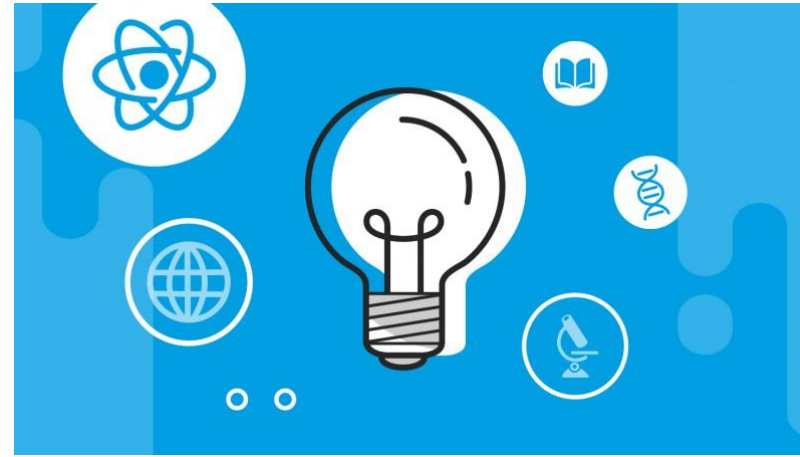




Students' Experiences of and Perspectives on the Family Project in GMGY

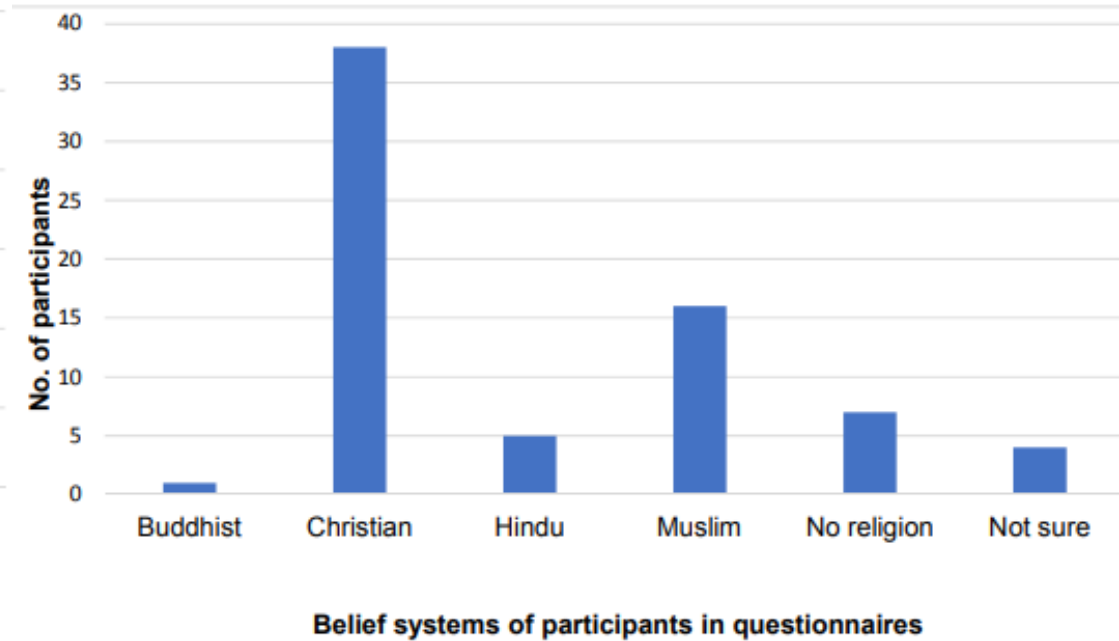
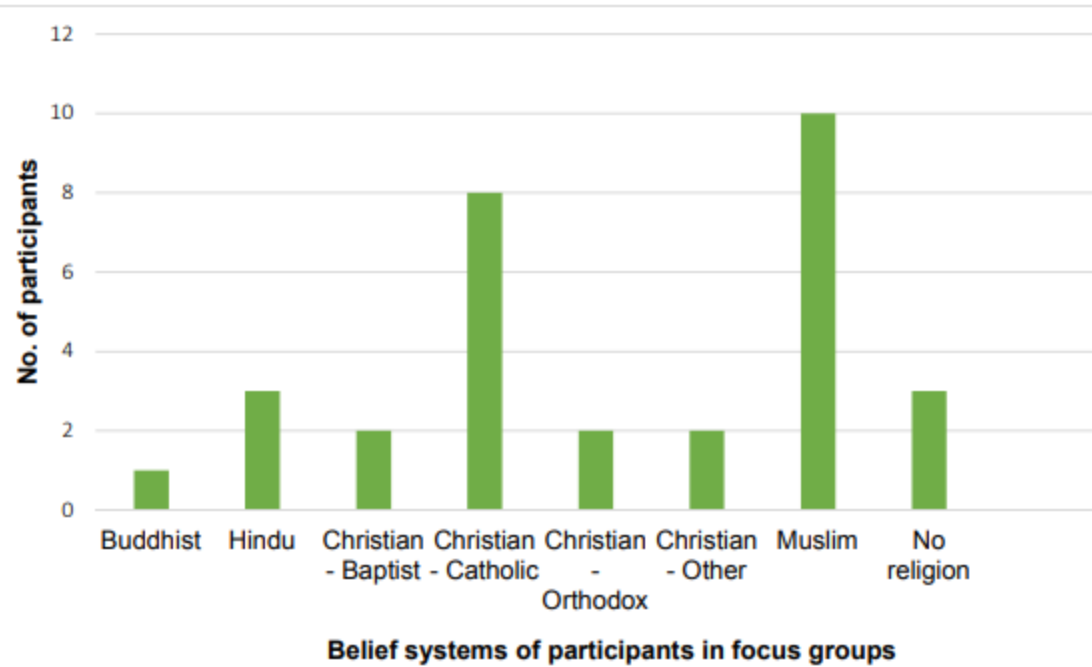
BACKGROUND



