

The 'Family Project': Investigating Multi-Belief Peer Learning in Two Irish Primary Schools

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Abstract

In 2007, a new model of state-run primary schools was established in Ireland in response to the growing pluralism in this country. These are publicly-managed, multid denominational schools with the Irish state, through the Education and Training Boards (ETB) as their patron. The ethos of schools is inclusive, striving to ensure that the beliefs of all children are respected and celebrated. There are currently twenty-three schools in this sector. A multi-belief curriculum has been written for schools; one of the methodologies employed, 'the Family Project' is the focus of this research. The Family Project aims to encourage students to engage in conversation with their families about specific themes being explored in school, and to complete their projects at home. Students then present the Family Projects to peers in school, educating one another about how they express or live out their beliefs.

This mixed-methods study explores students' views on how they feel about sharing their religious or secular beliefs with peers and about learning from their peers. Using questionnaires and focus groups with children in 5th class (10-12 years) significant insights are revealed. Students reported positive attitudes towards listening to each other's beliefs but ambivalence about presenting beliefs. They also highlighted the importance of a safe space being created for the sharing of beliefs.

Keywords: multi-belief learning, students' voices, peer learning, multid denominational education.

Introduction

Over the past three decades, Irish society has become increasingly diverse. 2016 census figures reveal that the number of people identifying as Catholic decreased from 84.2% in 2011 to 78.3% in 2016 (CSO 2017). The numbers identifying as having no religious affiliation rose by 74% since 2011 to represent almost 10% of the Irish population. The figures showing people identifying as part of a minority religion have increased significantly: Muslim by 29%, Orthodox by 38% and Hindu by 34% (CSO 2017). According to Darmody and Smyth “considering these trends, the issue of religion and belief identity is of growing political and educational importance” (2017, 17). Such matters concerning religion and education, particularly regarding the voices of those with minority beliefs, are not unique to Ireland. The student body across Europe has become more diverse in recent years (Darmody et al. 2016; Faas et al. 2016); hence, the questions around religious education examined in this article, while grounded in the Irish context, we hope will have relevance far beyond the borders of one European country.

The range of school types in the Irish Republic has evolved in response to the changed societal demographics. Although denominational patron bodies manage the majority of schools (95%), with the Catholic Church making up 90% of this figure, multid denominational schooling is the fastest-growing primary school sector in Ireland (Department of Education and Skills 2018a). In September 2018, 32,060 students, or 5.7% of the total primary school student population attended multid denominational schools. This was an increase of 7.7% from the previous year (Department of Education and Skills 2018b). Minority faith and multid denominational schools are “twice as likely as Catholic schools to have too few places to accommodate all applicants” (Darmody et al. 2018, 5).

Multidenominational schools, such as Community National Schools and Educate Together¹, have more pupils from migrant backgrounds and higher numbers of pupils from diverse belief systems than denominational schools (Darmody et al. 2012). While Educate Together schools have been in existence since the mid-1970s, the first Community National School was established in Ireland in 2007 in response to increased demand for school places in one Dublin suburb, particularly from migrant families who were unable to secure a place in local Catholic schools (Edwards 2007). Community National Schools are publicly managed under the patronage of the Education and Training Board Ireland (ETBI), a statutory authority that oversees and operates all such schools (ETBI 2018). The ethos or “characteristic spirit” of the CNS is based on four core values: excellence in education, multidenominational, equality based, and community focused (CNS 2018). There are now 23 such schools in Ireland. This article focuses specifically on these schools and on one aspect in particular; namely, the ‘Family Project’ dimension of the multi-belief programme offered in these settings.

‘Goodness Me, Goodness You’ (GMGY). GMGY is a multi-belief and values-education curriculum for Community National Schools. It provides students with “identity education, values education, philosophy and multidenominational religious education” (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) 2018a, 4). As the only state-developed multi-belief 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.

¹ Educate Together is an independent organisation which is patron body to a network of equality-based primary and secondary schools in Ireland.

