class.
4. The data also showed how children with no religious affiliation felt marginalised and excluded because their beliefs were not included in the teacher's PowerPoint. Therefore, it is recommended that policy makers or individual schools add information about atheism, agnosticism, humanism and no religious affiliation to the PowerPoints.
5. Students enjoyed learning about religions and beliefs from their peers because it was told through the authentic experience of the child as an 'insider'. Therefore, a further recommendation is that policy-makers or individual schools create videos featuring students from different belief systems discussing their beliefs. Students

can then be invited to engage with the video and share their beliefs if they feel comfortable.

6. The findings illustrated that students were able to use their religious literacy in real-life applications such as travelling and socialising with peers from various belief systems. A recommendation is that teachers explicitly utilise religious literacy to develop students' skills of citizenship. For example, students could analyse news and current affairs in relation to religion in the media (Jackson, 1997).

Recommendations from Students

Focus group participants were asked to suggest alternative ways to share their beliefs and religions given the majority of students felt uncomfortable presenting their projects. Below is an outline of suggestions made by students.

- Teachers present students' Family Projects anonymously to avoid embarrassment.
- Students work in small groups rather than engaging in whole-class discussions.
- Family Projects are displayed rather than discussed.
- Students create a PowerPoint to teach their classmates about their beliefs. In this way, interesting images can be added so their classmates will not feel bored.
- Members of the religious community can be invited into the school to discuss religious traditions.
- Students can engage in drama activities for teaching and learning about religions (Ipgrave, 2001).
- Students from the same religious background create a PowerPoint together. This is consistent with Harmon's (2018) research in which children felt it was important to have "some time to discuss their own religion with people of a similar religion or

belief system to themselves" (p. 102). However, this practice is similar to the methodology of belief-specific teaching which was a feature of the original GMGY programme (NCCA 2018b).

Recommendations for Further Research

In order to further enhance knowledge and best practice in the area of multi-belief learning, gathering insights from teachers, parents and policy-makers as well as students is recommended. Also, seeking the views of children from various age groups rather than confining the participants to Fifth Class would further add to the discussion. A comparative research study involving urban and rural CNSs would be advantageous in providing a fuller picture of the Family Project in classroom practice.

There is a lack of research in relation to students with no religious affiliation and their engagement with multi-belief curricula. Therefore, research in this area particularly through one-on-one interviews with students from minority religions may yield a deeper insight into their experiences and would be worthwhile for future curriculum planning. GMGY is a new curriculum, and as such, further research into the methodologies employed by the programme in the coming years would enhance further best practice in the area of multi-belief learning.

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Appendix A: Sample of the Family Project

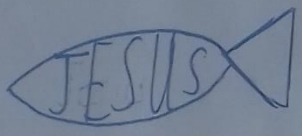
Symbolism Family Project

Our class has been learning about **symbolism.** A symbol is an action, word or picture that gives us meaning. We have discussed symbols from history as well as symbols that are associated with and/or represent a variety of world religions and beliefs. We would like to tell our friends about the symbols that are important to our families in order to develop greater respect and understanding for our own traditions as well as those of others.

What symbol is important to you and your family?

Jesus Fish

Draw or include a photograph of this symbol.



Where does this symbol come from? Describe its origins.

It's when the early Christians would scratch a fish symbol as a means to distinguish friend from foe. The Greek word for fish is ICHTHUS it's also an acronym for the phrase Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour.

Appendix B: Letter to Inform School Principal of Research Project

Dear Principal 06.02.19

My name is Tara Malone. I am a teacher and GMGY co-ordinator in School X. I am currently completing a part-time Masters in Intercultural Education at Marino Institute of Education (MIE). As part of my thesis I am conducting research into students' experiences of the **'Family Project'** during the **Goodness Me Goodness You (GMGY)** lessons. There are two parts to the study which I hope to conduct in your school with Fifth Class students: (i) questionnaires and (ii) interviews with focus groups.

In **March 2019** I hope to visit two Fifth Classes twice. During my first visit on **March 13th**, I will introduce myself and use a PowerPoint presentation to describe the research topic. I will explain to the students that I would like to gather their thoughts and experiences of the family project and use this data as part of my thesis. I will explain to the students that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, and that their anonymity in completing the questionnaires will be guaranteed. I will distribute parental consent and student assent forms during this visit. I will have parent-consent letters translated into several languages depending on the linguistic backgrounds of the students. Students will have one week to return these forms to their class teacher. I will then return to the school the following week on **March 20th** and I will distribute the surveys to students who have the appropriate permission. Students will be given approximately twenty minutes to complete the survey during class-time. The completed questionnaires will be collected,

analysed and discussed in my research project. I will then lock the surveys in a filing cabinet in my home and until they are destroyed in July 2020.

The second part of my research will also take place during my two visits to the Fifth Classes. This part involves conducting interviews with two focus groups consisting of 8-10 students from two Fifth Classes. The interviews will focus on the participants' experiences of the Family Project. Classroom teachers will assist in drawing up a list of students to participate in the focus groups consisting of children from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. During my first visit to both classes I will explain that students' confidentiality will be guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms and that each student has the right to withdraw from the research at any stage. I will distribute parental consent and student assent forms. On my second visit I will conduct the focus group interviews with students who have the appropriate consent/assent. I hope to carry out the interviews in a quiet space in the school if available. The interviews will take approximately thirty minutes to complete. Prior to beginning the focus group, I will inform the students that if they reveal information that might lead me to think their safety is at risk, I will inform the designated liaison officer in the school. I will record the data using two dictaphones. I will then transcribe and analyse the data from the focus groups and include this in my thesis. This data will be stored on my encrypted computer and destroyed in July 2020.

I really appreciate your support. If you have any questions in relation to the research project please email me at: **tmalonemies17@momail.mie.ie**

Kind regards,

Tara Malone.

Appendix C: Letter to Inform Teachers of Research Project

Dear Teacher, 06.02.19

My name is Tara Malone and I am a teacher and GMGY co-ordinator in School X. I am completing a part-time Masters in Intercultural Education at Marino Institute of Education (MIE). As part of my thesis I am conducting research into students' experiences of the **'Family Project'** during the **Goodness Me Goodness You (GMGY)** lessons. There are two parts to the study which I would like to conduct with students in your class: (i) questionnaire and (ii) an interview with a focus group.

Research questionnaire:

In **March 2019** I will visit your class twice. During my first visit which I am hoping to do on **March 13th**, I will use a Powerpoint presentation to introduce the research topic, to explain students' right to withdraw from the research at any time, and to explain their anonymity in completing the questionnaire. I will distribute parental consent and student assent forms during this visit. I will have parent-consent letters translated into several languages depending on the linguistic backgrounds of the students. Students will have one week to return these forms to you. I will then return to the school on **March 20th** and I will distribute the surveys to students who have the appropriate permission. Students will be given twenty to thirty minutes to complete the questionnaire during class-time. The completed questionnaires will be collected, analysed and discussed in my research project.

I will then lock the surveys in a filing cabinet in my home and until they are destroyed in July 2020.