- Teaching in Scoil Choilm CNS for past 9 years. GMGY co-ordinator for about 7 years.
- Research was conducted as part of a Masters in Intercultural Education in Marino Institute of Education. 2 Dublin CNS schools and used questionnaires and interviews with students.
- Aim of the research was to find out how students feel about sharing their personal religious or secular beliefs with their peers and learning from their peers.

PARTICIPANTS

5th class students



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

1

2

Books about religions and beliefs

Worksheets/writing

3

4

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

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 (draw a picture or write some words)

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?

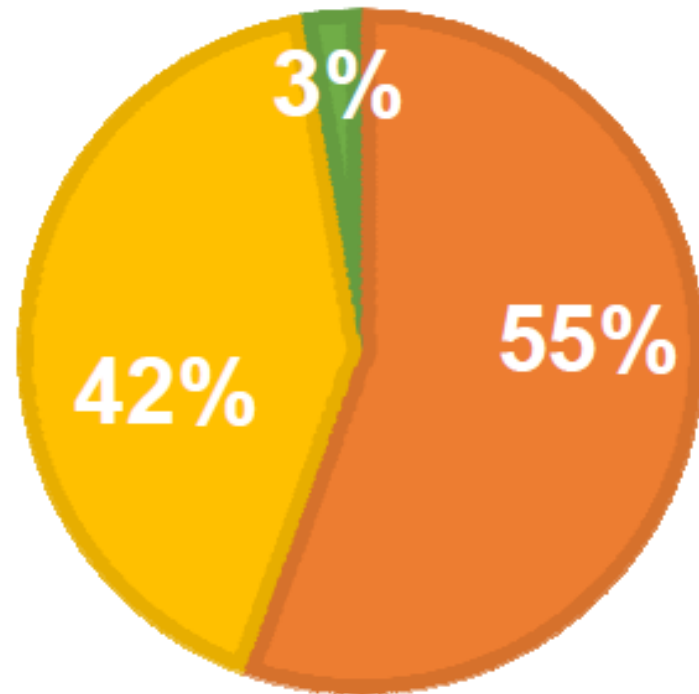
School and curriculum

- 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?