GMGY aims to enable students learn about various beliefs in an objective, non-confessional manner (NCCA 2018a). As a form of multi-belief RE, 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, 14)

As GMGY aspires to value and respect all religious traditions and secular worldviews, it aims to be equitable for all students regardless of their belief background. This means that students do not have to “opt out” of the lessons, as is the case for those students in denominational schools who do not subscribe to the faith of the school (O’Toole 2015).

The Family Project. GMGY’s multi-belief curriculum is underpinned by dialogical, constructivist, inquiry-based and aesthetic approaches towards learning. The Belief and Religions strand of the GMGY curriculum encourages students to share their belief experiences (religious and secular) with one another. The Family Project is a methodology used with each year group that encourages the students to engage in conversations with their families and peers about themes explored in school. First students learn about various belief systems through a thematic approach presented by the teacher, through a local perspective and then a global perspective. Themes may include celebrations, special places or important books or artifacts. These theme-based facts are presented to students in a comparative manner; drawing on the phenomenological approach (Smart 1968) to RE, whereby knowledge and understanding about a particular belief is taught objectively by the teacher.

Students are then asked to engage in conversations with their families about how the beliefs and customs related to these themes are expressed in their home and to complete their Family Projects at home. Students present these projects to their peers in school, educating one another about how they express or live out their beliefs. The Family Project therefore

brings students' beliefs from the private sphere of the home into the public sphere of the school. Based on peer learning, the intention is that as active listeners, students not only learn *about* religion, but also *from* religion (Grimmitt 1987). This reflects Jackson's interpretive approach to RE which has three aspects; *representation* which explores the diverse aspects of religion and allows individuals to present their own experience of belonging to a particular religion or worldview, *interpretation* which involves students comparing and contrasting their own beliefs to those they are encountering, 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, 34). The approach is contingent on teachers creating a 'safe space' in which students feel comfortable, safe and respected when expressing their beliefs (Erricker et al. 2000; Jackson 2012).

Rather than using textbooks, the Family Project aims to provide children with an opportunity to take control of curricular content. They use their own words to communicate their authentic lived experience as 'insiders' in their belief systems. Erricker et al. (2000) argue that textbooks often present subjective, pre-packaged information about religious traditions rather than providing opportunities for children to construct their own knowledge and become aware of the diversity that exists within beliefs. Without the use of textbooks, students have the opportunity to think for themselves; they can construct knowledge through personal narratives when they discuss their beliefs and experiences (Erricker et al. 2000).

Peer learning. A number of social factors such as family, peers, school and teachers (Hemming et al. 2012; Jackson 2004) inevitably influence students' religious beliefs. This was illustrated in the research of Faas et al. which showed that "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” (2018a, 497). Older primary school students and adolescents are at important developmental stages for the formation of religious beliefs and becoming affected by peer influences (Erickson 1992; Desrosiers et al. 2011). Indeed, according to Schwartz et al. (2006), faith dialogue with friends was found to have a greater impact on adolescent religious faith than dialogue with parents. 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, 11). In the Family Project, the aim is that students learn *about* their friends’ beliefs and *from* their friends’ beliefs.

It is also important to recognise that peer learning and the sharing of religious beliefs can 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” (72-73). This is echoed in Moulin’s (2011) research, which found that many 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. Similarly, Harmon’s research with primary school children in an Irish denominational school found that in terms of religious identity, some students felt “uncomfortable talking about this aspect of their lives” (2018, 71). 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. As the Family Project is based on peer learning, it is important to investigate this element of the programme in greater depth and elicit students’ views on the process. This research study aimed to do just that.

Methodology

This article draws from a larger study, which investigated students' experiences of and perspectives on the Family Project in the GMGY curriculum across two schools located in an urban area in the Republic of Ireland. Both schools teach GMGY 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 was representative of the wider Irish population.

This article focuses on one element of the study; namely, findings from the following research question:

- How do students feel about sharing their personal religious or secular beliefs *with* their peers and learning *from* their peers?