Interviews with focus groups:

During my two visits to your classroom in March 2019, I will also conduct a focus group interview with 8-10 students from your class. The interviews will focus on the participants' experiences of the Family Project. I will require your assistance with compiling a list of students to participate in the focus groups which will consist of children from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. During my first visit to your class I will explain students' confidentiality and right to withdraw from the research at any stage. I will distribute parental consent and student assent forms to the students participating in the focus groups. On my second visit to your class, I will conduct the focus group interviews with students who have the appropriate consent/assent. I hope to conduct the interviews in a quiet space in the school if available. The interviews will take approximately thirty minutes to complete. I will record the data using two 121articiple121. I will then transcribe and analyse the data from the focus groups and include this in my thesis. This data will be stored on my encrypted computer and destroyed in July 2020.

I really appreciate your support and co-operation with my research project. If you have any questions in relation to the research project please email me at:

tmalonemies17@momail.mie.ie

Kind regards,

Tara Malone

Appendix D – Pilot Questionnaire

1. On a scale of 1-3, how do you enjoy **presenting** your family project to your classmates?

1 = I love it 2= It's ok 3 = I don't enjoy it **Answer = _____**

Why?

2. On a scale of 1-3, how do you enjoy **listening to** your friends' family projects?

1 = I love it 2= It's ok 3 = I don't enjoy it **Answer = _____**

Why?

3. Who helps you with your family project? (tick all the boxes that apply)

Parent ☐ Sister or brother ☐ Friend ☐ Someone Else ☐ no-one ☐

4. On a scale of 1 – 3, do you learn anything **new** from your classmates when they were talking about their beliefs?

1 = I learn a lot 2= I learn a little bit 3 = I don't learn anything new **Answer = ___**

If you learned something new, what was it?

5. On a scale of 1 – 3, did your classmates beliefs make you think differently about your own beliefs?

1 = yes, a lot 2= A little bit 3 = No, not at all. **Answer= _____**

Why?

6. On a scale of 1 – 3, how comfortable do you feel talking about your beliefs in your class?

1 = very comfortable 2= A little bit comfortable 3 = No, not comfortable **Answer = _____**

Why?

7. How do you like to learn about religions and beliefs (order them – 1 is your favourite, 4 is your least favourite)?

Teacher talking using a PowerPoint	☐
Books about religions and beliefs	☐
Worksheets/writing	☐
Learning from your peers during the family project	☐

8. Who influences your beliefs? (tick the boxes that apply)

My friends ☐
My family ☐
My teacher ☐
My school ☐
My self ☐

Please explain your answer:

_____

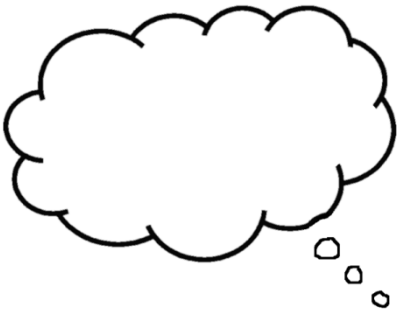
_____

9. On a scale of 1-3, how **important** do you think the family project is in GMGY?

1 = very important 2= somewhat important 3 = not important **Answer = _____**

Why?

What I think about the family project:



Your thoughts on the questionnaire

Is there any other question about the family project and GMGY that you would **add** to this questionnaire?

Was any question difficult to answer? Why?

Were there any words that you did not understand or found confusing?

How could you make the questionnaire better?

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form for Parents: Participation in Pilot Questionnaire

Dear parent/guardian, 25.02.19

My name is Tara Malone and I am a teacher in a Community National School. I am completing a part-time Masters in Intercultural Education at Marino Institute of Education (MIE). As part of my studies, I am conducting research into students' experiences of the **'Family Project'** during the **Goodness Me Goodness You (GMGY)** lessons in school.

I am conducting my research with students from Fifth Class in March 2019. However, prior to this I would like to distribute a "pilot questionnaire" to the students in Ms Keogh's Class (10S). The purpose of this pilot questionnaire is to assess the suitability of the survey and how affective it will be in fulfilling the aims of the research project. This includes the language and clarity of the questions, the time taken to complete the questionnaire and the ease of following the instructions. With your consent, the questionnaires will be completed during school time on **Thursday, 28th February** and should take no more than twenty minutes to complete.

Your child's identity will be kept strictly anonymous; no-one will know which questionnaire your child completed. The data taken from the questionnaires will be read by me and then destroyed within one week. The data will **not** be included in the final research project. The questions asked in the questionnaire will relate to the family project based on your child's beliefs (religious or non-religious). Your child does not have to answer any questions if they feel it is too personal or makes them feel uncomfortable. Your child has also been asked for their consent to participate in the research project.

If you have any questions in relation to the research you can email me at: tmalonemies17@momail.mie.ie

Please tick the appropriate box whether you give consent for your child to participate in the pilot questionnaire and sign your name:

I do consent to my child participating in the questionnaire ☐

I do not consent to my child participating in the questionnaire ☐

Your signature: _____

Your child's name: _____

Thank you,

Tara Malone.

Appendix E: Informed Assent Form for Participation in Pilot Questionnaire

Dear student, 25.02.19

I am conducting research into the "family project" which is a part of your GMGY lessons. I am conducting the survey with Fifth Class students in March 2019. However, before I do this, I would like to "test out" the questionnaire with all the students in 10S. This will help me to find out whether the questions are clear and easy to follow, and whether the answers are suitable for my research.

The questionnaire will be distributed during class time on **Thursday, 28th February** and should take no more than twenty minutes to complete. Your identity is strictly anonymous; no-one will know it was you who completed the survey. Your answers will be read by me and then destroyed; they will not be a part of the finished research project.

The questions asked in the questionnaire will be about the GMGY programme and sharing your ideas about beliefs and religions in the Family Project. You do not have to answer any question if you feel that it is too personal or it makes you feel uncomfortable.

It is really important that your voice is heard and your experiences are listened to.

Please tick the appropriate box whether you consent to participating in the pilot questionnaire and sign your name:

I do consent to participating in the questionnaire ☐

I do not consent to participating in the questionnaire ☐

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Thank you,

Ms Malone

Appendix F: Research Questionnaire

Questionnaire for Research on the Family Project

What is your religion/belief system?

_____

1. On a scale of 1-3, how do you enjoy **presenting** your family project to your classmates?

   1 = I love it 2= It's ok 3 = I don't enjoy it **Answer = _____**

Why?

2. On a scale of 1-3, how do you enjoy **listening to** your friends' family projects?

   1 = I love it 2= It's ok 3 = I don't enjoy it **Answer = _____**

Why?

3. Who helps you with your family project? (tick all the boxes that apply)

   Parent ☐
   Sister or brother ☐
   Friend ☐
   Someone Else ☐
   no-one ☐

4. On a scale of 1 – 3, do you learn anything **new** from your classmates when they were talking about their beliefs?

   1 = I learn a lot 2 = I learn a little bit 3 = I don't learn anything new **Answer:__**

If you learned something new, what was it?

5. On a scale of 1 – 3, did your classmates beliefs make you think differently about your own beliefs?

   1 = yes, a lot 2 = A little bit 3 = No, not at all. **Answer = _____**

Why?

6. On a scale of 1 – 3, how comfortable do you feel talking about your beliefs in your class?

1 = very comfortable 2 = A little bit comfortable 3 = No, not comfortable Answer: _

Why?