FINDINGS

1. Positive attitudes towards listening to peers' beliefs

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT LISTENING TO YOUR PEERS' FAMILY PROJECT?



■ I love it ■ It's ok ■ I do not like it

“fun”

“educational”

“fascinating”

“interesting”

1
“it teaches people how to respect others’ beliefs” (QP20).

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

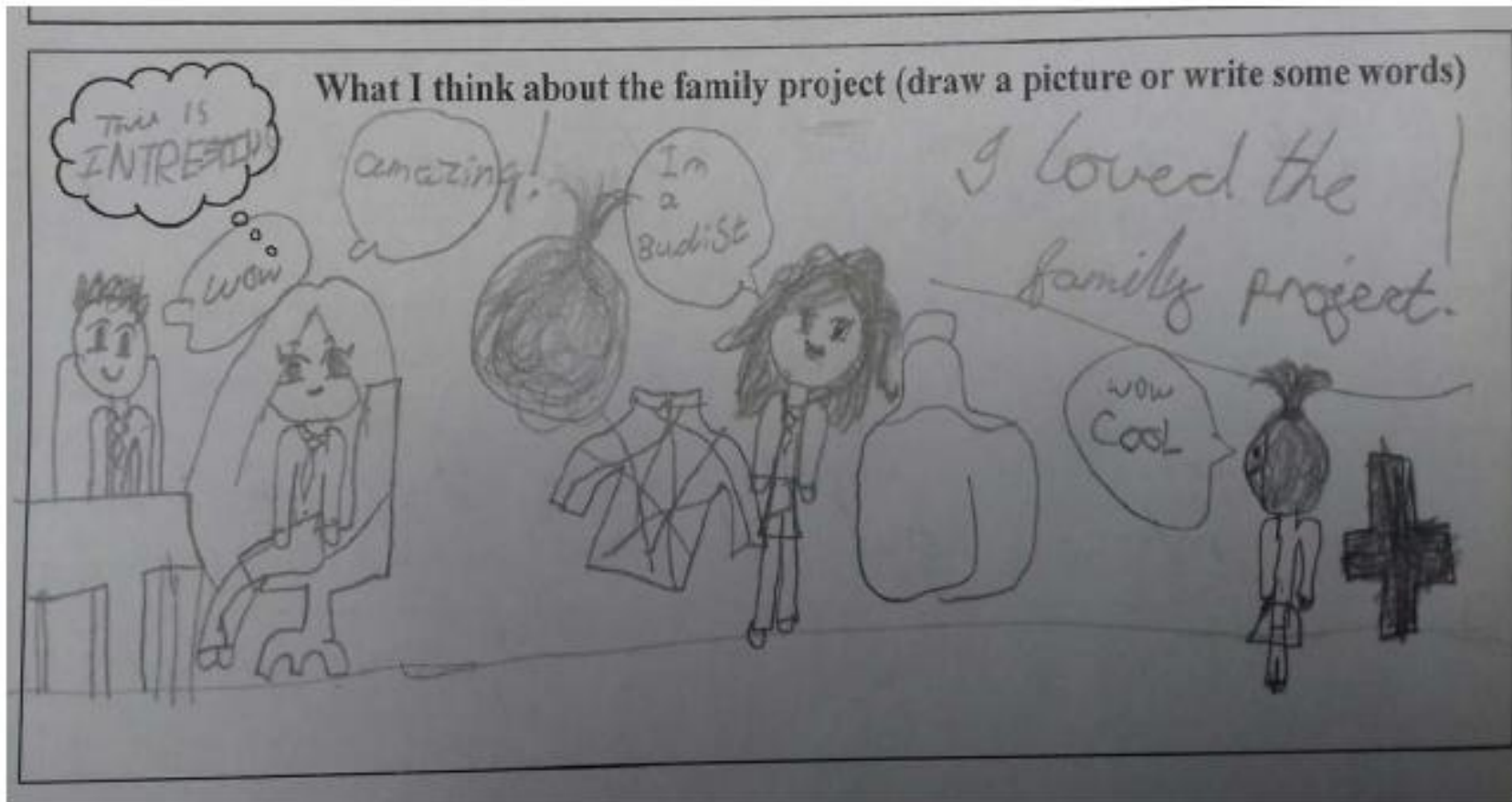
“it shows like diversity and you learn about other peoples’ cultures [. . .] everybody is not like you and everybody’s not the same and they have different beliefs and different cultures” (FGP19).