A mixed-methods research methodology was implemented, comprising questionnaires and focus groups. Triangulating across both data sets increased the validity and accuracy of the study (Creswell 2008). Indeed, many researchers exploring religious identity have used a mixed-method approach because 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 et al. 2012, 47).

Surveys. Surveys in the form of questionnaires enabled the researcher to gather a large amount of up-to-date information from a group of expert people; namely, the students themselves (Denscombe 2014). In addition, the questionnaires gathered both quantitative data information *and* qualitative by asking respondents to explain and elaborate upon their answers (Greig et al. 2007), and there was a section for drawing/writing underneath a caption: What I think about the Family Project (Figure 4).

Focus groups with children. Choosing to use focus groups as opposed to one-on-one interviews allowed for qualitative data to be gathered from several participants at the same time (Robson 2011). The groups were also useful for students who may have felt uncomfortable being interviewed on their own (Robson 2011). Furthermore, this methodology enabled the researcher to gather rich detail about participants' experiences by asking them to elaborate on certain points in the discussion (Bell 2010).

Focus groups with children can also be 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, 10). However, focus groups were chosen for this research for several reasons. First, they provided opportunities for students to discuss their attitudes towards the Family Project in detail. Second, participants could elaborate upon unplanned questions or topics that arose from group discussions. Third, by inviting students from diverse backgrounds and belief systems to participate, it was more likely that there would be alternative views on aspects of the Family Project, which could be explored in greater depth than from solely using questionnaires.

Research participants. The study was carried out with two Fifth Classes (10-12 years old) from School A and three Fifth Classes from School B. This year group was chosen for several reasons. As well as having two years' experience of the Family Project, 10-12 year olds can manage the demands of the research (Greig et al. 2007), which involves understanding the topic, returning assent forms from themselves and consent forms from parents, and completing questionnaires accurately.

"Opportunity sampling" was employed because every student in each class was invited to participate in the questionnaire (Greig et al. 2007, 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. First, students required in-depth experience of the Family Project, and second, students had 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 focus groups. N=72 questionnaires were distributed and n=72 returned. 28 students (14 girls and 14 boys) participated in the focus groups which were approximately 30 minutes in duration. 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.