7. How do you like to learn about religions and beliefs ***(order them – 1 is your favourite, 4 is your least favourite)?***

Teacher talking using a PowerPoint ☐

Books about religions and beliefs ☐

Worksheets/writing ☐

Learning from your peers during the family project ☐

8. Who influences your beliefs? (how they think about something might make you think the same)

My friends ☐

My family ☐

My teacher ☐ Please explain your answer:

My school ☐ _____

My self ☐ _____

9. On a scale of 1-3, how **important** do you think the family project is in GMGY?

1 = very important 2= somewhat important 3 = not important **Answer= _____**

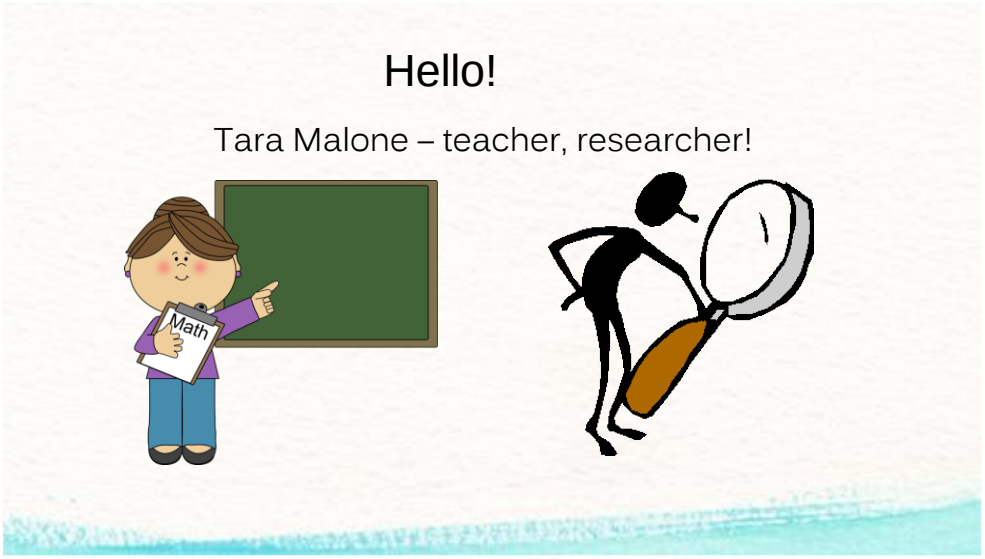
Why?

What I think about the family project (draw a picture or write some words)

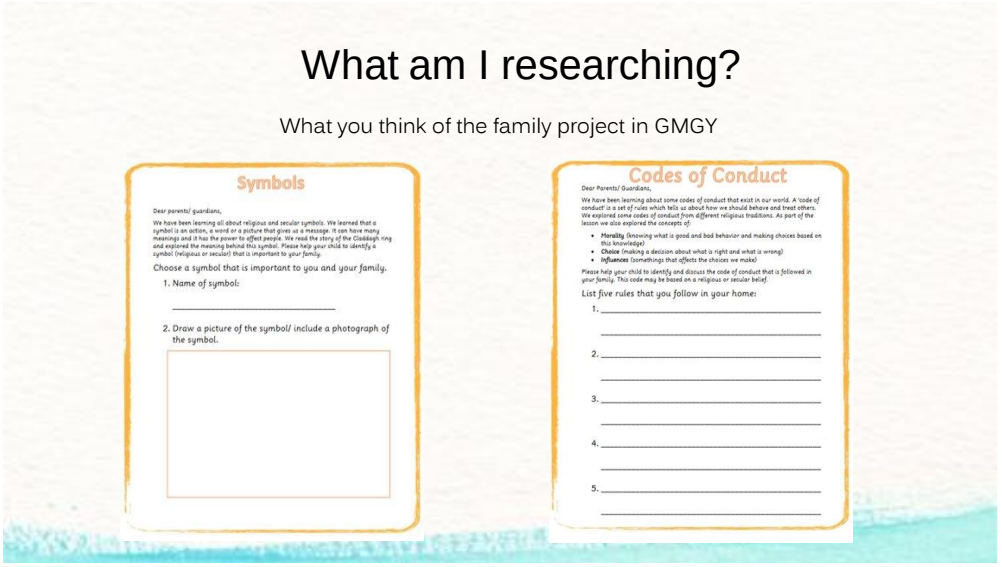
Appendix G: Plain Language Statement for Student Participation - PowerPoint Presentation

Slide 1

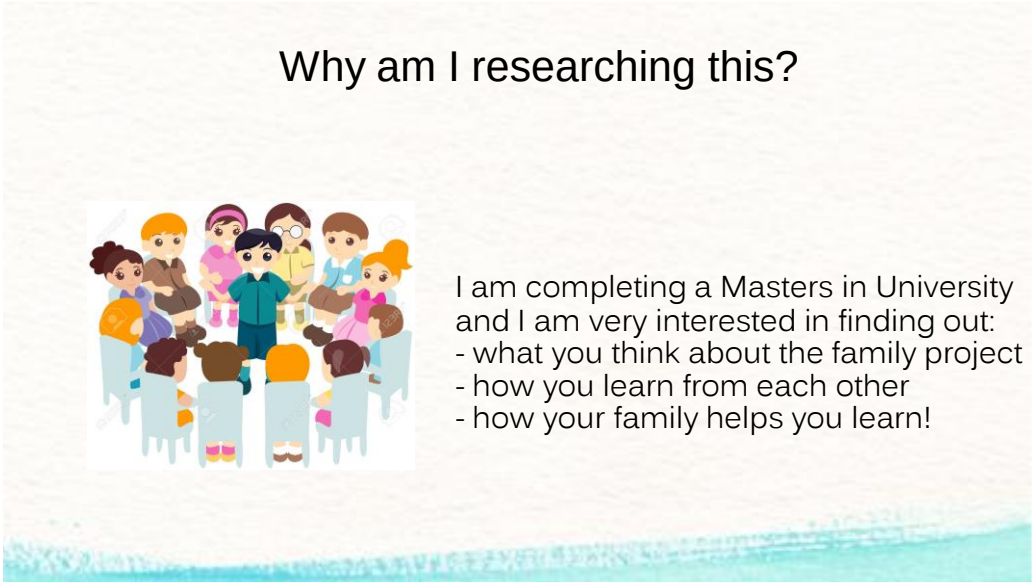
Slide 2



Slide 3



Slide 4



Slide 5

Who is doing this researching?

Everyone in this class will be asked to do the questionnaire. A few students will also be asked to take part in the focus group.

Slide 6

How am I researching this?

Surveys

What are your thoughts and ideas about the family project?

Write them on the questionnaire to let me know!

Focus groups

Some students will be invited to talk about their experiences in a circle called a focus group.

Slide 7

When and where am I doing this research?

- Next Wednesday, March 20th I will visit the school again.
- Those who have consent will be asked to participate in the questionnaire in your classroom.
- Some students will be asked to participate in the focus group which will take place in the library or meeting room.

Slide 8

Anonymous

When you fill in the questionnaire, do not write your name. No-one will know how you answered. Your identity will be anonymous.

Confidential

During the focus groups, only I will know your identity but I will use fake names **(pseudonyms)** when writing my research.

Slide 9

Parental consent

Your parents must sign the parental permission form before you can participate.