“it’s important to know what people believe in coz [sic] they have the right to believe it” (FGP25).

A Muslim respondent explained that expressing their beliefs to their classmates helped others **“understand me, how I act differently sometimes”**

“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”.

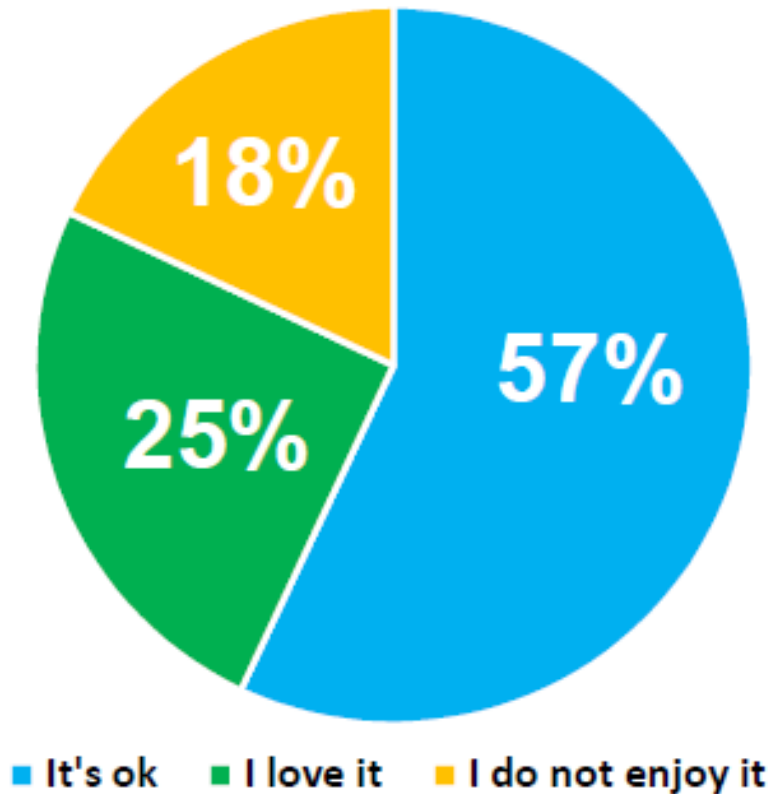
Children enjoyed learning about beliefs from an **insider's perspective** “you can ask more detailed questions because they actually are that religion so they know more”



FINDINGS

2. Students' thoughts on presenting their beliefs.

How Do You Feel About Presenting Your Family Project?



“shy”

“timid”

“nervous”

“uncomfortable”

“embarrassed”

- Some showed a reluctance to engage in public speaking.
- For some students they felt uncomfortable speaking aloud in any subject.
- Other students showed a reluctance to discuss specifically their beliefs.
- Perceived lack of knowledge about their religion.
- Some felt their religion was private to them and should not be discussed publicly.

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.

3. SAFE-SPACE

FINDINGS

Many students felt that a classroom environment conducive to inter-belief conversation was necessary.

“some people might not respect your beliefs and then I would be a bit shy maybe going up”.