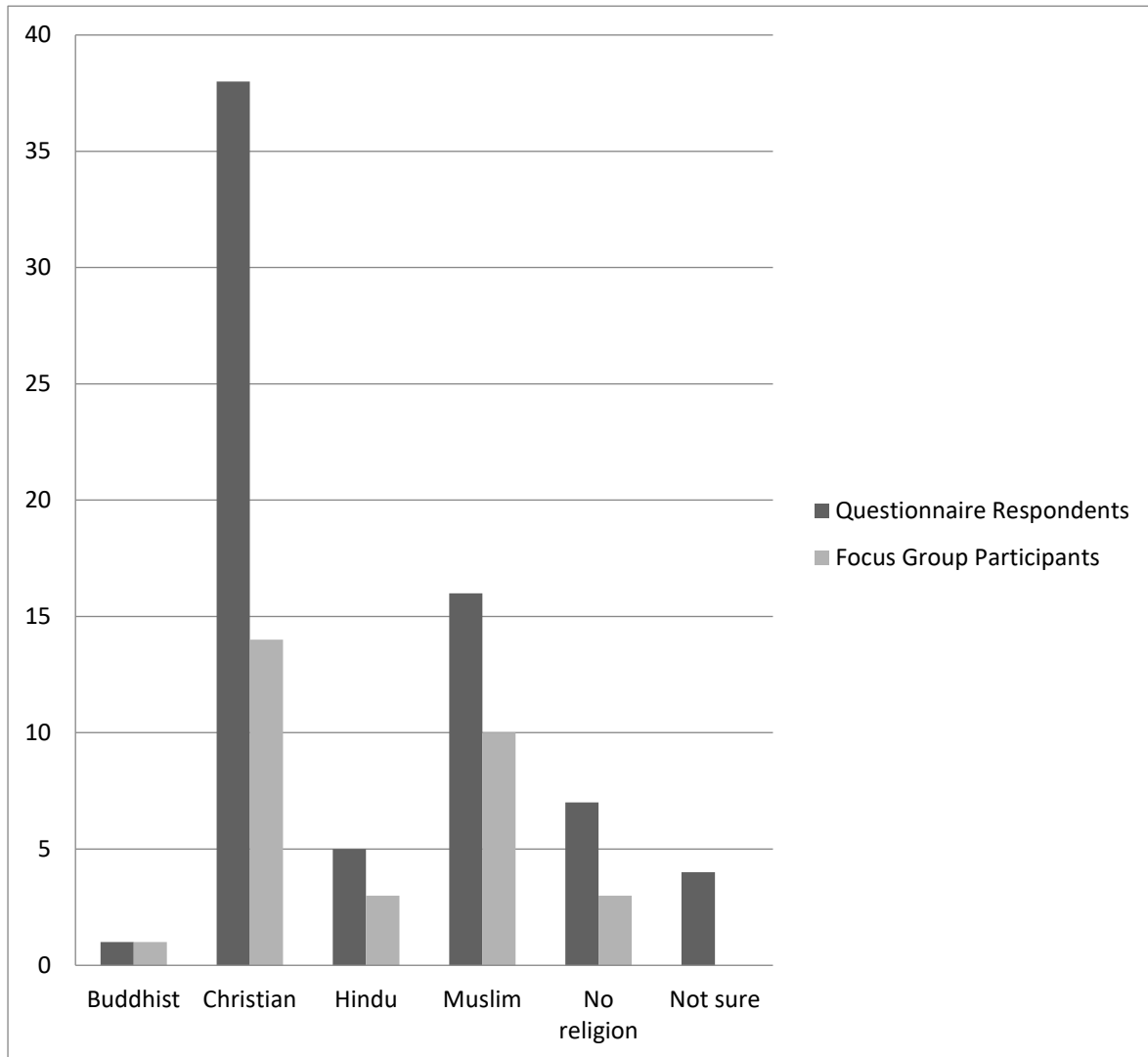


Figure 1: Belief-system of respondents

Results

In response to the research question: how do students feel about sharing their personal religious or secular beliefs *with* their peers and learning *from* their peers?, three key findings emerged:

1. Positive attitudes towards *listening to* each other's beliefs
2. Ambivalence about *presenting* beliefs:
 - Students' self-consciousness
 - Public versus private spheres

3. Need for a safe space for sharing beliefs

Positive attitudes towards listening to beliefs. Using a three-point Likert scale, questionnaire participants were invited to select the option which best-described how they felt about listening to their peers' Family Projects:

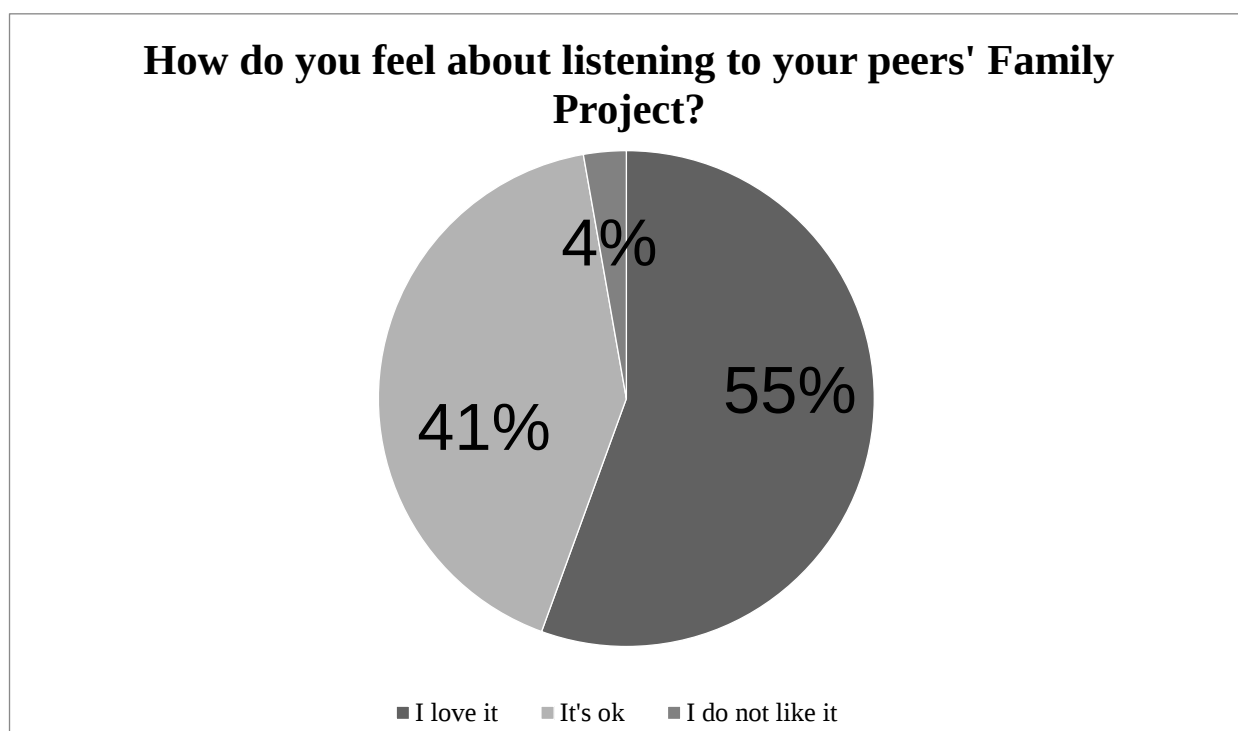


Figure 2. Students' feelings about listening to their peers' Family Projects

Of the 55% of students who “loved” listening to their peers' Family Projects, many 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 included:

“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).

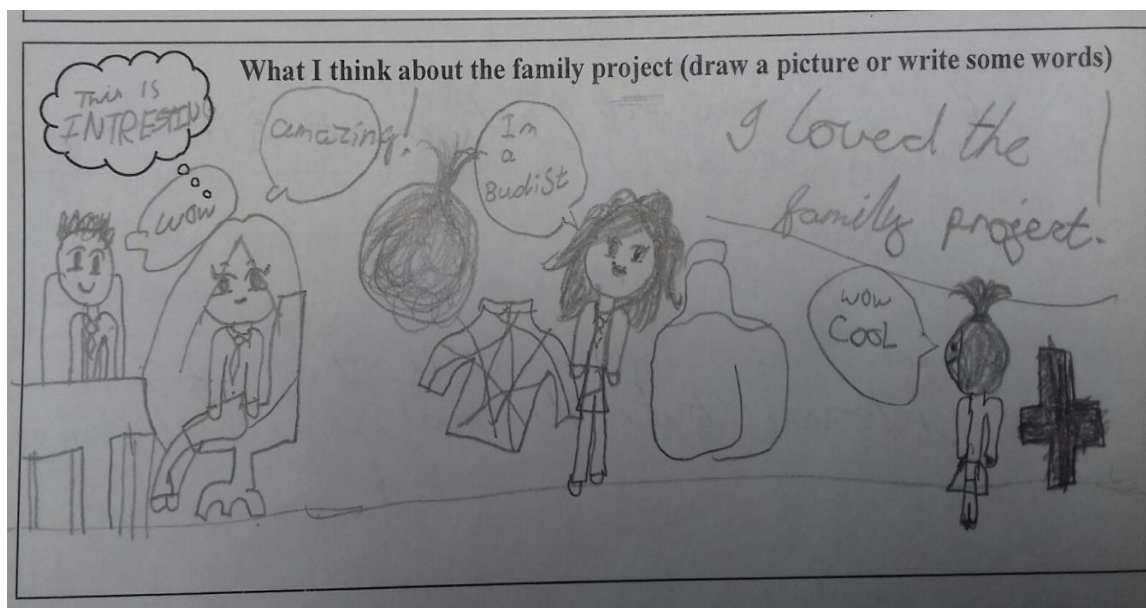
“it teaches us that we are all unique and different in special ways” (QP39).