Student Assent

You must also agree to participate. You do not have to participate! It is your choice.

Slide 10

Any questions?

Slide 11

Some final notes:

- You can change your mind and decide you dont want to participate at any time!
- All the data I collect will be stored on my computer in a safe place and destroyed in July 2020.
- Please be as honest as you can when filling in the questionnaire!
- The data will be part of my thesis which will be in Marino library
- You do not have to answer any question that you may feel uncomfortable about.

Slide 12

Parental Consent forms available in:

- English
- Hindi
- Chinese
- Romanian
- Polish
- Arabic

Please return to your class teacher by next Wednesday.

Slide 13

Slide 14

Appendix H: Parental consent form for participation in research

Dear parent/guardian, 11.03.19

My name is Tara Malone and I am a teacher in a Community National School. I am completing a part-time Masters in Intercultural Education at Marino Institute of Education (MIE). As part of my studies, I am conducting research into students' experiences of the **'Family Project'** during the **Goodness Me Goodness You (GMGY)** lessons in school.

It is very important that your child's views and experiences of their learning are listened to. Therefore, I would like your child to tell me about their experiences of the family project by completing a short questionnaire. With your permission, this questionnaire will be distributed to your child during their school time on **Thursday March 14th** and should take no more than thirty minutes to complete. The data collected from the questionnaire will be analysed and used as part of my dissertation. This will be available to view in Marino Institute of Education library upon completion. Please carefully read the following:

- Your child can opt out of the research project at any stage and does not have to give a reason.
- Your child's identity will be kept strictly anonymous. No-one will know which questionnaire your child has completed, and the data given by your child will be confidential when published.
- The data collected from the questionnaires will be protected on an encrypted computer and stored until July 2020 in a locked filing cabinet in my home, after which it will be destroyed. The original copy will be deleted.
- The questions asked in the questionnaire will be about the GMGY programme and your child sharing their thoughts about beliefs and religions. They do not have to answer any questions if they feel it is too personal or makes them feel uncomfortable.

- Your child has also been asked for their consent to participate in the research project.

If you have any questions in relation to the research you can email me at: **tmalonemies17@momail.mie.ie**

Please tick the appropriate box whether you give consent for your child to participate in the questionnaire and sign your name:

I do consent to my child participating in the questionnaire ☐

I do not consent to my child participating in the questionnaire ☐

Your signature: _____

Your child's name: _____

Thank you,

Tara Malone.

Consent Form for Parents: Student Participation in a Questionnaire and Focus Group

Dear Parent/guardian, 11.03.19

My name is Tara Malone and I am a teacher in a Community National School. I am completing a part-time Masters in Intercultural Education at Marino Institute of Education (MIE). As part of my studies, I am conducting research into students' experiences of the **'family project'** during the **Goodness Me Goodness You (GMGY)** lessons in school.

It is very important that your child's views and experiences of their learning are listened to. I would like your child to tell me about their experiences of the family project by completing a questionnaire and participating in a focus group on **March 14th.** The questionnaire will be distributed during class time and should take no longer than thirty minutes to complete. The focus group will consist of eight to ten students from your child's class and will take place in your school during school time. It will be less than one hour in duration. I will record the groups' voices using a 136articiple, no images or visual recordings will be taken.

The data collected from the focus group will be analysed and used as part of a Masters dissertation. The dissertation will be available to view in Marino Institute of Education library upon completion. Please carefully read the following:

- Your child can opt out of the research project at any stage and does not have to give a reason.
- Your child's identity will be kept strictly confidential. A pseudonym will be used concealing your child's identity during transcribing of the focus group. During the questionnaire, your child's identity will have complete anonymity.
- The data collected from the focus group will be protected on an encrypted computer and stored until July 2020 in a locked filing cabinet in my home, after which it will be destroyed. The original copy will be deleted.

- The questions asked in the focus group and questionnaire will be about the GMGY programme and your child sharing their thoughts about beliefs and religions. They do not have to answer any questions if they feel it is too personal or if talking about it makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Your child has also been asked for their consent to participate in the research project.

If you have any questions in relation to the research you can email me at: tmalonemies17@momail.mie.ie

Please tick the appropriate box whether you give consent for your child to participate in the focus group and questionnaire and sign your name:

I do consent to my child participating in the focus group and questionnaire ☐

I do not consent to my child participating in the focus group and questionnaire ☐

Signature: _____

Thank you,

Tara Malone.

Świadomy formularz zgody dla rodziców: Udział w ankiecie

Drogi rodzicu / opiekunie, 11.03.19

Nazywam się Tara Malone i jestem nauczycielką w Community National School. Kończę Studia Magisterskie na wydziale Edukacji Miedzynarodowej w Marino Institute of Education (MIE). W ramach moich studiów prowadzę badania doświadczeń uczniów o nazwie**"Family Project"** podczas lekcji **Goodness Me Goodness You (GMGY**) w szkole.

Bardzo ważne jest słuchanie poglądów dziecka i doświadczeń związanych z jego uczeniem się. Dlatego chciałbym, aby Twoje dziecko opowiedziało mi o swoich doświadczeniach, wypełniając krótki kwestionariusz. Za twoją zgodą, ten kwestionariusz zostanie rozdany dziecku w czasie lekcji w **Czwartek 14 marca,** a jego wypełnienie nie powinno trwać dłużej niż trzydzieści minut.

Dane zebrane z ankiety zostaną przeanalizowane i wykorzystane w ramach mojej Pracy Magisterskiej. To będzie dostępne do obejrzenia w Marino Institute of Education. Proszę, uważnie przeczytaj:

- Twoje dziecko może zrezygnować z projektu badawczego na dowolnym etapie i nie musi podawać powodu.
- Tożsamość Twojego dziecka będzie ściśle anonimowa. Nikt nie będzie wiedział, którą ankietę ukończyło Twoje dziecko, a dane podane przez Twoje dziecko będą poufne po opublikowaniu.
- Dane zebrane z kwestionariuszy będą chronione na zaszyfrowanym komputerze i przechowywane do lipca 2020 r. W zamkniętej szafce na dokumenty w moim domu, po czym zostaną zniszczone. Oryginalna kopia zostanie usunięta.
- Pytania zadane w ankiecie będą dotyczyły programu GMGY, a Twoje dziecko dzieli się swoimi przemyśleniami na temat przekonań i religii. Nie muszą odpowiadać na żadne pytania, jeśli uważają, że jest to zbyt osobiste lub sprawia, że czują się niekomfortowo.
- Twoje dziecko zostało również poproszone o zgodę na udział w projekcie badawczym.