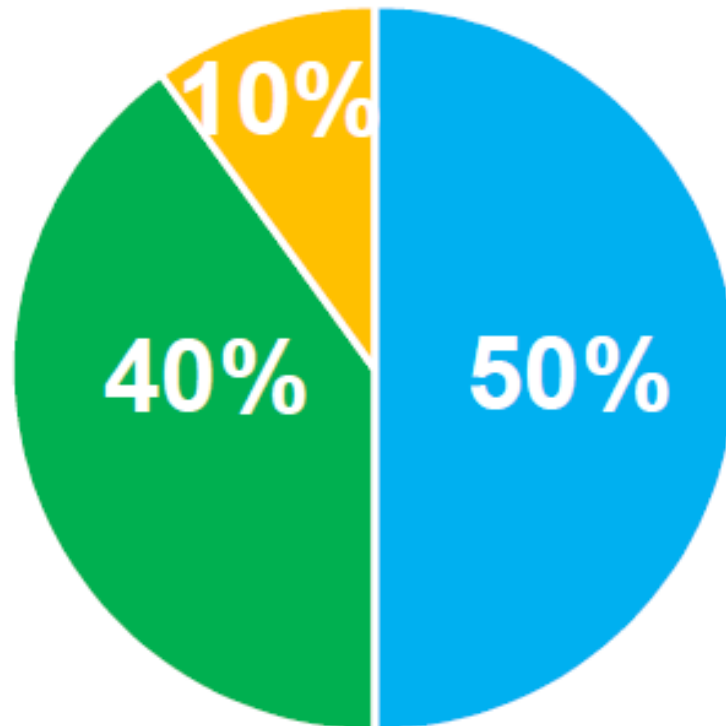
A Muslim student felt uncomfortable expressing their beliefs because their classmates **“might get a bit offended and we don’t want to start World War 3”**

“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”.