“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).

Figure 3. QP25’s perspective on the Family Project.

Students also recognised that they could 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 connections 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 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 enabled these students to recognise that language, culture *and* religion can be connected.

The data illustrate how the Family Project can facilitate students' development of intercultural competence (Council of Europe 2014, 16) 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”. Through engagement with multi-belief conversations, many students' knowledge and understanding of diverse beliefs led to increased attitudes of respect for diversity. Some participants also showed evidence of the skill of “multiperspectivity” in which they took others' perspectives into account (Council of Europe 2014, 20). 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”. A further skill acquired by some students was the ability to relate a different belief to their own. In both data sets, participants were able to see commonalities across religions such as praying, fasting, drinking alcohol, celebrations and fasting.

Sharing beliefs through the Family Projects enabled students to increase their religious understanding, something that can strengthen friendships between students from

diverse belief backgrounds. FGP24 explained: “I feel good because then I know what my friends believe in and then they know what I believe in”. A Muslim student said: “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 who wrote about the Family Project: “I think it has brought people together”. The data are consistent with research on the agency of children in the GMGY programme by Faas, Smyth and Darmody (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). Three focus group participants believed that the Family Projects enabled them to learn about beliefs from an “insider” (Barnes 2014; Erricker et al. 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... 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).

Ambivalence about presenting beliefs

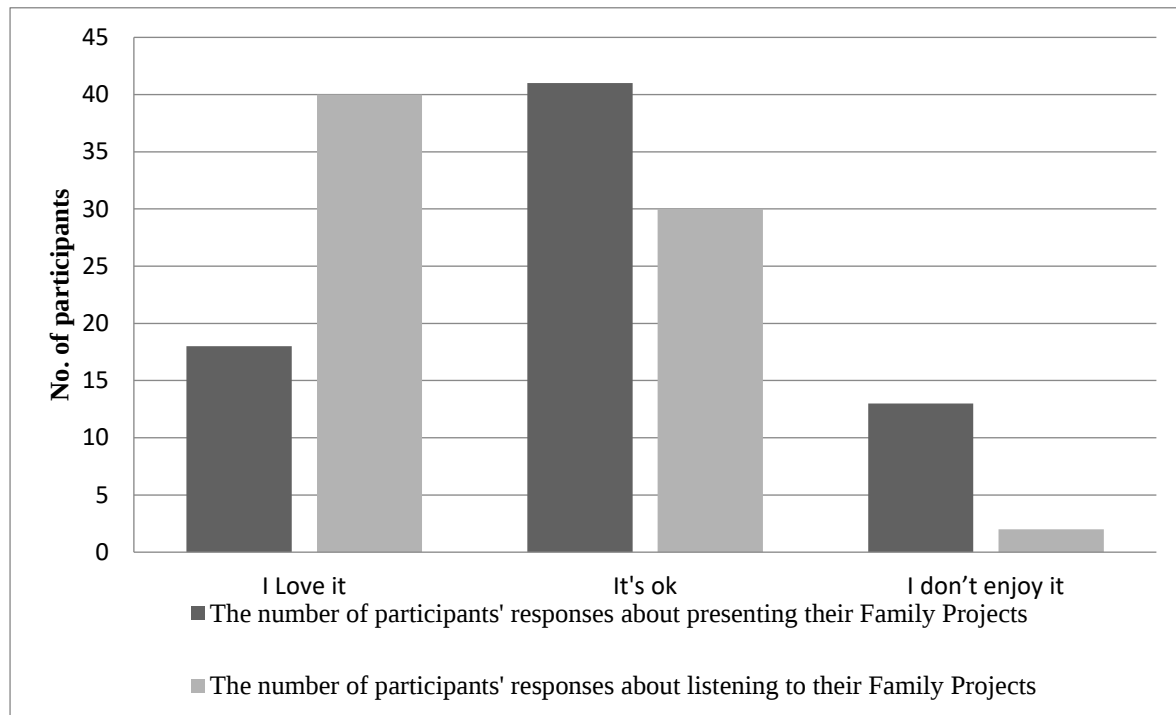


Figure 4. Respondents' attitudes towards presenting and listening to the Family Project

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. Some students did enjoy 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". A Muslim respondent explained that expressing their beliefs to their classmates helped others "understand me, how I act differently sometimes" (QP21). 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 are consistent with previous research linking students' increased self-esteem with the recognition of their cultural backgrounds in school (Devine 2013; Gay 2002; Ipgrave 2001). 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, in the questionnaires, 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).

However, the majority of students were either ambivalent or disliked presenting their projects; the following sections tease out these findings, focusing on two areas: students’ self-consciousness; and beliefs as a private rather than a public phenomenon.

1. Students’ self-consciousness

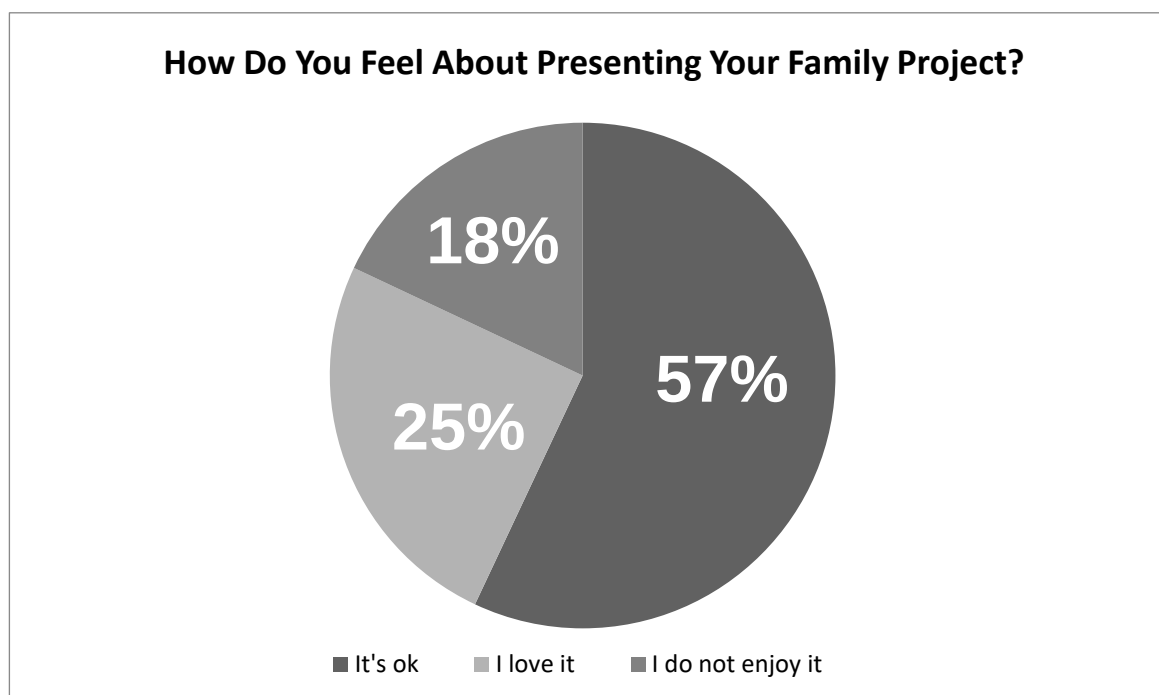


Figure 5. Students’ attitudes towards presenting their Family Projects

Despite students’ positive responses to listening to their friends’ Family Projects, 75% of questionnaire respondents were either ambivalent or disliked presenting their projects. The majority of questionnaire respondents explained how they felt “shy”, “timid”, “nervous”, “embarrassed” or “uncomfortable” when presenting their beliefs through the Family Project. This was corroborated during focus group discussions as many participants felt self-

conscious when 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 reluctance to specifically discuss their beliefs. This corroborates previous research (Harmon 2018; Moulin 2011; Smyth et al. 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 resonates with 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.