Jeśli masz jakiekolwiek pytania, możesz wysłać do mnie e-mail na adres:
tmalonemies17@momail.mie.ie
Proszę zaznaczyć odpowiednie pole, bez względu na to, czy wyrażasz zgodę na udział Twojego dziecka w kwestionariuszu. Proszę podpisz się:
Wyrażam zgodę na udział mojego dziecka w kwestionariuszu
Nie wyrażam zgody na udział mojego dziecka w kwestionariuszu ☐
Twój podpis: _____
Imię twojego dziecka: _____

Dziękuję bardzo
Tara Malone

家长用知情同意书：学生参与问卷调查及注意力小组

尊敬的家长/监护人：
11.03.19

我叫Tara Malone,目前是国立社区学校的一名老师。近期，我在马里诺教育学院（MIE）攻读跨文化教育的兼职硕士学位。为完成学习任务，我准备在校园**Goodness Me Goodness You (GMGY)** 课程上就学生对于“家庭计划”项目的体验展开分析研究。

您的孩子关于学习的观点和经验得以被倾听是极为重要的，因此，我希望您的孩子可以通过填写一个简短的调查问卷的形式和我分享他们对于“家庭计划”项目的感受与经验。在得到您的许可后，这份调查问卷将在2019年3月14日（周四）的上课时间分发到您的孩子手上，并花费他们不超过30分钟的时间来完成。

注意力小组将由您的孩子所在班级的8-10个学生组成，该研究会在上课期间进行，时长不超过1小时。我将使用录音机全程记录小组活动的声音，但不会留存任何照片或视频。

通过注意力小组调查获得的数据将会被分析并使用在我的毕业论文中，我的毕业论文在完成之后将可以在马里诺教育学院图书馆被找到。请认真阅读以下内容：

- 您的孩子可以在任何时候决定退出此次调查并不需要给出任何理由。
- 您的孩子的身份信息将被做严格的匿名化处理。在誊抄注意力小组的讨论内容时，我们将使用代称称呼您的孩子。在问卷调查过程中，您的孩子的身份信息将被做完全的匿名化处理。
- 通过此次注意力小组调查收集的信息将被储存并保护在一台加密电脑上。此外，调查问卷原件将被存在我家中一个上锁的文件柜中直至2020年7月，此后，该原件将被删除。
- 调查问卷及注意力小组调查中的问题主要围绕GMGY项目，您的孩子将会被要求分享他们关于信仰与宗教的观点。对于任何他们感到太私人或可能造成不适的问题，他们都不需要作答。
- 本次研究项目的参与也有同样征求您的孩子的同意。

如果您对本次研究项目有任何疑问，请通过以下邮箱地址联系我：

tmalonemies17@momail.mie.ie

请根据您的意见，勾选适用的框并签名

我同意我的孩子参加注意力小组及问卷调查

我不同意我的孩子参加注意力小组或问卷调查

签名：_____

谢谢！

Tara Malone.

सचित सहमति फॉर्म B: एक अनुसंधान परियोजना में भागीदारी

11.03.19

प्रिय अभिभावक / संरक्षक,

मेरा नाम तारा मालोन है और मैं एक कम्युनिटी नेशनल स्कूल में शिक्षक हूँ। मैरिनो इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ एजुकेशन (MIE) में इंटरकल्चरल एजुकेशन में मास्टर्स पूरा कर रही हूं। अपनी पढ़ाई के हिस्से के रूप में, मैं स्कूल में गुडनेस मी गुडनेस यू (GMGY) पाठ के दौरान छात्रों के 'परिवार परियोजना के अनुभवों' पर शोध कर रही हूँ।

यह बहुत महत्वपूर्ण है कि आपके बच्चे के विचारों और उनके सीखने के अनुभवों को सुने। इसलिए, मैं चाहूंगी कि आपका बच्चा एक लघु प्रश्नावली पूरा करके मुझे अपने अनुभवों के बारे में बताए। आपकी अनुमति के साथ, यह प्रश्नावली आपके बच्चे को उनके स्कूल समय के दौरान 14 मार्च गुरुवार को वितरित की जाएगी और इसे पूरा करने में कोई तीस मिनट से अधिक नहीं लगने चाहिए।

प्रश्नावली से एकत्र किए गए डेटा का विश्लेषण और मेरे शोध प्रबंध के हिस्से के रूप में उपयोग किया जाएगा। यह पूरा होने पर मेरिनो इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ एजुकेशन लाइब्रेरी में देखने के लिए उपलब्ध होगा। कृपया ध्यान से निम्नलिखित पढ़ें:

आपका बच्चा किसी भी स्तर पर अनुसंधान परियोजना से बाहर निकल सकता है और उसे कोई कारण नहीं देना पड़ता है।

आपके बच्चे की पहचान को सख्ती से गुमनाम रखा जाएगा। किसी को भी नहीं पता होगा कि आपके बच्चे ने कौन सी प्रश्नावली पूरी की है, और आपके बच्चे द्वारा दिया गया डेटा प्रकाशित होने पर गोपनीय होगा।

प्रश्नावली से एकत्र किए गए डेटा को एक एन्क्रिप्टेड कंप्यूटर पर संरक्षित किया जाएगा और जुलाई 2020 तक मेरे घर में एक लॉक फाइलिंग कैबिनेट में संग्रहीत किया जाएगा, जिसके बाद इसे नष्ट कर दिया जाएगा। मूल प्रति हटा दी जाएगी।

प्रश्नावली में पूछे गए प्रश्न GMGY कार्यक्रम और आपके बच्चे द्वारा मान्यताओं और धर्मों के बारे में अपने विचार साझा करने के बारे में होंगे। उन्हें किसी भी सवाल का जवाब देने की ज़रूरत नहीं है अगर उन्हें लगता है कि यह बहुत व्यक्तिगत है या उन्हें असहज महसूस करता है।

आपके बच्चे को भी अनुसंधान परियोजना में भाग लेने के लिए उनकी सहमति के लिए कहा गया है।

यदि आपके पास अनुसंधान के संबंध में कोई प्रश्न हैं, तो आप मुझे इस पर ईमेल कर सकते हैं:
tmalonemy17@momail.mie.ie

कृपया उपयुक्त बॉक्स पर टिक करें कि क्या आप अपने बच्चे को प्रश्नावली में भाग लेने और अपने नाम पर हस्ताक्षर करने के लिए सहमति देते हैं:

मैं अपने बच्चे को प्रश्नावली में भाग लेने की सहमति देता हूं ☐

मैं अपने बच्चे को प्रश्नावली में भाग लेने के लिए सहमत नहीं हूं ☐

आपके हस्ताक्षर: _____

आपके बच्चे का नाम: _____

धन्यवाद,

तारा मालोन।

Formular informativ pentru parinti: acord pentru participare la chestionar

Stimati parinti, 13.03.19

Ma numesc Tara Malone si sunt profesoara la o scoala nationala comunitara. La momentul curent imi fac studii de Masterat in domeniul invatamantului multicultural la Institutul Marino (Marino Institute of Education - MIE). Ca tema am ales sa cercetez experienta elevilor la **'Proiectul de Familie' ('Family Project')** pe parcursul lectiilor de moralitate si religie predate la scoala sub denumirea **Goodness Me Goodness You (GMGY)**.

Este foarte important ca opinia si experienta elevilor sa fie luate in consideratie. De aceea eu mi-as dori ca copilul D-voastra sa-si exprime opinia asupra experientei sale de invatare sub forma unui chestionar. Cu acordul D-voastra, acest chectionar va fi distribuit la scoala 20 martie si va lua aproximativ 30 minute sa fie completat.