FINDINGS

4. INCREASE IN RELIGIOUS LITERACY

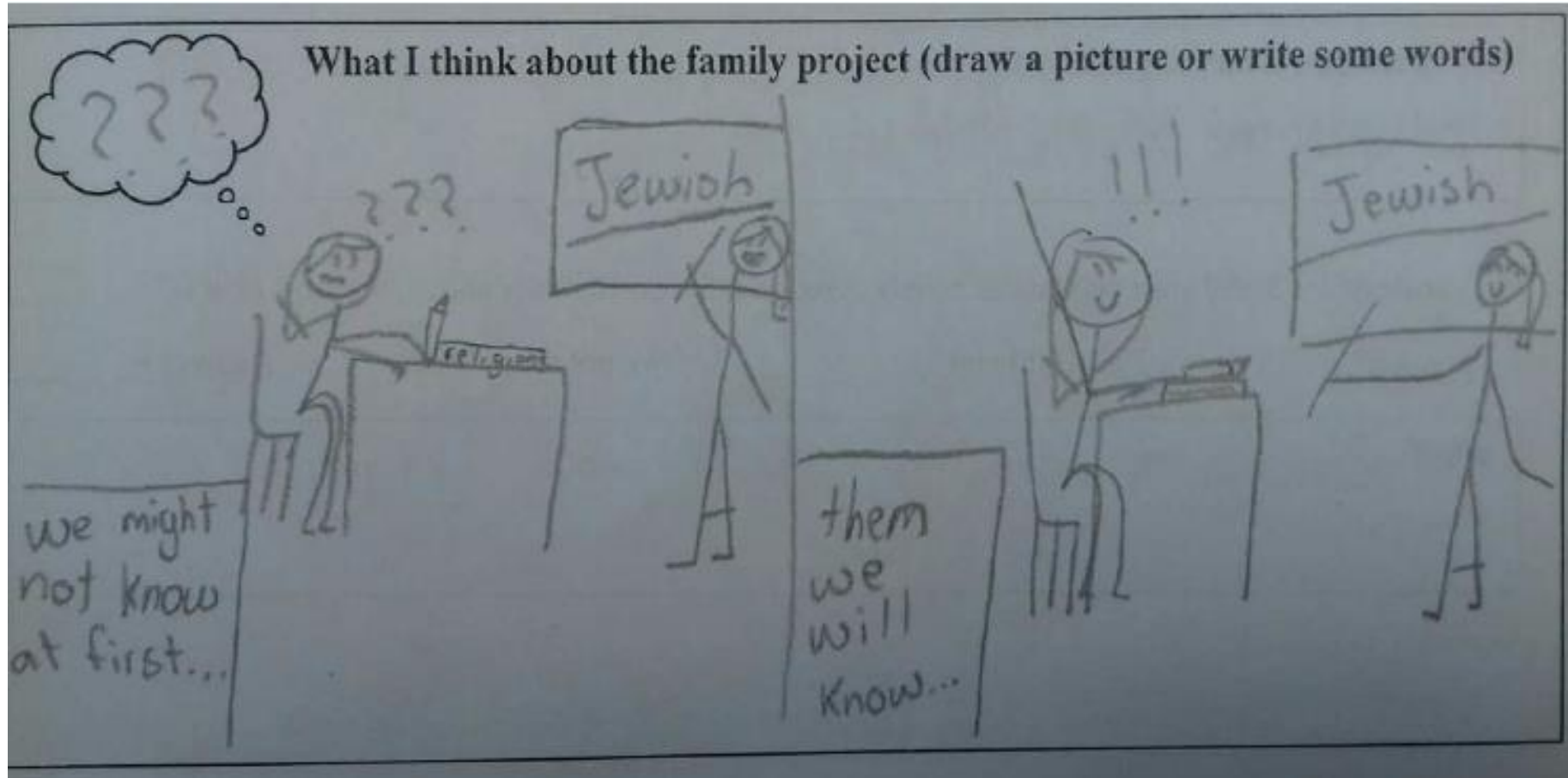
New Learning From The Family Project



■ I learned a bit ■ I learned a lot ■ I did not learn anything new

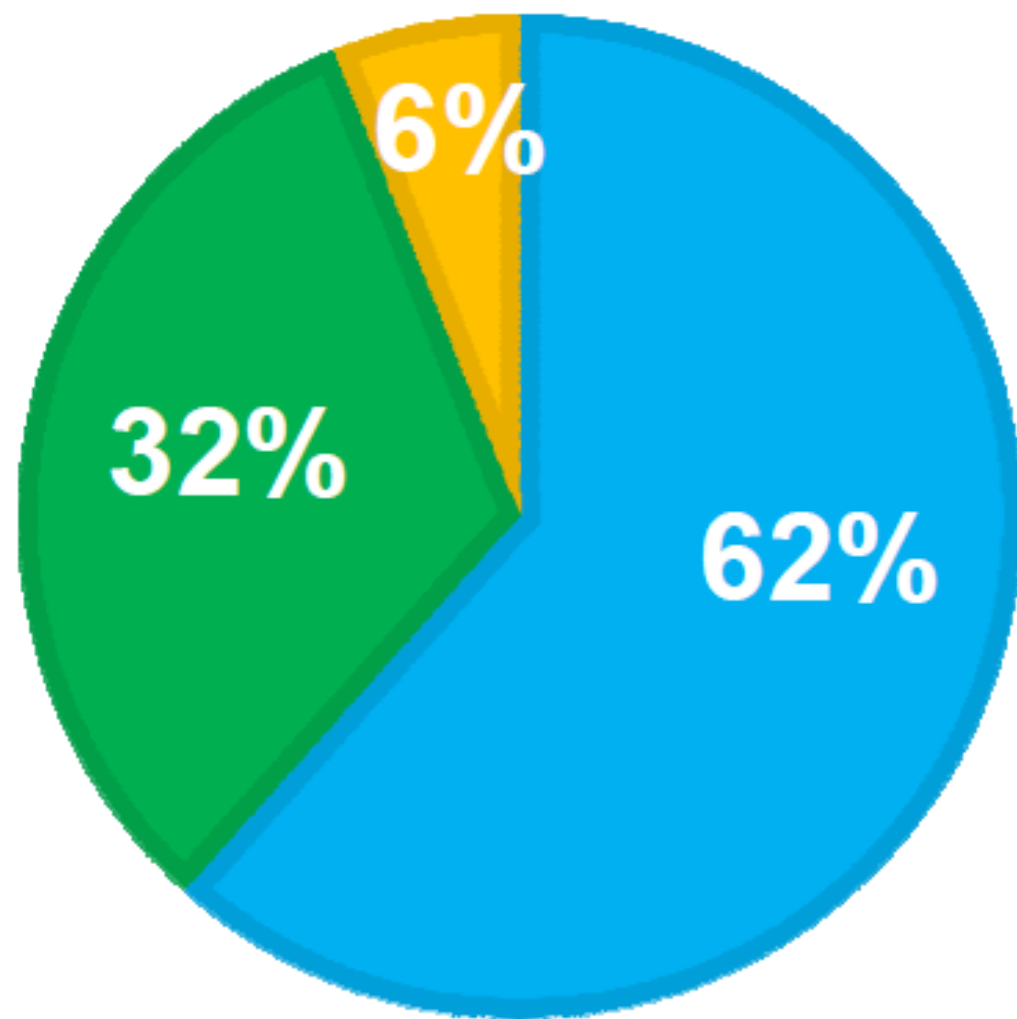
- 90% of students gained knowledge from listening to their peers' Family Projects.

