

BELIEFS, RELIGIONS AND GMGY

SUPPORT MATERIALS - GMGY - BELIEFS & RELIGIONS



Religion and belief is situated in strand 4: Beliefs and religions, however, discussions about religion may manifest itself in any of the 4 strands in an informal way. The Beliefs and religions strand offers children an education about the many religious and non-religious perspectives that exist in our world. Learning pertaining to religions and beliefs in the Beliefs and religions strand enables children to learn 'about' and 'from' religion and other non-religious life philosophies.

Children learn **about** religion and beliefs through the study of a religion or belief. Religion and belief is explored in a purely objective and descriptive manner where children learn facts about a religion or belief. This increases a child's level of **religious literacy**.

Children also learn **from** religion. Through engaging with the Beliefs and religions strand children learn to listen to, discuss and respect different religions and beliefs, as well as developing a greater understanding of how their own religion or belief is lived out in their family and community.



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HOW ARE RELIGIONS AND BELIEFS PRESENTED IN GMGY?

Religions and beliefs in GMGY are taught from a pluralist perspective. This involves the study of many religions and beliefs rather than the study of one religion or belief.

The lessons aim to promote the harmonious co-existence between adherents of different beliefs and religious denominations. Beliefs and Religions lessons aim to explore the principal teachings of some of the world's religions and beliefs as well as the individual religious or non-religious practices of each child.

The GMGY curriculum tells the teacher the content which is to be studied, but it is the teacher who decides in what context, by what methods and in what sequences the material itself shall be presented to the children.

The teacher presents each religion not as a truth but as a world view or perspective. The teacher does not state which world view or perspective is the correct one but rather emphasises the right of every person to hold a religious belief and express that belief respectfully.

As the aim of the lessons are not to instruct children 'in' a particular belief or religion. The teacher presents each religion or belief system as a world view rather than an expression of a 'truth'. Although it is recognised that the teacher themselves may adhere to a particular belief-system and consider it the expression of the truth, for the purposes of this strand it is

required that the teacher does not endorse a world view or perspective as the correct one. The teacher emphasises the right of every person to hold a religious belief or secular belief and express that belief respectfully.

The teacher is the facilitator of this expression and dialogue in the classroom. The teacher is a co-participant in discussions and should lead discussions by modelling respectful language that can be used when discussing beliefs.

But how does a teacher know if a belief is disrespectful? And what happens if a belief is disrespectful of a member of society or a value held by the school? In order to answer these questions we must first understand what values the Community National School promotes and upholds.

WHAT VALUES DO GMGY AND THE CNS PROMOTE?

Religion can be a contentious topic. Opposing views will arise and the teacher needs to manage the expression of these views to ensure that children's beliefs are respected.

Community National Schools are state schools and as such aim to develop citizens of Ireland who recognise their rights and responsibilities as Irish citizens.

The Community National School has four cornerstones upon which the

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model has been developed. These cornerstones are:

- excellence in education
- equality-based
- multi-denominational
- community-based.

Therefore CNS schools promote values of equality, respect for diversity and inclusion of all children in the community.

GMGY is the curricular expression of the ethos and values of the CNS model. In the We are a Community National School strand, the underlying aim is for children to understand their own values and to understand and respect the values promoted in their school. Through this strand children will have an opportunity to explore and come to an understanding of the concepts of equality, self-identity, citizenship, democracy, justice and human rights. In this strand, teachers are encouraged to develop the children's respect for themselves and each other. They will also develop their ethical values in the context of their school and the wider CNS characteristic spirit. The uniqueness of each school should also be respected in this manner. Thus schools should develop their own set of values in the form of a charter in consultation with children, teachers, staff and parents.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE BELIEFS AND RELIGIONS STRAND?

This means that when exploring Beliefs and Religions teachers, parents and children must be conscious of and reinforce the values that the school promotes and upholds.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EQUALITY?