Informatia dobandita va fi analizata si utilizata in disertatia mea. Odata finalizata aceasta lucrare va fi disponibila pentru a fi vazuta la biblioteca Institutului Marino. Va rog sa cititi cu atentie urmatoarele:

- Copilul D-voastra poate renunta la proiectul de cercetare in orice moment fara nici o obligatie.
- Identitatea copilului D-voastra va ramane anonima. Nimeni nu va sti care chestionar a fost completat de copilul D-voastra si informatia oferita va fi publicata in mod confidential.
- Datele obtinute din chestionare vor fi protejate pe un calculator cifrat si pastrate pana in iulie 2020 intr-un sertar incuiat la domiciliul meu dupa care vor fi distruse. Versiunea originala va fi stearsa.
- Intrebarile din chestionar vor fi bazate pe programul GMGY si pe reflectia copilului D-voastra asupra credintelor si religiilor. Elevii pot renunta sa raspunda orice intrebare personala care-i face sa se simta incomod.
- Copilul D-voastra a fost intrebat daca vrea sa participe la aseasta cercetare.

Daca aveti intrebari suplimentare referitor la aceasta cercetare, va rog sa-mi scrieti la: **tmalonemies17@momail.mie.ie** Va rog sa bifati una din aceste doua optiuni si sa subsemnati mai jos:

- **Dau** acord copilului meu sa participe la chestionar
- **Nu dau** accord copilului meu sa participe la chestionar

Semnatura D-voastra: _____

Numele copilului D-voastra: _____

Va multumesc, *Tara Malone*

نموذج الموافقة لأولياء الأمور : مشاركة الطالب في الاستبيان

13.03.19

العزيز / ولي الأمر،

اسمي Tara Malone مُدرسة في مدرسة محلية. حالياً أكمل درجة الماجستير في التعليم متعدد الثقافات (Intercultural Education at Marino Institute of Education ,MIE) . كجزء من دراستي, أقوم بإجراء بحث حول تجارب الطلاب في **" الواجب المنزلي المخصص لاولياء الامور "**كجزء من تدريس مادة **" Goodness Me Goodness You" (GMGY)** في المدرسة.

من المهم جدًا أن يتم الاستماع إلى آراء طفلك وتجاربه فيما يتعلق بالتعلم. لذلك ، أود من طفلك أن يخبرني عن تجاربه في **" الواجب المنزلي المخصص لاولياء الامور "**من خلال إكمال استبيان قصير. بعد أن يتم الإستئذان من ولي الأمر, سيتم توزيع هذا الاستبيان لطفلك خلال وقت المدرسة يوم الأربعاء **الموافق 20 مارس،** مع العلم أن هذا الاستبيان لن يستغرق اكثر من ثلاثين دقيقة لإكماله.

سيتم تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها من الاستبيان واستخدامها كجزء من مشروع البحث و سيكون متاحًا للعرض في مكتبة Marino Institute of Educationعند الانتهاء.

يرجى قراءة ما يلي بعناية:

- يمكن للطفل أن يختار عدم الاستمرار في المشاركة في البحث في اي مرحلة دون الحوجة لإعطاء سبب.
- ستظل هوية طفلك مجهولة تمامًا بحيث أن لا يعرف أحد الاستبيان الذي أتمه طفلك ، وستكون البيانات التي قدمها طفلك سرية عند نشر نتائج البحث .
- سيتم حماية البيانات التي تم جمعها من الاستبيانات على جهاز كمبيوتر مشفر وتخزينها حتى يوليو 2020 في خزانة ملفات مغلقة في منزلي ، وبعد انتهاء البحث سيتم حذف النسخة الأصلية.
- الأسئلة المطروحة في الاستبيان ستكون حول برنامج GMGY و مدى مشاركة طفلك لافكاره حول المعتقدات والأديان. مع العلم انه ليس بالضرورة الاجابه على الاسئلة التي يظنون انها شخصية جدا أو تجعلهم يشعرون بعدم الارتياح.
- سوف يتم ايضا طلب الموافقة من طفلك للمشاركه في البحث.

إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة فيما يتعلق بالبحث يمكنك مراسلتي عبر البريد الإلكتروني على العنوان التالي: **tmalonemies17@momail.mie.ie**

فضلاً يرجى اختيار المربع المناسب سواء كنت توافق على مشاركة طفلك في الاستبيان ام لا وتوقيع اسمك:

☐ **أنا أوافق** على مشاركة طفلي في الاستبيان

☐ **أنا لا أوافق** على مشاركة طفلي في الاستبيان

اسم ولي الأمروتوقيعه: _____ _____ _____

اسم طفلك: _____

شكرا لكم،Tara Malone

Appendix I: Student Assent Forms for Questionnaire & Focus Group Participation

Student Participation in Questionnaire

Dear student, 11.03.19

My name is Tara Malone and I am a teacher in a Community National School. I am conducting a research study based on students' experiences of the **'family project'** during the **Goodness Me Goodness You (GMGY)** lessons in school. I would like you to tell me about your experiences by completing a questionnaire on **Thursday March 14th.** The questionnaire will be given to you during school time and should take no more than thirty minutes to complete.

Please carefully read the following:

- You can opt out at any stage between now and filling in the questionnaire and do not have to give a reason.
- Your identity is strictly anonymous. No-one will now it was you who completed the survey. The answers you put on the questionnaire will be kept very safe on a password-protected computer and stored until July 2020 in a locked filing cabinet in my home, after which it will be destroyed. The original copy will be deleted.

- The questions asked in the questionnaire will be about the GMGY programme and sharing your ideas about beliefs and religions. You do not have to answer any question if you feel that it is too personal or it makes you feel uncomfortable.

I hope that the research will be used in future planning for religious education. It is really important that your voice is heard and your experiences are listened to.

Please tick the appropriate box whether you consent to participating in the questionnaire and sign your name:

I do consent to participating in the questionnaire ☐

I do not consent to participating in the questionnaire ☐

Signature: _____

Thank you,

Tara Malone.

Student Participation in both Focus Group and Questionnaire

Dear student, 11.03.19

My name is Tara Malone and I am a teacher in a Community National School. I am completing a research study based on students' experiences of the **'family project'** during **Goodness Me Goodness You (GMGY)**.

I would like you to tell me about your experiences by completing a questionnaire and participating in a focus group on **Thursday March 14th.** The questionnaire will be given to you during school time and should take no more than twenty minutes to complete. The focus group will be eight to ten students all from your class and will take place in your school during school time. It will take less about thirty minutes. I will be recording the groups' voices only (I will not use a camera). Please carefully read the following:

- You can opt out at any stage during the focus group and do not have to give a reason.
- I will record your ideas and use them in my research which will be available to read in Marino library.
- Your identity is strictly confidential. Only I will know what you said, and I will use a pseudonym (pretend name) in my essay so no-one will be able to identify you.
- Your data will be protected on a password-protected computer and stored until July 2020 in a locked filing cabinet in my home, after which it will be destroyed. The original copy will be deleted.
- The questions asked in the focus group and questionnaire will be about the GMGY programme and sharing your ideas about beliefs and religions. You do not have to answer any question if you feel that it is too personal or if talking about it makes you feel uncomfortable.

I hope that the research will be used in future planning for religious education. It is really important that your voice is heard and your experiences are listened to. Please tick the appropriate box whether you give consent to participating in the focus group and questionnaire and sign your name:

I do consent to participating in the focus group/questionnaire ☐

I do not consent to participating in the focus group/questionnaire ☐

Signature: _____

Thank you, Tara Malone.