1. Public versus private sphere

Eight questionnaire respondents and two focus group participants felt 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”. Another student in the same focus group echoed this:

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 reluctance to engage in public speaking, some students preferred to keep their beliefs private. This raises the question as to whether some students *want* teachers to engage in sharing their religious beliefs or whether they would prefer to keep such aspects of their lives in the private sphere. Convictions about the nature of the world and of humanity, whether framed religiously or in a secular way, can touch deep parts of the human psyche, and as such, may not be amenable in all cases to the scrutiny of others. This is something that needs to be considered when devising curricula in which this kind of sharing is an expectation. A further consideration is the extent to which reticence around presenting beliefs related to classroom climate; in other words, to what extent did students' reluctance reflect their conviction about the inherent privacy of their beliefs, or was it about the need for a *safe space* in which to present those views to peers?

Need for a 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, 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. As a classroom can be regarded as a “miniature community, an embryonic society” (Dewey 1907, 32), these comments show students’ awareness of an Islamophobic discourse that is prevalent in western society (Lentin and Titley 2013). 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 emphasised 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”.

Conclusions

As a relatively recent pedagogy, the Family Project is traversing complex territory. At its essence, it concerns deep personal matters pertaining to students’ religious and cultural identities. On the one hand, these findings illustrate that the Family Project can be effective for teaching students about and from each other’s religions and beliefs. Students enjoyed listening to each other. However, many students felt uncomfortable or ambivalent about expressing their beliefs, whilst others felt marginalised because their beliefs could be highlighted as different. This mixed picture is itself reflective of the inherent complexity involved in implementing a multi-belief programme that is equitable for all students. Such matters need to be taken seriously by curriculum developers and educators. How can

innovative RE pedagogies such as the Family Project be introduced in classrooms in ways that student discomfort is reduced?

The research indicated that most participants felt a level of discomfort sharing their beliefs, and that the emphasis on public presentation can highlight differences amongst peer groups; therefore, students could be invited to share their beliefs in a more informal way. Rather than asking each student to complete the Family Project, students who feel comfortable could 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. Moreover, to ensure that students with no religious affiliation are not marginalised or excluded because their beliefs are not included in the teacher's PowerPoint, curriculum developers or individual schools could add information about atheism, agnosticism, humanism, and no religious affiliation to the GMGY PowerPoints.

Students' views. The students themselves had insights into how the Family Projects could be improved; these views merit serious consideration. Focus group participants were asked to suggest alternative ways to share their beliefs and religions, given that the majority of students felt uncomfortable presenting their projects. Below is an outline of suggestions made:

- Teachers present students' Family Projects anonymously to avoid embarrassment.
- Students work in small groups rather than engaging in whole-class discussions.
- Family Projects could be displayed rather than discussed.
- Members of the religious community could be invited into the school to discuss religious traditions.
- Students could engage in drama activities for teaching and learning about religions.

- Students from the same belief background could create a PowerPoint or video together.

The research findings also highlighted the necessity of creating classroom environments in which students feel safe in expressing their beliefs. Therefore, on-going support for CNS teachers would be beneficial, 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.

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

There is a further research lacuna in relation to students with no religious affiliation and their engagement with multi-belief curricula. Research in this area, particularly through one-on-one interviews with students, may yield deeper insights 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 best practice in the area of multi-belief learning. This will inform best practice in multid denominational schools not just in Ireland, but across Europe.

Notes on contributors

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