“I didn’t know that you couldn’t have a religion. I thought that everyone had to have a religion.”



How Important Is The Family Project?

■ Very important ■ Somewhat important ■ Not important



BUT

“you have to learn and respect different people’s beliefs but I don’t think it’s really important”.

repetitive and boring because:

“there are lots of people in our class that are Muslim people talking about the same thing”.

5. STUDENTS FROM MINORITY BELIEF BACKGROUNDS (ATHEISTS, BUDDHISTS, HINDU)

Sharing their beliefs highlighted their differences and some students felt marginalised.

- **“makes me feel bad because I am the only one in the class”**
- **“I sometimes feel a bit nervous since I’m a different religion to others”**
- **“I’d be afraid if people judge me and then I’ll get embarrassed.”**
- **“I don’t feel comfortable because I feel people will start laughing when they hear what I believe in”.**
- **“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”**

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.

FINDINGS

6. CHILD AGENCY

- Many students enjoyed sharing their expertise and controlling the information passed on about their religions:
- **“I like when the people said like ‘wow I didn’t know this!’”**
- **“I feel smarter than I usually am”**
- **“sometimes you then feel good about yourself because you taught someone something that you – they didn’t know yet so you might feel good”**
- Reciprocal teaching and learning: **“at the end of the day, we all get to learn something new about each other”**

TEACHING THE TEACHER

“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”

“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”

BUT...

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.

“I feel like the teacher might know more about my religion than me”

Some students had beliefs different to those of their parents which can be problematic for the Family Project:

“well they go to church and they don’t mind what I believe in”

“I don’t really believe in all the Catholic beliefs” (A self-identified Catholic student).