Appendix J: Focus Group Guiding Questions

Introduction:

- What family projects have you completed in the school (this year or previous years)?
- Who helps you with your family project and how do they help you?

Sharing beliefs:

- How do you feel about presenting your family project to your classmates? Why?
- Do you think it's important to share your beliefs? Why?
- How do you feel being an "expert" about your religion/teaching other people about your religion/beliefs?

Peer-learning:

- Did you learn anything new from your friends during presenting the family project?
- What have you heard during family projects that you thought was interesting/similar to your beliefs/different to your beliefs?
- Has the family project made you think differently about other religions? Your own religion?
- Do you think it's important to hear about others' beliefs? Why? Does it help you in any way?
- Do you ever talk about your beliefs other than during GMGY? with who?

Methodologies:

- When your teacher uses the PowerPoint to talk about different religions, what do you think of that?
- Do you prefer learning from your friends/more interesting than learning from a textbook? Why?

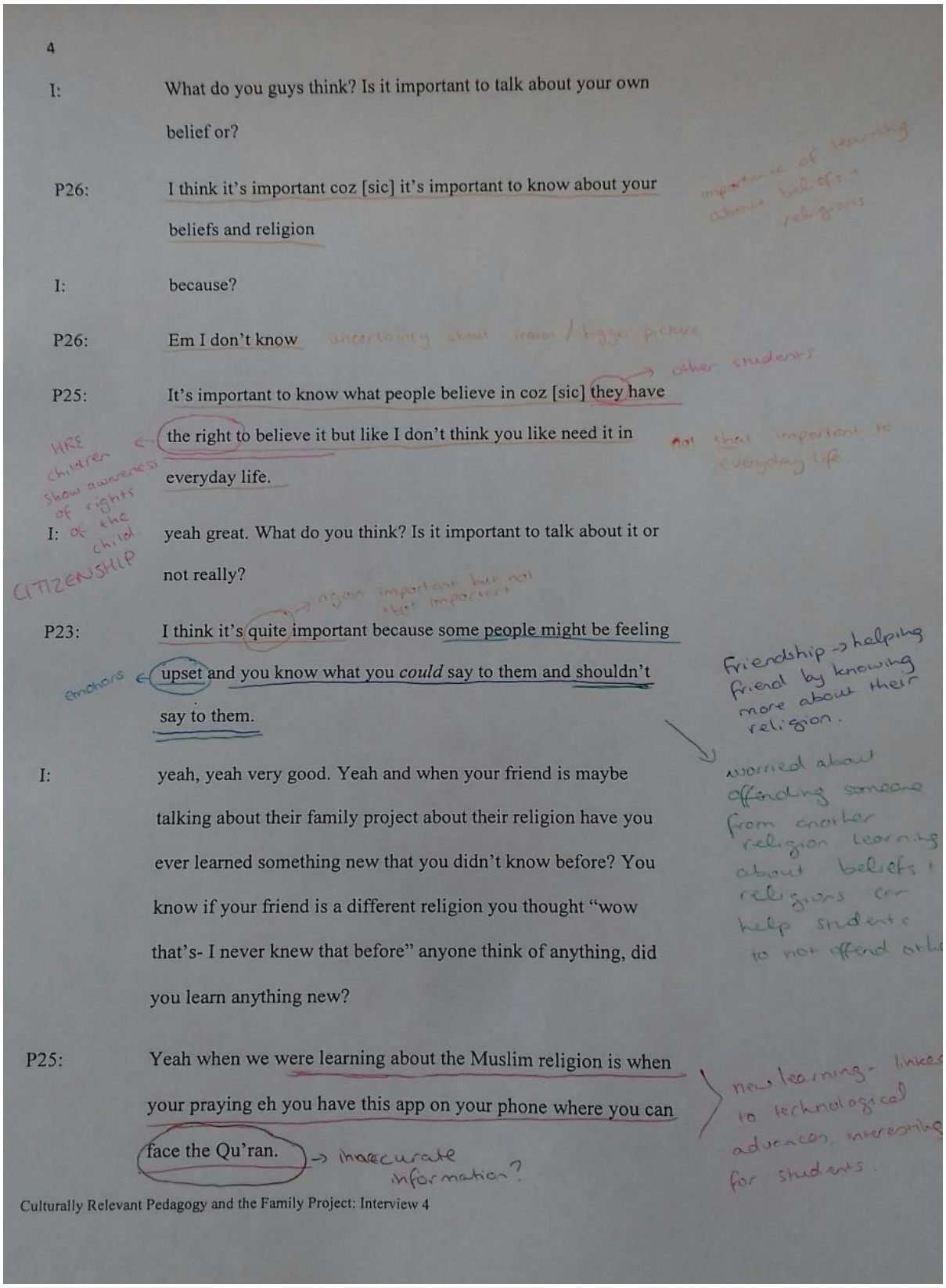
Teacher and classroom:

- Do you feel comfortable talking about your beliefs in front of your teacher and classmates? Why? Do you think all students feel comfortable/uncomfortable?
- Do you think your teacher learn anything new? Does your teacher enjoy the family projects?

School and curriculum

- What would you like to learn about religions and beliefs that is not mentioned in GMGY?
- In some schools, students don't learn about their classmates' beliefs and religions – what do you think about that?

Appendix K: Colour-coded sample of qualitative data analysis



4

I: What do you guys think? Is it important to talk about your own belief or?

P26: I think it's important coz [sic] it's important to know about your beliefs and religion

importance of learning about beliefs + religions

I: because?

P26: Em I don't know

uncertainty about reason / bigger picture

P25: It's important to know what people believe in coz [sic] they have the right to believe it but like I don't think you like need it in everyday life.

other students

HRE children show awareness of rights of the child CITIZENSHIP

that important to everyday life

I: yeah great. What do you think? Is it important to talk about it or not really?

again important but not that important

P23: I think it's quite important because some people might be feeling upset and you know what you *could* say to them and shouldn't say to them.

emotions

Friendship → helping friend by knowing more about their religion.

I: yeah, yeah very good. Yeah and when your friend is maybe talking about their family project about their religion have you ever learned something new that you didn't know before? You know if your friend is a different religion you thought "wow that's- I never knew that before" anyone think of anything, did you learn anything new?

worried about offending someone from another religion. learning about beliefs + religions can help students to not offend others