In 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child in recognition of the specific rights and vulnerabilities of children and to promote greater protection of children around the world. Ireland ratified the Convention in 1992. In doing so, Ireland committed itself to promote, protect and fulfil the rights of children as outlined in the articles of the Convention. These rights are valued and promoted in the Community National School.

One of the rights that informs the teaching in GMGY is a child's right to: *Be treated equally, to be included and to make their own decisions.* Equality is about recognising that everyone has the same worth and should be treated with dignity. Sometimes people are treated badly or unfairly because of negative attitudes and stereotypes like racism. This type of treatment goes against the idea of equality and is known as discrimination. Children have the right to be protected from discrimination at school. GMGY actively challenges discriminatory

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attitudes and behaviours. The nine grounds for equality which GMGY and the CNS promotes and respects are:

1. Your gender: whether you identify yourself as a boy, a girl, or as transgender.
2. Your marital or civil status: whether you are married or in a civil partnership.
3. Your family status: whether you are pregnant, a parent of a child or the carer of someone with a disability.
4. Your sexual orientation: whether you are heterosexual (straight), gay, lesbian or bisexual.
5. Your religion, or non-religious beliefs.
6. Your age (this generally only applies to those over 18 years).
7. Your disability.
8. Your race, ethnic background, nationality and colour.
9. Your membership of the Traveller community.

Children in a Community National School will explore their rights and the responsibilities that complement these rights in the We are a Community National School strand. The right to equality has particular importance when teaching the Beliefs and religions strand. Human rights education is often seen as incompatible with religious education but GMGY seeks to merge the two in its ambition to develop Irish citizens.

If a belief expressed is discriminatory the teacher should challenge that belief appropriately by explaining that the school promotes equality and human rights, and therefore that belief is in conflict with the values promoted by the school. Where possible, an effort should be made to assist the child in overcoming underlying assumptions or stereotypes.

ARE BELIEF AND RELIGION HUMAN RIGHTS?

‘Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is one of the most fundamental human rights.’ (OSCE/ODIHR, 2007)

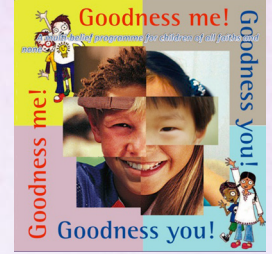
In order to support the freedom of the individual to profess and practise religion or belief, Community National Schools will:

- Foster a climate of mutual tolerance and respect between believers of different communities as well as between believers and non-believers.
- Recognise and celebrate diversity in the school. This includes religious diversity. Children have an opportunity to express their beliefs in the Family Project aspect of each lesson.
- Be proactive in preventing and eliminating discrimination against individuals or communities on the grounds of religion or belief and to ensure effective equality between believers and non-believers.

Community National Schools respect the right of every child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and also recognise the responsibility of each child to respect others’ thoughts, conscience and religion.

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WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS?

Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by the rules of the school and the laws of the country. This is necessary to protect the safety, order, health, morals and the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. **Beliefs expressed must adhere to the rules of the school and the laws of the Republic of Ireland.**

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER?

Teachers, as individuals, enjoy freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and may manifest their religion or belief in accordance with the general human rights framework. However, it is true that by virtue of their having chosen to work in a Community National School teachers have a responsibility to create an educational environment appropriate for GMGY and to respect the human rights of parents and children.

In this regard, it is expected that when teaching about religions and beliefs teachers must approach their task in a balanced and professional manner, and may not exploit their position as teachers to influence the beliefs of their pupils (OSCE/ODIHR, 2007).

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CAN HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AND THE BELIEFS AND RELIGIONS STRAND BE COMPATIBLE?

Human rights education is defined as the pedagogical practices and materials that promote human rights' values.