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

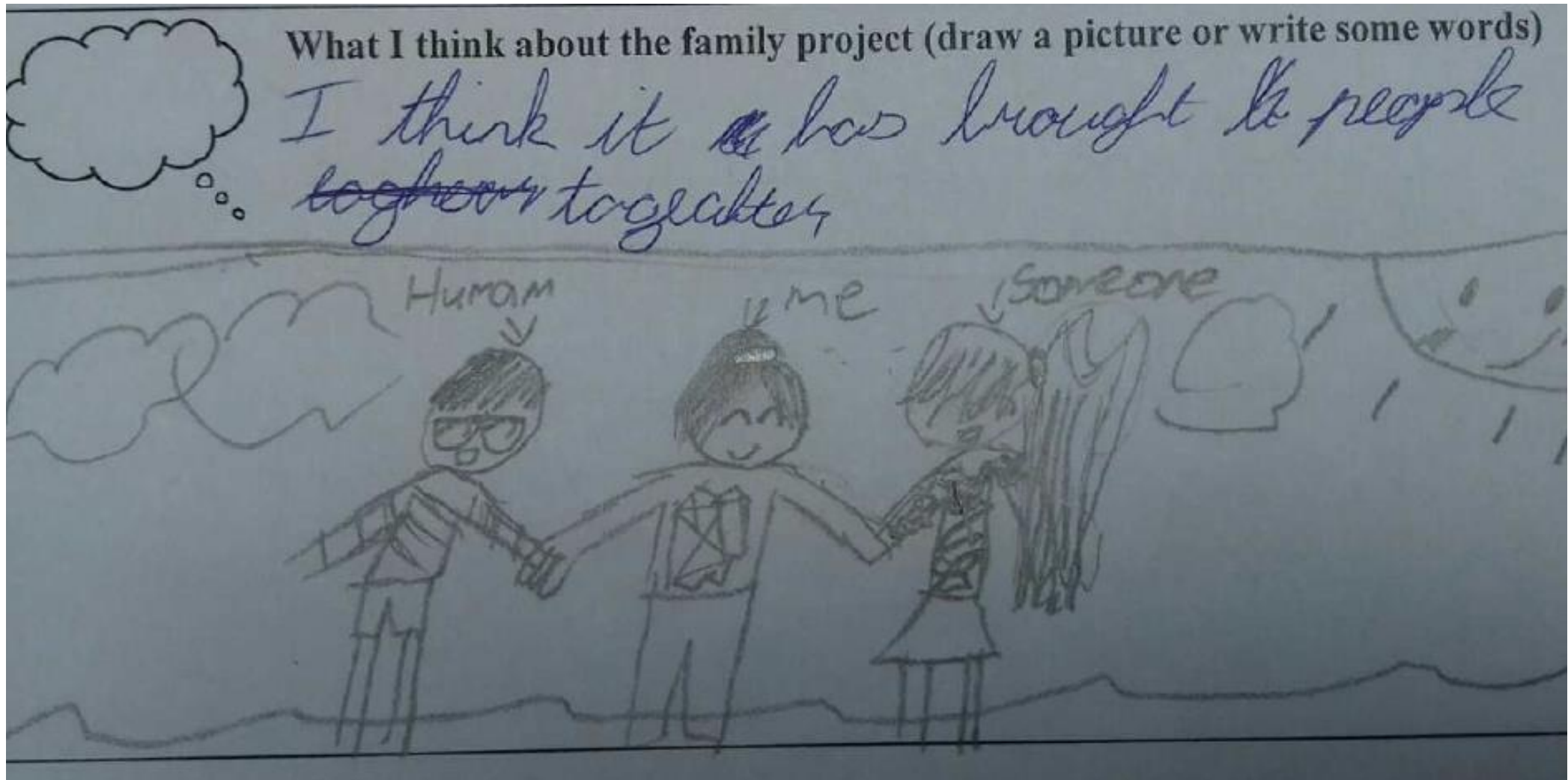
- Respect for and appreciation of different beliefs.

“I learned that if someone believes in something, you don’t criticise them.”

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

- The Family Project can facilitate students' development of **intercultural competence** 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” (Council of Europe, 2014)
- **Citizenship skills** “if you go to a different country and they have a different religion there, you'd know more about that religion”

- The Family Project can **strengthen inter-cultural friendships**: 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).



Teaching the teacher subverts traditional classroom pedagogy of “chalk and talk”

“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.”

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).

BUT!

- Sharing beliefs can also highlight differences amongst friendship groups.
- Many students felt self-conscious and uncomfortable when it was their turn to share their beliefs.
- An 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.
- Different beliefs to their parents.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RESEARCH

Continued Professional Development (CPD)

- on how to facilitate a 'safe space' for inter-belief dialogue Groundwork to create a safe-space may take some time.
- on culturally relevant pedagogy (engaging with students' cultural expertise during various classroom activities).

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RESEARCH

- Informal presenting of the Family Project to include only children who are comfortable.
- Add information in the Powerpoints about atheism, agnosticism, humanism and no belief system.
- “insider” experience from a child’s point of view through videos.
- teachers explicitly utilise religious literacy to develop students’ skills of citizenship.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STUDENTS

- Teachers present anonymously
- Students work in small groups
- 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
- Students from the same religious background create a PowerPoint together.



**Thanks for listening -
Any questions?**