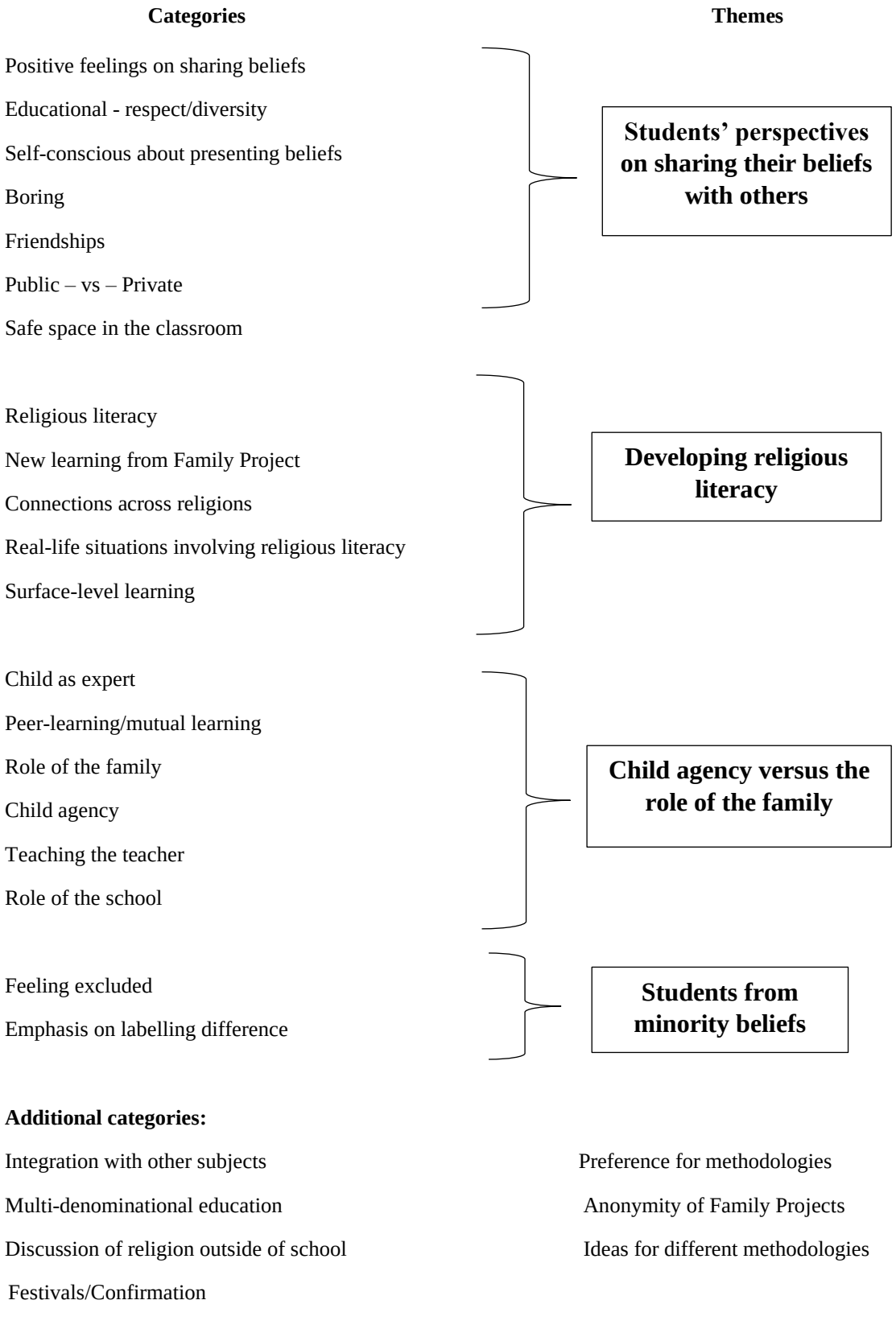
P25: Yeah when we were learning about the Muslim religion is when your praying eh you have this app on your phone where you can face the Qu'ran.

→ inaccurate information?

new learning - linked to technological advances, interesting for students.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and the Family Project: Interview 4

Appendix L: Emerging Themes from qualitative data



Additional categories:

Integration with other subjects

Multi-denominational education

Discussion of religion outside of school

Festivals/Confirmation

Preference for methodologies

Anonymity of Family Projects

Ideas for different methodologies

Appendix M – Overview of Quantitative Results

Overview of Data Analysis of Quantitative Results

Question as per survey	Choices of response	Percentage of answers
How do you enjoy presenting your family projects to your classmates?	I love it Its ok I don't enjoy it	25% 57% 18%
How do you enjoy listening to your classmates Family Projects?	I love it Its ok I don't enjoy it	56% 41% 3%
Who helps you with your family project?	parent parent and sibling parent, sibling and friend sibling no-one other	71% 24% 3% 1%
do you learn anything new from your classmates when they were talking about their beliefs	I learn a lot I learn a little bit I don't learn anything new	50% 40% 10%
did your classmates beliefs make you think differently about your own beliefs?	Yes a lot A little bit No, not at all	4% 29% 67%
how comfortable do you feel talking about your beliefs in your class	Very comfortable A little bit comfortable No not comfortable	33% 43% 21%
How important do you think the family project is in GMGY?	Very important Somewhat important Not important	61% 32% 6%
How do you like to learn about religions and beliefs (order them – 1 is your favourite, 4 is your least	1st overall preference: teacher powerpoint 2nd overall preference: peer learning through family project 3rd overall preference: books 4th overall preference: worksheets	
Who influences your beliefs? (how they think about something might make you think the same)	61% family 7% themselves 11% family and themselves	

Appendix N: Matrix of themes and subthemes from both qualitative and quantitative data.

Theme	Category	G1	G2	G3	G4	Total	Questionnaire Results
Students' perspectives on sharing their beliefs	Self-conscious about presenting beliefs	7	10	5	3	**25**	18% dislike presenting, 57% don't mind
	Boring	1	6	2		**9**	3% don't enjoy listening to others' FP
	Strengthening Friendships/friends curious	1	8	3	9	**21**	
	Positive feelings on sharing beliefs	10	3		5	**18**	25% "I love it", 57% "its ok"
	Spreading the word about your religion	2				**2**	
	Level of comfort talking about beliefs/safe space in the classroom			4		**4**	33% very comfortable, 43% a little comfortable, 21% not comfortable
	Public –vs- private				2	**2**	8 students commented "its personal" or private to them.
	Intercultural education/ respect/ diversity	9	12	6		**27**	
Developing Religious Literacy	Language	4			2	**6**	
	Importance of learning about beliefs	8	7	7	6	**28**	61% very important, 32% somewhat important, 6% not important
	Real life situations where learning is beneficial		7			**7**	
	Offending others	5	1	1	6	**13**	
	New learning	15	8	3	4	**30**	50% learn a lot, 40% learn a bit, 10% no new learning
	Connections across religions	3	3	1		**7**	
Students from minority beliefs or no beliefs.	Child doesn't feel they know much		2	2		**4**	
	Highlighting difference	1			8	**9**	
	Feeling excluded						4 felt uncomfortable presenting – only child from that religious group
	Students from minority beliefs or no beliefs		3	1	6	**10**	
Child-agency versus family	Child agency	2		1	1	**4**	
	Parent/Family	4	9	5	3	**21**	71% receive help from parents, 24% parent and sibling
	Peer-learning/symbiotic learning	9	6	10	14	**39**	56% enjoy listening to peers' FP, 41% answered "it's ok"
	Child as expert	7	2	3	2	**14**	
	Teacher	7	7	5	4	**23**	
	Role of the school – bullying/racism	5	4	5		**14**	
	Others' beliefs influence your beliefs						67% do not think differently after listening to FPs
Other Categories	Discussion of religion outside of school	4	5	7	7	**23**	
	Festivals/Confirmation	4			2	**6**	
	Influences religious beliefs					**0**	61% family, 7% themselves, 11% family and themselves
	Preference for methodologies	4	7	5	11	**27**	1st preference: PowerPoint, 2nd: FP, 3rd: Books, 4th: Worksheets
	Multi-denominational education	5	8	5	6	**24**	
	Ideas for different methodologies	4	3	6	1	**14**	
	Integration with other subjects	3				**3**	