There are good reasons to explore the entanglements between religions, beliefs and human rights in the Beliefs and religions strand. It is important to consider the tensions between the values of human rights and religion and belief, because the standard approach to human rights education reflects a non-religious perspective that might be viewed as oppositional to some religious beliefs, especially in societies in which religion plays a considerable role in public life.

GMGY recognises that there are multiple relationships between religion and human rights and that under some conditions, there might be a 'convergence' between human rights values and values found within religions. These values may include, for instance, compassion and tolerance, and thus it can be argued that such values provide a strong foundation for both human rights and religion.



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GMGY believes that human rights education is compatible with religious education when the following conditions are met:

- The curriculum combines the learning 'about' and 'from' religion in the Beliefs and religions with human rights education in the We Are a CNS strand.
- Dialogue is welcomed when it is undertaken in a respectful manner. Children are taught how to debate with each other respectfully and the teacher facilitates this dialogue. A dialogue in GMGY never aims to uncover or decide who holds the correct perspective, but rather raises children's awareness that not all people share the same perspectives. These perspectives can be discussed in a respectful manner. Teachers should explicitly teach the skills of dialogue and debate to the children in their class so that pupils understand what is deemed as an appropriate response when they hear something that is contradictory to their belief.
- When a belief is deemed to be discriminatory then this belief is challenged in accordance with the values of the school. The child and their parents will be reminded of the values that the school promotes and requested to adhere to these values at school. The school should refer to its code of behaviour if the discriminatory behaviour persists.
- The school should ensure that its code of behaviour addresses issues of identity-based bullying. Schools should refer to the Anti-Bullying Procedures 2013. These procedures require that the prevention of bullying must be an integral part of the school's anti-bullying policy.
- The teacher should ensure that their pupils are explicitly taught about the values of the school. The teacher has a responsibility to uphold the values

the school promotes and ensure that they model these values for their

pupils.

TEACHER REFLECTION ACTIVITY

Please consider the following questions in relation to your own practice.

1. Am I knowledgeable about the religious backgrounds and non-religious life philosophies of the children in my class?
2. In my own life, do I model respect for, and inclusion of, people who are different of a different religion than me?
3. Do the children in my class perceive me as sincerely interested in, and respectful of, contributions made by all religious groups that are represented in my classroom?
4. Can I recognise and constructively address value conflicts based on religion?
5. Do the children in my class see me as actively confronting instances of stereotyping, bias and discrimination when they occur?
6. Do I promote high self-esteem for all children in my classroom? Do I help each child to feel good about who he/she is?
7. Do I encourage students to understand and respect the feelings of others who are different from them?
8. Do I have an equitable system for calling on children to speak in my classroom?
9. When teaching about religion, do I:

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- a. Place religion within historical and cultural context?
 - b. Use opportunities to include religion in history, literature and music?
 - c. Avoid making generalist comparisons among religions?
 - d. Avoid soliciting information about the religions or beliefs of my students if they are uncomfortable speaking about them?
 - e. Recognise the place of non-religious life philosophies as equal to religious belief?
10. Do I know the grounds for equality in Ireland?
 11. Do I teach children to identify instances of prejudice and discrimination?
 12. Do I help my students develop proper responses to instances of prejudice and discrimination?
 13. Do I involve parents and other community members to help children develop greater understanding of the benefits and challenges of living in a diverse society?
 14. Do I inform parents about the GMGY curriculum?
 15. Do I build a secure and supportive atmosphere by creating a respectful classroom environment?
 16. Do I use opportunities such as current events to discuss different religions?
 17. Do I provide children with opportunities to problem-solve issues of inclusiveness?
 18. Do I utilise children's literature to help students understand and empathise with individuals who have experienced prejudice and

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discrimination and to discuss important social issues?

19. Do I avail of continuous professional development opportunities to enable me to effectively teach the GMGY curriculum and uphold the characteristic ethos of the CNS model?
20. Do I feel adequately informed/empowered by school management to deal with the sensitive issues that may arise from the effective teaching of GMGY?

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